

Tuesday, 24 February 1998

The SPEAKER (Hon. S. J. Plowman) took the chair at 2.05 p.m. and read the prayer.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Minister for Police and Emergency Services: retirement

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Premier to his statement earlier today in which he announced the early and compulsory retirement of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services without the minister's consent or knowledge. Given the Premier's determination to get rid of the minister, and his obvious lack of confidence in him, will the Premier now sack him from the ministry immediately?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — The question shows there is so little substance in the opposition it has to rely on my comments to the media to frame a question.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr KENNETT — If I am a loose cannon, you haven't got a shot away yet. I admit that earlier today in one of my more frivolous moments I was answering a question asked by one of my close friends in the media about the Australian Labor Party's embracing of Mary Delahunty, who I understand is coming here shortly to join the opposition. She is coming with the full support of the ABC right behind her — and in front of her. I understand she has been promised a seat on the opposition front bench and that the honourable member for Bundoora is the one targeted to be replaced.

I made the comment that it did not surprise me that Mary had joined the ALP. So far as we are concerned she has been a member of the ALP for years!

Mr Speaker, you would remember when Miss Delahunty was broadcasting for the ABC, I believe during the 1992 elections — —

The SPEAKER — Order! I remember her well, but I do not believe that is relevant to the question asked by the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr KENNETT — I am getting there, Mr Speaker! Mine was very much a family answer. I used the question about Mary to then refer to her brother, Hugh, who is a good man. He works very well in the western part of Victoria. I believe he was a commissioner on

one of the councils. He is well known, and it is also well known that Hugh Delahunty is interested in a political career in state or federal Parliament. It has often been said that he might follow my close friend and colleague the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I admit I made the comments to my close friend in the media and then I went back and said to the minister, 'Bill, I think I've just retired you'. He was very excited about that! He actually said to me, 'Well, actually I might outlast you.' This gave me some difficulty, as you can imagine, because I have just recommitted myself to the year 2020. I thought by then that Bill would probably want to get back to the farm.

Mr Hulls interjected.

Mr KENNETT — You have one claim to fame and only one! Wear it as a badge of honour! From time to time members on this side of the house will retire at the time they decide is suitable, unlike the honourable member for Northcote, who is being retired, or the honourable member for Springvale, whose leader is campaigning against him.

Members on this side of the house look forward to Miss Delahunty now finally embracing the coat of Labor, marching into this place and sitting where the honourable member for Bundoora now sits. She has been offered a job and one of those on the other side will disappear. I can only hope the Leader of the Opposition shows as much interest in matters of policy as she does — —

An Honourable Member — He does!

Mr KENNETT — He does, I am sorry! Maybe that is a good place for Mary! Maybe she will do a better job than him! That is probably the truth of it!

We look forward to Mary's arrival. She has always been a Labor person, and it has not necessarily required her to be a member of the party. She has been Labor through and through for years, and the ABC will attest to it.

The SPEAKER — Order! Mary Delahunty's future in politics has nothing to do with the question.

Schools: Christian pageants

Mr FINN (Tullamarine) — Will the Minister for Education inform the house of the action the government has taken to ensure that Christian pageants can be held in state schools?

Mr GUDE (Minister for Education) — It was drawn to my attention last week that a school in Malvern was banned by the rules of the Department of Education from holding two pageants. I have taken advice and I believe the pageants should be allowed to go ahead. Commonsense dictates they should go ahead and, indeed, pageants have been an active part of school life for 125 years without anything like the current furor impacting on them in any way, shape or form. The government is committed to the provision of a broadly based secular education for our children, and through the Schools of the Future model school communities, through school councils, now have the right to set goals and directions in a whole series of forms. Commonsense and tolerance dictate that a school council should decide whether a school community participates in a pageant and not the Department of Education.

The government has changed the existing policy to allow pageants to go ahead at the instigation of school councils with the proviso that the schools concerned must offer to any parents who do not wish their sons or daughters to participate a genuine alternative educational setting. That does not mean that the students are sent off to the library to read books with the warning that they should not get into any trouble; it means a genuine alternative educational setting.

Pageants will be able to be held on and off school property. If they are held off school property the same rules that apply to, for example, a school excursion will apply. In any event, parental permission is needed for children to participate in religious instruction in schools. Teachers will be able to participate in the preparation and in the pageants but not in religious instruction, which is left to designated people.

It is interesting to note that there has been tremendous public support for the commonsense approach taken by government, but it is also interesting to note that one of the few people who has come out against this in the media has been Mr Joseph O'Reilly of Liberty Victoria. This morning Joseph O'Reilly attacked the government. He could not resist taking a whack at education matters. He is an aspiring candidate for the seat of Prahran, which has been indicated by the applause from members here and endorsed by none other than the Leader of the Opposition on the Neil Mitchell program on 4 February, when he stated:

Joseph O'Reilly, who's nominated for the seat of Prahran, the executive director of the council for civil liberties, absolute top-quality candidate.

He could not wipe the grin off his face. Given that Joseph O'Reilly is such a top-quality candidate, I can

only assume he was espousing ALP policy in this matter. The honourable member for Footscray shakes his head, but if it is not Labor Party policy the Leader of the Opposition, who has extolled the virtues of Mr O'Reilly, should come out now and chastise his chosen candidate for getting it wrong. If he gets that wrong, how many other things will he get wrong? If he has got this right, then let us know that this is the first piece of ALP education policy, because we have barren land at the moment.

Mr Batchelor — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the minister is clearly debating the issue in defiance of standing orders, and I ask you, Sir, to bring him back to the question.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister is now debating the question; ALP policy was not the subject of the question asked of him. The minister has been speaking for 4 minutes, and I ask him to wind up his answer.

Mr GUDE — I well understand the embarrassment of Labor members when a chosen candidate gets it wrong. Indeed, they should be embarrassed just by having him. So far as the government is concerned, the policy direction I have outlined both publicly and in the house today will be carried through. In addition, I inform the house that both my department and the Department of Justice are working to develop legislation that will put these provisions beyond contestability to ensure that sanity, good sense and tolerance apply in our schools.

Absence of minister

The SPEAKER — Order! I should have advised the house earlier that the Treasurer will not be present during question time today because of government business. The Premier will answer his questions.

Minister for Police and Emergency Services: retirement

Mr HAERMAYER (Yan Yean) — I refer the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to the Premier's announcement today of the minister's early and involuntary retirement as a member of Parliament. Given the expression of no confidence in the minister's ability, will he do the right thing and step down from his portfolio or will he defy the Premier and continue as a lame— duck minister?

Mr W. D. McGRATH (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I have always been a very competitive person. One of the dull parts of being the

Minister for Police and Emergency Services is that I do not have any opposition at all.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr W. D. McGRATH — The Premier is doing a very good job for this state and it is about time the Leader of the Opposition recognised that fact of life.

During the past 12 months all the problems with Intergraph have been rectified — no longer do we hear about problems with Intergraph. The Victorian road toll of 377 fatalities is the lowest ever recorded and the state's crime rate is 19 per cent lower than the national average. I cannot take all the credit for those figures, but I take some credit because of my portfolio responsibilities.

The government is in the process of bedding down the three privatised prisons and working through the issues. It is always difficult to bed down a new prison, and that was also the case with the public-sector operated Loddon and Barwon prisons.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr W. D. McGRATH — No, I am not standing down. I am very happy working with the Premier in a coalition government. Members on this side of the house have an outstanding leader ably supported by a very good deputy. The question asked by the honourable member for Yan Yean does not have any policy substance. The honourable member's terminology of 'lame duck' is similar to the terminology used by Neil Mitchell, of 3AW, who is a person I have no respect for either.

Schools: Turning the Tide program

Mr McLELLAN (Frankston East) — Will the Minister for Education inform the house of the government's commitment to drug education in government schools through the Turning the Tide program?

Mr GUDE (Minister for Education) — I thank the honourable member for his question —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to pause until the house comes to order. I will not allow the minister to continue with the number of interjections. We have had a frivolous start to question time, but it is about time we got serious. I hope the opposition does not come to me with concerns about

the number of questions asked — it is wasting its own time.

Mr GUDE — The immaturity on the other side of the table has to be seen to be believed. I am sure the visitors will enjoy the sideshow. It is very important that I report progress on the Turning the Tide program. This government has committed \$100 million to the program, which is an unprecedented allocation, to arrest the growth of drugs in society but particularly to provide an educational benefit to school children.

Last year honourable members will be aware that 800 schools were part of the program. I am pleased to have more good news for Victorians: a further 750 state, Catholic and independent schools will participate this year in the Turning the Tide program by participating in drug education strategies. These schools will follow on from the good work of the 800 schools that took part in the program last year.

On behalf of the Premier, who gave direction to the program in Victoria, and the government, I extend my appreciation to those 800 school communities for the work they have done. Last year as part of the program 2500 teachers, 250 principals, 200 parents and 23 community agency staff received professional development in drug education and student welfare issues from the 20 regional drug education facilitators. The program provided a useful backdrop to and improvement in the knowledge of the school and broader communities. More than 9000 people attended some form of professional development program and about 4800 parents attended 80 parent education programs and more than 180 parent forums. The 800 schools that took their task seriously did an excellent job and provided a valuable adjunct to education.

I conclude by restating the government's appreciation to all those involved in the drug strategy last year and offering continuing support and good wishes to the 750 schools taking part in this year's program.

Natural Heritage Trust: assessment panel appointment

Ms GARBUTT (Bundoora) — I refer the Minister for Conservation and Land Management to the Kennett government's appointment of well-known National Party identity, Mr Jeremy Gaylard, as Chairman of Commissioners of the Shire of Moira in 1994 and to the fact that in December 1997 an independent financial audit of the council found a \$17.5 million black hole in the council's accounts. In view of the financial debacle at the Moira shire, will the minister rule out the

reappointment of Mr Gaylard to the state assessment panel for grants under the \$1.25 billion Natural Heritage Trust?

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Conservation and Land Management) — I thank the honourable member for asking her first question this session and welcome her because she does not know when the new member for Bundoora, Mary Delahunty, will join the Labor side of politics. Apart from his other duties, Mr Jeremy Gaylard is the chairman of the Victorian Catchment and Land Protection Council. He has undertaken a range of duties on behalf of the government and of the many people involved in catchment management he, probably more than anyone else, has worked assiduously and effectively in focusing interest on catchment management and on leading a review that has brought together a range of organisations now forming catchment management authorities. Mr Gaylard has focused on catchment management from a state perspective far beyond any other single contribution.

Mr Gaylard is involved in the assessment of applications for Natural Heritage Trust funding. The process is set out clearly through regional and state assessment panels which then make applications to me and to the federal ministers for environment and primary industries and energy. The funding process has been beyond reproach. I have confidence in the ability of Mr Gaylard to contribute to the ongoing role of catchment management in this state.

Building industry: performance

Mr A. F. PLOWMAN (Benambra) — Will the Minister for Planning and Local Government inform the house of the current level of private building activity in Victoria and the way in which the government has encouraged the building industry?

Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning and Local Government) — The Building Control Commission statistics reveal that the building industry is continuing to show a strong recovery. For the quarter ended December 1997 there was a \$308 million increase in private sector building activity, which included record amounts — almost as far back as statistical information goes — for the renovation of existing private housing stock. With low interest rates and the current affordability of loans, many Victorians are choosing to renovate existing houses rather than building new ones. Renovation activity has reached almost 50 per cent of the permits issued for new housing. Although it does not represent the same value, the number of permits issued for renovations is significant.

The building industry is continuing to show a strong recovery. The commission's reliable statistical process provides a detailed and accessible opportunity to obtain that information, and the continuing recovery in the building industry is welcome in employment terms.

Schools: suicide prevention

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I refer the Minister for Education to a regional briefing of principals in Geelong on 22 January where it was revealed that nearly one-third of the youth suicide prevention money allocated to schools is being syphoned off for the department's administration of the disability and impairment program. Is that not a fundamental breach of the government's commitment to dealing with the tragic loss of life of our young people through suicide?

Mr GUDE (Minister for Education) — The simple answer to the question is no.

Housing Week

Mr ASHLEY (Bayswater) — Will the Minister for Housing inform the house of activities taking place in Victoria during Housing Week to acknowledge 60 years of public housing and the contribution both public housing and public housing tenants have made to the social fabric of Victoria?

Mrs HENDERSON (Minister for Housing) — The first Housing Week in Victoria was launched on Sunday, which was an opportunity to celebrate 60 years of public housing in Victoria. I have been overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of tenants, community organisations and local government in organising more than 120 activities that are taking place throughout the state.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs HENDERSON — Obviously the opposition does not support what is happening to tenants this week. Housing Week provides a great opportunity to acknowledge the contribution tenants have made to their local communities. It gives us an opportunity to acknowledge the changing face of public housing over the past 60 years, the innovative designs that have emerged over the past 10 years and what public housing has contributed to the social fabric of Victoria.

A range of activities has taken place throughout the state. It began with a fun run around the high-rise buildings in Collingwood, photo exhibitions and serious discussions about public housing have occurred. The patron of Housing Week this year,

Mr Doug Hawkins, the football and media personality, has made a great contribution.

Over the past three or four days I have visited most opposition member electorates, with the exception of one. I have not seen any interest or involvement of that member.

Housing Week is a great opportunity for public housing tenants to come together to celebrate 60 years of public housing. It has created huge interest and is putting pride back into public housing.

CSR Timber Products

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Premier to yesterday's announcement that the CSR Timber Products factory at Bacchus Marsh will close with the loss of 130 jobs. The announcement follows the closure last year of the APM Broadford mill which resulted in a loss of 150 jobs and the government's total failure to assist with the rebuilding of the Castlemaine woollen mill.

Will the Premier explain the double standard that means he is unable to lift a finger to assist those businesses that have closed, or the more than 1700 Victorian small businesses that closed last year, but he is prepared to rush out to help his mates at Crown Casino with a \$50 million taxpayer-funded gift?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — I welcome the Leader of the Opposition asking a question that is at least relevant to what is happening in Victoria. His last assertion about Crown, as I said last week, is wrong in terms of a bailout, but apparently he has more knowledge of government proceedings than anybody else — although that has never been borne out.

His question about the lack of assistance provided to CSR with the closure of the mill has again been asked without any knowledge or understanding of industry. CSR has closed the plant because the product it manufactures is no longer in demand.

Mr Brumby — It's going to Ipswich, Queensland!

Mr KENNETT — One feels sorry for the Leader of the Opposition because he is without relevance. The fundamental reason CSR is closing its plant is that the product has no particular market now because a new form of board is being produced by another factory in Victoria. It is not part of the CSR group — it is a group that has opened up partly with Malaysian money. The Wangaratta factory employs about 200 people.

There will always be change in any industry. One does not manufacture a product and expect that there will be demand for it forever. It is a bit like the Labor Party: it has not changed its attitude or its policies for five years. Labor is not relevant because not one new idea has come from the whole team. It is all about personality and is totally without leadership.

There will be times when businesses in this state close. That is the nature of industry. It happens to be part of a normal transition, with new products being developed. As a government we try to provide the environment in which you can — —

Mr Seitz interjected.

Mr KENNETT — Look at that, the honourable member for Keilor should table the document he is holding up. I would like to have a look at it. Bring it down here!

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier will address the Chair.

Mr KENNETT — The work the government has done over the past couple of years in providing the environment in which jobs can be created led last year — this is based not on our figures but on ABS figures — to Victoria being responsible for creating more jobs than any other state.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr KENNETT — The Leader of the Opposition says, 'You've got to be kidding', but the reality is that that is the truth. We will continue to do what we can to attract new industries to Victoria and to grow jobs. But we will not throw public money at organisations like CSR, for whose product there is no demand. I think I am correct in saying that CSR did not approach the government for any assistance at all. It had an investment that had become outmoded because of new technology. From a commercial point of view, that is why it will close.

I can only assume from the question asked by the Leader of the Opposition that every time a business wants to transform itself or enter into producing a new product, a Labor government — if ever there is to be one — will throw money at it just to keep it open. If that is what he is saying, I have to say that that is what it did with the VEDC, and it is why it loses the whole time. Even an organisation called Eziwalkin, which was a very good shoe company in this state some years ago and which was well run by an entrepreneurial, hard-working individual, was eventually transformed

and, because of changes in ownership, went into different forms of business.

You cannot hold onto businesses indefinitely, but you can try to create the environment in which there is new investment. The government has been doing that very well, whether it be with ADI at Benalla, which is now a 350-job investment; in Damum in Gippsland, where Bonlac Foods is opening the biggest milk factory of its kind anywhere in the world; or with Snow Brand going to Tongala. A range of multimedia and information technology industries have also come to the state.

We have seen a very good illustration of the thought processes of the Leader of the Opposition, which indicate how he and his government, if ever they were elected, would go about supporting all businesses regardless of their efficiency. The Labor Party has never been competitive; it has never had any ideas about creating jobs. The Leader of the Opposition does not have the leadership capabilities to present his team at the next election in a way that enables it to be seriously considered. That will be very quickly obvious. Even an opposition member is nodding his head in agreement — and I could not agree more. The Leader of the Opposition is friendless, not only in his own party but in the broader community.

Interjection from gallery.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask that that person be removed from the gallery.

Person escorted from gallery.

Trams: City Circle and Nightlink

Mr PHILLIPS (Eltham) — Will the Minister for Transport inform the house of the successful operation of the City Circle and Nightlink tram services during daylight saving?

Mr COOPER (Minister for Transport) — The City Circle tram, which is a unique service that enables Melburnians and visitors alike to see the sights of Melbourne, has been a huge success. It has carried more than 7 million people over that time, and its success is mirrored in the awards it has received, including, last year, a Victorian tourism award.

To build on that success, it was decided to extend its hours of operation during daylight saving because Melbourne has a lot to offer from November to March. Since 30 October last year, the City Circle trams have been running until 9.00 p.m. on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights, and that will continue until 28 March. That innovative extension has been very successful.

The extended operating hours have encouraged an extra 4600 passengers a week to travel on the free burgundy and gold trams. Friday nights are the most popular, when the trams carry nearly 3000 people. Given that the average number of passengers carried daily is 1700, operating the City Circle during daylight saving has been a resounding success. As I said, the extended hours will continue until 28 March, and I encourage all Victorians, and in particular all Melburnians, and all the tourists who visit Melbourne — especially during the grand prix — to use the City Circle trams. It is unique in the world, it is free; and the trams will allow them to get an exceptional look at Melbourne. They also will have the services of expert customer service employees, who will be able to show the sights of Melbourne in ways that many other service operators cannot.

During daylight saving Yarra Trams has responded to the demands of all-night party-goers by introducing a Nightlink tram service on Saturday and Sunday mornings. The service is also attracting a healthy patronage, with an average of about 1300 people using it every weekend. A recent customer satisfaction survey of the Nightlink service showed that 38 per cent of patrons rated it as excellent, 56 per cent rated it as good, and 6 per cent rated it as satisfactory.

Nightlink runs every 20 minutes from 12.30 a.m. to 5.30 a.m. on Saturdays and Sundays between Melbourne University, St Kilda, South Yarra and North Fitzroy. The service takes in most of Melbourne's popular entertainment precincts, such as Acland Street, Fitzroy Street, Chapel and Brunswick streets, the Crown entertainment complex and Swanston and Collins streets in the city. Seventy-five per cent of its patrons travel less than 3 kilometres with 21 per cent travelling between 3 and 6 kilometres and only 5 per cent travelling further than that. It is a great way for people who have been out on the town and who may well have imbibed a little more than they should have to get home or to get from where they are to a nearby taxi rank so they do not become a problem for society, the police or, more importantly, themselves.

Both the City Circle and Nightlink tram services are excellent initiatives of this government. They have been widely accepted by the Melbourne and Victorian communities, and I would encourage all those who have the opportunity to use them to do so. If they do, I think they will be very impressed.

Schools: suicide prevention

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I refer the Minister for Education to his previous answer. Will he indicate how much of the youth suicide prevention

money has been siphoned off for administration and assessment expenses instead of going to tackle youth suicide?

Mr GUDE (Minister for Education) — I should not have thought that a member of the Labor Party would want to be heard in this place using the term 'siphoning'. If ever a party in government perfected the art of siphoning it was the Australian Labor Party. It was widely reported that funds were siphoned off from the former State Electricity Commission to the education area.

Mr Thwaites — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, under standing order 127 the minister is debating the matter. He ought to come back to the question.

The SPEAKER — Order! I uphold the point of order. I ask the minister to come back to the question.

Mr GUDE — Funds were siphoned off from the SEC to pay teachers. In relation to suicide prevention, through the Premier, Victoria has demonstrated leadership in trying to arrest the problem of youth suicide in particular. Some \$23.91 million has been allocated to the youth suicide program, of which approximately \$8 million has gone into school programs.

In his previous question the honourable member for Footscray referred to a Geelong briefing and approximately a third of the process being siphoned off. If he was really asking whether part of the funds going to youth suicide were used properly to administer youth suicide funds, then the answer would have been yes instead of no. But the answer is no, the government does not siphon off funds for the purpose he was talking of.

The government is delivering quality programs in schools in a way that will advantage youngsters and ensure the least possibility of their becoming so depressed that they commit suicide. It does not want that to occur in Victoria's schools; it does not want Victorian children to be in those circumstances. Where possible the government is contracting out those services to try to get further value for every dollar it spends.

The government is not in the business of siphoning — that is a process the Australian Labor Party uses in government, it is a Cain-Kimer effort. It is the sort of thing Labor would probably do if Victoria were ever unlucky enough for it to get back to this side of the chamber.

BLF CUSTODIAN

The SPEAKER presented 38th report given to him pursuant to section 7A of the BLF (De-recognition) Act 1985 by the custodian appointed under section 7(1) of that act.

Laid on table.

Ordered to be printed.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Melbourne City Link Act 1995 — Orders pursuant to section 8(4) increasing the Project Area

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — Notices of approval of amendments to the following Planning Schemes:

Boroondara Planning Scheme — Nos. L43, L46

Buloke Planning Scheme — No. L4

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme — No. L193

Melbourne Planning Scheme — Nos. L28, L289

Stonnington Planning Scheme — No. L30

Whittlesea Planning Scheme — No. L157

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Health Services Act 1988 — S.R. No. 10

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — S.R. No. 9

Tobacco Act 1997 — S.R. No. 11

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 —

Minister's exception certificate in relation to Statutory Rule No. 9

Minister's exemption certificates in relation to Statutory Rule Nos. 10, 11.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed from 19 February; motion of Ms McCALL (Frankston) for adoption of address-in-reply.

Mr ANDRIGHETTO (Narracan) — On behalf of my constituents I congratulate His Excellency on his appointment. I am sure he and Lady Gobbo will serve the state well during their time in office. It is appropriate to reflect on His Excellency's Italian background, something I have in common with him.

His appointment was extremely popular and welcome, and it has been embraced by the community.

The office of Governor is of significance not only to the general community but also to particular groups that feel part of the history of the state. I speak of the many voluntary and community organisations that contribute to the social fabric and prosperity of the state, such as the Red Cross, the scout movement, the Country Women's Association and the many organisations with which the Governor is personally involved.

The Governor's excellent speech raised some very significant points. He referred to the wonderful things that are happening in the state in education, health and on a host of other issues. Over the past five years the Kennett government has been responsible for major achievements in education. Schools now have independence. Through the schools charter they are now in a position to determine the direction they wish to take, not only for the current year or the next year but well into the future.

Schools have been set up in a way that encourages individual schools to take advantage of their strongest points, allows them to be competitive with others and invites parents from all over my electorate to look at what schools in the electorate have to offer. The schools attract students on the basis of the varied programs each offers. Some of those skills vary greatly. For example, for some schools, information technology, which is a huge area of growth, is the most important area. Other schools consider music programs to be of the most importance while others consider capital works and improving student facilities such as gymnastics and sports facilities to be of the utmost importance. Each school now has the ability to implement relevant changes and to take responsibility for its own individual development. Having seen the benefits in my own electorate I welcome that policy with open arms.

I shall comment on some of the wonderful developments in schools that have embraced the ability to set their own goals for the future. I will mention schools that are going ahead in leaps and bounds. One such school is the Warragul North Primary School, which my children attend. I can speak in glowing terms of the results the principal, Mr Peter Walkley, the school council, the teachers and the entire school community have achieved. Those changes are undoubtedly reflected in the enormous growth that has occurred at the school. Parents cannot be blamed for wanting the best for their children. While parents have always been astute, they now have the ability to view what is available and decide for themselves which school will be of the most benefit to their children.

I also refer to schools such as Neerim South regional college. The principal, Mrs Margaret Corcoran, has done a wonderful job by developing a new culture in and planning for major changes in that school. Warragul Primary School has also gone ahead in leaps and bounds. I congratulate the principal, Mrs Rosemary Alica, on the work she has done. She is a member of the Board of Studies and her expertise is assisting parents to compare what is on offer at Warragul and Warragul North primary schools before deciding where to send their children.

Newborough Primary School, the principal of which is Mrs Sue Collins, has experienced some difficulties associated with the Moe-Newborough area. This year the school has enjoyed a tremendous increase in its student population. It is performing exceptionally well and I congratulate Sue Collins, her school council and the teaching staff who share in the responsibility on achieving excellent changes.

The independence schools now enjoy is coupled with an ability to decide where their spending will occur. At present approximately 90 per cent of a school's budget is available for expenditure on what it considers to be priorities. All schools have different priorities and peculiarities that cannot be controlled or gauged by a bunch of bureaucrats sitting in high-rise offices in the city of Melbourne. Rural schools have peculiarities that only the school council, principal and teachers intimately involved can recognise and address. Schools now have the opportunity to address those peculiarities and problems very quickly to enable their students to achieve the best possible results. After all, the students are the most important part of our educational system. Because our children are the future of our state and country the system is designed to suit the needs of all students and to bring out the best in them.

School councils, working together with principals, now have greater responsibility. It is interesting to observe that some schools have gone ahead in leaps and bounds because they have recognised and embraced the benefits of change while others seem to lack the confidence necessary to bring about major reform. They feel threatened because they are being made more accountable for their management practices. They prefer to receive daily memos telling them what to do the next day, thereby abrogating their responsibilities. This government is about providing choice and giving schools the opportunity to grow and to improve. To do so they must have control of their budgets.

The choice of schools is very important to parents. Regardless of whether they wish their children to proceed along the direction of high-tech industries,

information technology or multimedia or whether they believe their children have talents for technology or prowess in music, the choice for parents is currently much wider than it has ever been.

The old negative culture of schools needs to be broken down, and to a certain extent that is already happening. Some schools have totally reversed the negative culture that once existed, but some are trailing behind. I hope school councils, principals and school communities will take advantage of the independence now available to them and change negative cultures into something to be proud of.

Victorians have a great deal to celebrate when considering some of the achievements in education. Our students and their teachers are achieving wonderful results. It is a pity the teacher unions and the ALP continually try to talk down the standing of the profession and the outstanding things that are happening in their schools. They do themselves a great deal of damage. When they talk about 9000 teachers being sacked, they forget to say that the only teachers who have left the service are those who accepted voluntary redundancy packages. No teachers have been sacked. They forget to say that most of the so-called teachers who left the industry were either employed in bureaucratic positions around the state — concentrated mainly in the Rialto building in the city — or on long-term leave. At one regional college in my electorate the staff roll contained the names of 15 people whom none of the existing teachers had ever met. They had been on leave for considerable periods but remained on the roll. I understand that some of the teachers still on the roll were teaching at other schools. That shemozzle needed to be cleaned up, and I congratulate the minister on being able to bring back some sense to school staffing so that teachers now know exactly what their positions and responsibilities are. I look forward to improvements along those lines in the coming few years.

It is very sad to see the constant barrage of misinformation from the opposition about school funding being cut when this year the government is spending \$351 million — more than any other government in the history of this state — on education. Although spending has increased by 14.5 per cent since 1992 when this government took office, in real terms, taking into account inflation and the like, it represents an increase of 6.1 per cent. How that can ever be described as a 'cut' or 'slashed funding' is beyond me. Spending per child has increased. In 1991-92 Victoria spent \$4500 on each child. That has been increased to \$5280 per child.

The great improvements that have occurred in Victoria's education system will continue. After speaking with school communities I am confident that they are more than happy with what is currently occurring and that they enjoy the independence they now have. I can see improvements almost on a daily basis.

I now turn to the issue of health, which has been of great concern for many of my constituents, and rightfully so because of the scare campaign run by the Labor Party, particularly in the Moe area. A new hospital is being built in that area. As the building program for that hospital progresses, more and more people are feeling comfortable about it because they can see the benefits that will clearly flow. They are talking about the hospital in positive terms rather than the hype and nonsense spread about for so long early in the program.

I refer to an article that appeared in the *Herald Sun* of Wednesday, 18 February. I have cut it out and will include it in my contribution today because of its significance to what is happening in health in this state. It is a report headed 'Waiting lists at record low' and is pertinent to what is happening in our hospitals. It says:

Heart surgery waiting lists have been cut from more than a year to a few weeks, a record low.

Leading the way, thanks to new techniques and approaches, is the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre.

It has a waiting list of about 20 for open heart surgery, mainly bypass or valve operations.

The Alfred Hospital's waiting list is 'small' and St Vincent's numbers in the 30s. Both lists could be cleared in a month.

Two years ago Austin patients, except in urgent cases, could wait more than a year, said the director of cardiac surgery, Professor Brian Buxton.

Now the maximum wait was several weeks.

'It's the lowest we've ever had it,' the internationally renowned heart surgeon said yesterday.

The article goes on to comment about the enormous improvement in acute health care.

The spin doctors on the other side continually talk about the massive cuts to health in the state. Let me set the record straight by pointing out some of the enormous increases that have occurred in the area they say has been cut. For example, from 1992-93 to 1997-98 acute health funding in this state has had an increase of 19 per cent to \$2.4 billion. Over the same period, funding has increased for ambulance services by 57 per cent, for the aged community and mental health by 32 per cent and for public health by 51 per

cent. The total increase in funding for health has been a significant 25 per cent.

All those figures show a marked increase in funding by this state. Perhaps members on the other side are confused because of the cuts made by the commonwealth during the same period. I assure honourable members opposite that this state government continues to strive to provide a better health program. The results of the initiatives put into place to improve service delivery and outcomes have been spectacular, with over 200 000 patients being put through the system, which is more than ever before. That figure is obviously reflected in the dramatic reduction in waiting lists at our hospitals.

I take this opportunity to recognise the excellent work done by the board of management of the West Gippsland Health Care Group and in particular the past chairman, Dr Rob Sinnett; the new chairman, Dr Julie Thomson; and the chief executive officer, Mr Greg Pullen, who has recently departed because of promotion. I am sure Mr Pullen's services will be missed. His expertise will be welcomed at the Shepparton Base Hospital where he has taken up a new appointment.

Before I finish talking about the West Gippsland Health Care Group I point out the marvellous support that group has received from the community, which has contributed \$2 million in donations. That money has been put to excellent use with the development of stage 1 of the redevelopment of the West Gippsland Hospital. It should also be noted that the change in direction and emphasis of the West Gippsland Health Care Group on attacking primary health care as a priority has been achieved by funding and opening two primary health care centres in Warragul and in Trafalgar. The emphasis on primary care in an effort to stop people having to go to an acute service provider in the first instance is of course removing the stress and trauma from what used to happen many years ago and so the quality of life for the community, especially those in the older age bracket, is improving on a day-to-day basis.

I commend the chief executive officer of the new Latrobe Regional Hospital, Mr Stewart Rowley, who has done a tremendous job in not only supervising the construction of the new facility but also dealing with the negative campaign that has been waged against the hospital developers and him personally.

In a recent example, allegations were made that the new hospital would open without a children's ward. In fact, rather than having no children's ward the new hospital

will have more children's ward beds than currently exist in the combined campuses of Moe and Traralgon — it will open with a minimum of eight children's ward beds. Because of the nature of the new design, which is probably the most important thing in health care these days, facilities are designed and built so that the new technologies can be maximised.

As I said, when the hospital opens it will have 8 children's ward beds, and that number can quickly be increased to 12 or even 16 in the case of special needs. That could not happen with the other two hospitals and it will greatly benefit the community. It is a pity the chief executive officer had to make a public statement and recruit the services of the new paediatrician — four paediatricians were to start — to put down the misinformation spread by the other side. I do not know why some people continually want to be rumour mongers and destroy the potential of the new hospital. It seems to me that politics plays a role in just about every field of endeavour those on the other side wish to pursue.

It must be pointed out that the new Latrobe Regional Hospital will open as a teaching hospital co-located with Monash University, which has pumped several million dollars into the site and will have a centre for rural health and a centre for rural medicine on the premises.

A graduate diploma of rural medicine course will be offered and the lecture theatres and other necessary requirements will be in place from the first day. The initiative is extremely important given the difficulty experienced in attracting general practitioners to rural areas. The hospital will provide a mechanism for graduate doctors to move to where they can pursue specialist careers in rural general practice, which all practitioners would agree is different from working in a busy Melbourne hospital. I understand the course is full. It can cater for 12 graduate doctors undertaking the three-year program and has been well accepted. I congratulate Professor Roger Strasser on his work in bringing that about. I also pay tribute to the vice-chancellor of Monash University for ensuring that the medical component of the course will be undertaken on the premises.

As a member of the Law Reform Committee I endorse the comments of the honourable member for Doncaster when he spoke in glowing terms of the honourable member for Melbourne. I can vouch for the honourable member for Melbourne's contribution to the committee. He is one of the hardest workers on that bipartisan committee. It is shameful that he is being targeted by his own side, and sad that one of the reasons given is

that he is unfit to hold office. It is a disgrace. The honourable member for Melbourne has done a wonderful job and has a tremendous amount to contribute. It demonstrates the way in which the opposition treats its own members, but I will say no more about that.

I turn to the benefits of local government reform for the electorate of Narracan. The electorate includes part of the Shire of La Trobe and part of the Shire of Baw Baw. I congratulate Geoff Davey and the councillors at the Baw Baw Shire Council, and Daryl White, who has done a marvellous job as mayor of La Trobe Shire Council. The reforms have brought about a very aggressive attitude to rural development and, with the help of the Minister for Rural Development, have facilitated enormous growth.

I refer specifically to the establishment of the Bonlac Foods Ltd factory and the creation of 200 jobs — as the Premier said today, it is the largest milk production factory in the world — and the establishment at Morwell of National Foods and the telecentre, the latter also leading to the creation of 200 jobs. Those developments have resulted directly from aggressive marketing and are bringing employment opportunities to an area with much to offer. Its advantages over other locations are its proximity to ports and the capital city and its beauty.

I thank the Minister for Housing for her efforts in achieving a tripartite arrangement between the local council, which donated the land, the state government, which has donated 50 per cent of the funding, and the RSL on the building of 16 home units for eligible RSL personnel in the middle of Moe. I also thank all those who were involved for their work on the project.

The future looks extremely bright for the electorate of Narracan. The developments in the Asian economy will make things a little tougher in the tourism industry, but I am convinced that tourism from other areas will take up the slack. Wonderful work is being carried out by those with a stake in Mount Baw Baw. The fact that the mountain, which has struggled over the past few years, turned the corner last year and recorded an increase in visitation rates is an indication of a boost in tourism generally in the electorate. Tourism is the industry in my electorate that has had the largest increase in employment. I pledge to support it in any way possible.

Mr BRACKS (Williamstown) — I rise to contribute to the debate on the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. On page 2 of his speech, the Governor states:

Victoria is leading Australia and, in some cases, the world in economic reforms, and is pursuing a highly successful, pro-active industry policy.

The government has failed the Victorian public and industry absolutely and completely on the issue of port reform. The botched efforts at economic and other reforms have led to a reinforcement of the duopoly arrangements and a lack of competition at the port of Melbourne. Approximately 12 months ago there was a chance to have real competition at the port of Melbourne.

Historically there has been a duopoly, if not a monopoly, at the port of Melbourne. Patrick stevedores and P and O have had a cosy arrangement to share the activity at the port. An opportunity to break open the arrangement arose when shipping giant OOCL (Australia) Pty Ltd, one of the most reputable international stevedoring firms, was prepared to invest approximately \$150 million in a new container terminal at Appleton Dock and compete with the duopoly partners to bring about real reform. That would have been the main gain.

If the Governor's speech is to be given any credence I suggest that opportunity should have been taken to gain a third competitor at the port of Melbourne. It was a chance to break the duopoly and provide real competition and new investment that would have led to jobs and export income. That was all passed up for two fundamental reasons.

Firstly, OOCL committed the sin, in the government's eyes, of making an enterprise agreement with the Maritime Union of Australia. Like Patrick stevedores and P and O it intended having a cooperative arrangement with its work force.

Secondly, the Treasurer and the Premier were tapped on the shoulder and told, 'We know there is an agenda here to get a competitive port, to break the duopoly by getting a third competitor. However, you need to know we have a plan that might mean the duopoly stays. Effectively we will attack and replace the work force and try to get rid of the Maritime Union of Australia. That will have the dual benefit of, firstly, having an industrial relations agenda and using you as the example of it, and, secondly, making sure we have a stalking-horse for a federal campaign so we can campaign on industrial relations federally. You get rid of OOCL because it is in the way of those two objectives of getting rid of the work force and making sure we have a political campaign to wage on industrial relations that will help the coalition partners'.

Stupidly, the Premier, the Treasurer and the Victorian coalition government signed on and accepted it, to the absolute detriment of Victoria. That has meant that we now have a Clayton's competitor that cannot compete in the port of Melbourne — I shall describe that in detail later. Melbourne, Victoria is the battlefield of Australia — what a great outcome for our export industries! — and that has meant a loss of investment and jobs.

OOCL has gone to Sydney. It has walked out of Melbourne. It did not want to be part of this arrangement in Victoria. It has taken out of Melbourne its \$150 million, its couple of hundred jobs and its potential development of and investment in ports. The by-product of that is the damage to Victoria's reputation internationally. We know the statement made in Hong Kong by the Treasurer that was insulting to OOCL and its partners has irreparably damaged Victoria's reputation in this area, and for no long-term benefit.

Clearly, two agendas are involved. The first is the agenda of the Premier, the Treasurer and the Victorian coalition government, and the second is the agenda of Patrick stevedores and its principal, Chris Corrigan. Coincidentally, the agendas match! The chief executive of Patrick wants only one thing, and it is not necessarily to bust the union. He has signed on for that, but he wants to protect the duopoly. He wants to protect his market share and do everything possible to stop competition in the port of Melbourne. He wants a cosy arrangement, to cuddle up to P and O and ensure the two of them are the only partners involved in the carriage of goods at the port. Patrick does not want a proper international competitor in the future, but it will accept someone on its own terms and sublease arrangements, not on terms that mean there is proper competition. That is what Chris Corrigan wants and that is what he has been pursuing.

The Kennett coalition government and Minister Reith and the Howard government want to pursue a political and industrial relations agenda in the next federal election campaign. Chris Corrigan is smart. He knew that if he brought them in to protect his duopoly by running their agenda on ports he could get rid of OOCL and control the terms on which any rogue operation came in. As it turns out the National Farmers Federation has come in at the port of Melbourne.

The agendas are being run for different reasons. But what is the benefit for Victorians? What has the Kennett government delivered? It has delivered no reform at all in the port. It has delivered a market share for Patrick stevedores and industrial and political chaos

for Victorians. The government has signed on for this arrangement and been complicit in the way it has been carried out.

I shall now detail major events that have led to some of the assertions I have made about the lack of competition in the ports and the federal government's political agenda. It all adds up, and it stinks. There is collusion, collusion and collusion all the way through, from Patrick stevedores to the Treasurer and the Premier of this state, and Mr Reith and the Howard government at the federal level.

One need only look back to January 1997 to get the picture. That was when the Victorian Treasurer was crowing absolutely positive about having secured for Victoria a new competitor in the port, OOCL. This was to be the best thing for Victoria. The opposition supported it. We said we agreed and did not object to it. We wanted to see the duopoly broken up and the introduction of competition and port reform. The opposition thought getting a \$200 million investment from the private sector at a little-used port, Appleton Dock, was a good way of doing it. The Treasurer was wholehearted in his endorsement.

In April 1997 Patrick stevedores commenced litigation against the state of Victoria and the Melbourne Port Corporation objecting to the entrance of a competitor. It wanted to retain the duopoly. It said it understood there were agreements that the Treasurer had supported that would ensure the duopoly existed for the next 20 years or so. Patrick sought compensation for the fact that the government wanted to introduce competition. The Treasurer said that was dreadful and that he would not be held to ransom or blackmailed by Patrick stevedores. He said the \$100 million claim was outrageous and that he would rigorously defend the decision, break open the duopoly, get OOCL involved and beat Patrick stevedores in the port. But according to an article in the *Australian Financial Review* of 8 April, Mr Corrigan was saying something different. The article reports:

But the company's managing director, Mr Chris Corrigan, told the *Daily News* last week Patrick had gone ahead with its \$200 million investment at Swanson Dock in 1993 after obtaining verbal and written undertakings that no additional terminals would be permitted.

Mr Corrigan was rigorously pursuing his side of the duopoly. In May 1997 — surprise, surprise! — the other duopoly partner, P and O, also took legal action. They both wanted to stop competition.

The Treasurer was trumpeting this new investment and rigorously defending litigation against it. However, we must seriously ask what happened in July 1997 when

the OOCL investment was lost to Victoria on some minor issue to do with port charges. What was the change of heart, and what happened that this Treasurer let slip from Victoria this jewel that would have driven proper port reform? I know what happened. I know about the discussions that occurred. Clearly the Treasurer and the Premier were talked to. They were told about the Dubai operation and the potential National Farmers Federation operation. They were told to run the Liberal Party agenda even though that would mean the loss of investment to the port and Victoria and would mean the protection of the duopoly. They were told that would be the cost, but the benefit would be that the Liberal Party would get the chance to win the next federal election. Stupidly the Premier and the Treasurer signed on for this collusive arrangement, to the detriment of all Victorians.

The argument about port charges was very silly. Melbourne has the third-highest port charges of any major port in the world. It is 27th out of 30. Only three other ports — Rotterdam, Tilbury and Hamburg — have higher port charges. The article in the *Daily News* of 15 July 1997 also states:

The DCN understands that at the end of the day the breakdown in talks revolved around the state's insistence that VICT pay a premium for ground rental at the Appleton Dock site. The ground rent proposed by the government was three times that charged to other stevedores in the port and wharfage charges, removed by legislation last year, were to be introduced.

Therefore, not only was the government asking OOCL to pay up, but to pay up three times the amount paid by other stevedores. The government found its excuse. The Treasurer wanted to get rid of the competition and used port charges as the camouflage for it.

On Thursday, 4 December, the Premier admitted in Parliament that he had visited the port of Dubai as part of a four-day trade mission. He took along Mr Ken Baddenoch from the Victorian Farmers Federation. One does not need to be very bright to work out this was part of the plan.

We also know that at about the same time the Premier had an association with a person called Peter Kilfoyle, a principal of Fynwest, which was part of the Dubai operations. The Premier was caught out because a photograph appeared in the Ballarat *Courier* of a security guard holding an umbrella over the Premier's head, and the security guard was Mr Peter Kilfoyle. The Premier was asked about this and said, 'I don't know him. I don't know this Fynwest. I don't know this Peter Kilfoyle'. However, the *Courier* people found the photo of the umbrella being held up, so clearly there is a connection between Dubai, Mr Peter Kilfoyle and the

Fynwest operation of which he's a principal: it all adds up to foreknowledge right the way through. We are the bunnies who paid for it. The government signed on the cabinet to something that is an absolute dud and is causing industrial chaos in this state.

We go on to the Christmas-New Year period of 1997. The Treasurer has 'fessed up. He has admitted under scrutiny in this house and on radio that he was briefed on the National Farmers Federation operation at that period. That is an admission prior to the one the federal Minister for Industrial Relations and Small Business, Mr Peter Reith, made. So the Treasurer had foreknowledge; he was briefed on the matter.

We also know that in February 1998 state government riot gear was used. Mysteriously, it was found in Williamstown in a car destined for Webb Dock. The riot gear was hired over a weekend and the government's explanation was, 'Well, we didn't know who the principals hiring it out were. We thought it was done on government business'. It would be nice to know what sort of business involves the hiring out of riot gear. Clearly there was involvement there.

The key involvement came on 28 January 1998. As I mentioned, all along there has been litigation by Patrick stevedores and P and O trying to prevent competition. On 28 January that litigation between Patrick stevedores, the state of Victoria and the Melbourne Port Corporation was settled out of court in a substantive matter. Part of the settlement involved an ability for Patrick stevedores to get access to East Swanson Dock and for Patrick stevedores to sublease Webb Dock no. 5 to the National Farmers Federation operation. That settlement was made out of court, so you can see the collusion. Here is litigation that the government is supposedly vigorously opposing. Suddenly the case is settled, which gives the NFF the right to walk on the site under the lease, dissolves the litigation and allows the operation to happen. On the same day the settlement happens the operation goes on to Webb Dock. A bit cute, a bit too close; you have to say there has been collusion right through this matter.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr BRACKS — They are up to it everywhere. The trouble is they don't tell the backbench or cabinet about these matters. These things are done in secret.

The clear issue is what was in these leases, these arrangements that were settled between Patrick stevedores and PCS Operations, which is a National Farmers Federation company.

I have available to me two leaked documents from the state government. It is not surprising that we have leaks. We know the Premier is under pressure; when the government is under pressure these things happen and documents arrive for the opposition. I have two documents, the first of which describes in detail the commercial sublease between Patrick Stevedores No. 1 Pty Ltd and PCS Operations Pty Ltd for Webb Dock no. 5. The second is the equipment hire agreement between Patrick Stevedores Operations No. 2 Pty Ltd and PCS Operations Pty Ltd, an NFF company. This reveals the collusion, because we can see what it would end up with. I shall quote from the commercial sublease between Patrick stevedores and PCS, the NFF operation, which shows it would end up with a stevedoring operation that could not compete. Paragraph 10 of the reference table, relating to use, states:

General stevedoring terminal

that is what it is being used for —

and for the avoidance of doubt does not include the use of premises as an international container terminal.

The lease is signed by Patrick and the National Farmers Federation, which means that the operation on Webb Dock could never compete. Game, set and match to Mr Corrigan. He won! He gets the duopoly fixed; he gets a competitor in there that cannot compete, cannot handle an international container, and he wins. Victoria loses \$150 million.

The document further provides that the lease will be for two years at an annual rental of \$720 000. Clause 9(b) of the sublease provides:

The sublessor must undertake any reasonable action required to ensure that sublessee's

that is, the NFF —

access to the premises through any area controlled by the sublessor is not interfered with.

Effectively, the lease contains provision for security personnel to go onto the site, and it was protected in the lease arrangements between the NFF company PCS and Patrick stevedores.

The collusion gets much worse. Mr Corrigan has had a big win here. He has protected the duopoly; the champions of competition have caved in on the industrial relations agenda and allowed the duopoly to go unfettered.

There is a second agreement called an equipment hire agreement between Patrick Stevedores Operations

No. 2 Pty Ltd and PCS Operations Pty Ltd. This covers all the equipment at Webb Dock, including the cranes, which have not been assembled, and major machinery. There is a separate lease for that. Clause 3(c) of the agreement provides:

The lessor

that is, Patrick —

may terminate this agreement by giving seven days written notice to the lessee of its intention to terminate this agreement.

Therefore, if Patrick stevedores does not like what the NFF is doing, if it thinks the NFF is getting a bit tetchy and is starting to compete, it can give the NFF company seven days notice and take the equipment back. It is not minor equipment; this has an enormous lead time. Patrick has won completely. It has conned the government, because in this case the sublease refers to cranes, trailers, dock trucks, forklifts, three straddle carriers — they are the 43-metre high red cranes you see on Webb Dock. They are not small things.

Who would sign a lease to say that if one of your competitors, Patrick stevedores, decides it does not like you it can get rid of you in seven days?

Clause 5(f) of the equipment sublease also says, and this is the rub:

In consideration of the lessee paying the rent, the lessor agrees to make available to the lessee for a minimum of 20 hours per week a suitably experienced person to provide assistance and advise the lessee on the use of the equipment.

Patrick has agreed to train the NFF rogue operation under this lease arrangement. There is actual agreement; it is in the lease and explicit.

No more evidence is needed of collusion than those two documents that have been leaked to the opposition. The sublease arrangements between Patrick stevedores, the NFF operation PCS and the equipment sublease clearly demonstrate that there has been collusion. Think about this: we Victorians have ended up with the fact that we have forgone the investment of a major shipping giant, OOCL, to break the duopoly; the Treasurer used a fictitious reason in the port charges and signed on to an arrangement which, under these lease arrangements, cannot compete. Who has won? Chris Corrigan has won, game, set and match. He has protected his duopoly, stopped a competitor coming in and has control on the equipment sublease on the NFF operation, which cannot compete by definition. If it does compete he can take the equipment away and it would take ages to try to re-equip that site. That is an absolute win for competitors and a loss to Victorians.

It is useful to reflect on what has happened with the Melbourne Port Corporation during that time. The Treasurer and the honourable member for Box Hill, who, as I understand it, has taken over the response role in assisting the Treasurer, have usurped the corporation. The poor old Melbourne Port Corporation wants to operate an efficient port, but its head, Mr Jeffrey Gilbert, has threatened to resign. Why wouldn't he? He wanted to get competition into the port and to take up the OOCL contract, but the Prime Minister and the federal Minister for Workplace Relations and Small Business, Mr Reith, have intervened for their political and industrial agenda. I ask honourable members to imagine how Mr Gilbert must feel.

Actually, I can tell you how he feels because the 9 February edition of *Lloyd's List Australian Weekly*, a shipping magazine, states:

The MPC has in recent days been redirecting press inquiries to the office of parliamentary secretary to the Treasury, Robert Clark.

The handling of calls has fuelled industry belief that the port's management has become isolated from the decision-making process.

The Victorian Treasury moved on Friday to dampen speculation that Melbourne Port Corporation chief executive Jeffrey Gilbert is about to leave his post.

We don't blame him! What an arrangement he faces — with a political agenda overruling somebody who is trying to operate an efficient port. He has been trying to get competition but has been sidelined by the Treasurer and the honourable member for Box Hill. If the public or the media inquire about the port's competitive arrangements, the Melbourne Port Corporation has been instructed to tell any caller to ring the office of the honourable member for Box Hill.

The alleged threat to resign has been made by Mr Gilbert because of the lack of support from his minister in securing competition for the port. It is also widely known in shipping circles that when the OOCL deal was lost because of the deliberate actions of the Treasurer, Mr Gilbert wanted to have a fall-back position from which he could get some competition on Webb Dock. He had proposed that \$10 million be spent in doing up Webb Dock no. 5 to ensure that a proper competitive arrangement for the port was in place. But he was called into the Treasurer's office and told, 'Forget your plan, we have other things happening at Webb Dock'. Now we know what is happening there!

Under pressure, the Treasurer admitted he was briefed on those matters between Christmas and new year. He knew about the OOCL deal. He wanted to ensure any

arrangements complied with the federal industrial relations and political agenda. The federal government does not care about OOCL. The *Lloyd's List Australian Weekly* states:

Mr Gilbert is believed to have seen the Patrick facility as a ready made solution to his long-stated aim of establishing a third terminal in the port by the year 2000 — and at a bargain price of little more than \$10 million in estimated refurbishment costs. Those costs are based on a new terminal entrance supplying its own cargo handling equipment.

That was to be a sensible arrangement made by a sensible person, but he was called in to face the Treasurer and told, 'Back off, we have a Clayton's competitor, NFF, which cannot compete. We want NFF to go in there because it cannot compete under the terms of the lease'.

In effect, the outcome of those episodes is that Victoria is the loser. Forget about whether one agrees with the industrial relations agenda of the federal government or with the MUA. Does anybody in Victoria believe there should not be port reform?

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — The honourable members for Mitcham and Pascoe Vale agree with the need for port reform. The question must then be asked: where is the government's port reform program? The government has simply driven out investment in this state, signed on a Clayton's competitor and got rid of our best opportunity to get new capital investment and new technology into the port of Melbourne. It has missed out on breaking down the duopoly.

The government has forgone all that for its mates in Canberra who want an industrial relations election issue before the public. The federal government has conned the Treasurer and the Premier and said, 'The reward in busting the union is much better than having a port operating properly'. The issue has not been before cabinet; the Victorian government has been duped. It is a shame for Victoria that that loss of investment opportunity will go down as one of our worst legacies.

I remind the house of what the Governor said when he opened Parliament on 17 February:

Victoria is leading Australia and, in some cases, the world in economic reforms, and is pursuing a highly successful, pro-active industry policy.

What a joke!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr DIXON (Dromana) — I am pleased to respond to the address of His Excellency the Governor. I compliment His Excellency on the tremendous job he and Lady Gobbo are doing. Last week I had the pleasure of meeting both for the first time, when I was taken by their commitment to their jobs and to Victoria.

I am reminded of a scene from the movie *The Life of Brian* when a rhetorical question is asked by a group of citizens under Roman occupation. They asked, 'What are the Romans doing for us?'. After a pregnant pause somebody says, 'It is a safer place to live'. Then somebody else says, 'Our roads are better than they used to be'. The movie continues with questions about advantages that the Romans may have brought to the citizens — better infrastructure, roads, ports, public utilities, safety on the streets, consistency in government and stability.

My constituents in Dromana are entitled to ask, 'What has the state government done for the people of Dromana?'. The answers to that question are similar to what the Roman citizens may have said all those years ago.

I shall detail a few of the wonderful things that have happened for the people of Dromana. In the past two years a new TAFE college has been opened in Rosebud. It has been purpose built for TAFE education courses. Many more student contact hours are now available for people from all sorts of backgrounds, whether they be students continuing their studies or people coming back to study to gain better qualifications. One of the highlights of the expanded TAFE operations is that 70 per cent of people undertaking courses at Rosebud TAFE are recipients of social security payments and are gaining extra skills so they can enter or return to the work force and make a contribution to the community.

The idea of a merger of TAFE facilities is not new to the Peninsula TAFE of which Rosebud is a campus. It advocated the need for a merger so it could expand its facilities to better meet the challenges a modern TAFE institute must tackle in the coming years, in the breadth and depth of courses offered and in the infrastructure needed in a modern tertiary institution.

In the past few years the Rosebud hospital has been refurbished and extended. The number of beds available has practically doubled due to a large contribution by the government and community involvement. The refurbished hospital is a wonderful facility. It is flat out serving its community. Everyone who uses it is full of praise for its staff and for the services it provides.

The services throughout our hospital network have improved. The best example I can think of is chemotherapy. Previously, local residents who had been unfortunately stricken with cancer, most of them elderly and without access to transport, had to travel to Melbourne, or Frankston at best, for chemotherapy. Now they can pop into their local hospital at Rosebud. The treatment does not intrude on their lifestyles as much as it did, which helps the recuperation process. As the Governor pointed out in his speech, that is very much in line with the government's policy of putting hospital services where the people are.

My electorate has had poor hospital services. Although it has a growing population, a large proportion of whom are elderly, it has not had its share of hospital beds and health facilities, including facilities for the aged. The government is addressing those needs, which the people of Dromana welcome.

The Mornington Peninsula National Park has been extended. The Arthur's Seat precinct has now been added to the national park, and an exciting new management plan is being developed that will not only enhance the conservation values of the area but also encourage tourism. During the past two years the coastal park has also been developed. The Mornington Peninsula National Park is the most frequently visited national park in Victoria, with about 2.7 million visitors annually. The improved facilities include car parks, toilets and kiosks, better access to the beach, the reclamation of sand dunes, new fencing and new tracks.

The legislation affecting dolphin and whale watching that was passed late last year is a significant conservation measure. The number of dolphins has increased during the summer months; they seem to be returning to the bay, which is a great sign. It is important that the ecology of and food chain in that precious part of our bay is protected. The dolphins certainly need protection, and the legislation will ensure that that happens. Although the public needs to be further educated, the main operators have by and large adhered to the legislation and the ensuing regulations.

Through the Community Support Fund the Department of Sport, Recreation and Racing has passed on many grants to our local sporting clubs and recreational groups. Down our way there is a myriad of groups such as those, not only for our youth but also for our large retired population who have a lot of time on their hands to pursue recreational interests. The consistent number of small grants to recreational organisations encourages them not only to keep going but to expand and attract more people.

The government has increased its support for youth and community services in my area. The income of more than 70 per cent of my constituents comes from social security payments. As well, youths make up a large proportion of the population, so there is a need for those services. More personnel, especially youth counsellors, have come down to work in the various agencies. Emergency housing services have also been expanded. The programs administered by the various agencies are hitting the nail on the head in terms of target groups and outcomes. As a result, youth and community services in the electorate are better focussed. They are reaching the people they need to reach, who greatly appreciate them.

Gambling and poker machines are often put across as bad news stories. However, I will relate one small good news story in my electorate. The Rye RSL club has poker machines. Through astute management the club has grown to the extent that it is the largest employer of permanent full-time, part-time and casual employees in the area. The anecdotal message I have received from talking to management and to the patrons is that 99 per cent of those who attend the club are not addicted to gambling. Instead, they just like spending a couple of hours there meeting friends and having a drink. They put a limit on how much they will spend — and that is how much they spend. Then they go off and are not seen again until the following week.

The club has provided a social outlet for a large number of pensioners and locals who live on their own. That has not been abused, and the flow-on in community employment has been profound. The RSL is also a tourist attraction. Instead of going north into New South Wales, bus loads of tourists are now coming south to Rye. Those people play the pokies, go to the beach, shop and have a meal down our way before returning to Melbourne. That has a great flow-on effect on employment and the general economy of the electorate.

Another popular government decision followed the raising of what was a burning issue during the last election campaign — that is, scallop dredging. The electorate has a large number of recreational fishers, including the many tourists who come from Melbourne and other areas to fish in the waters of the bay. There are also a number of diving schools, and many recreational divers, who either live in or visit the area, enjoy the clean water and magnificent undersea vistas in the bay. All those people have commented on the difference the banning of scallop dredging has made.

If of a morning you went down to the beach or were driving along the beach road it was nothing for you to see 30 scallop dredgers going up and down like tractors in a paddock, dredging the seabed. Divers in the area

were horrified to see everything being ripped out. There were even instances of historical boat wrecks being disturbed by the dredging, and the resultant muck that was washed up on the beach was not pleasant. Now we do not have to put up with boats dredging the seabed, which has already begun to recover. As a result, fish are more abundant, and that has contributed to the growing numbers of dolphins in the bay.

Even though it is not situated in my electorate, I refer to the port of Hastings, the management of which has been privatised. The port services a large industrial area, and the tentacles of those industries reach throughout my electorate. That affects not only employment but also the amount of money that is injected into our community.

The privatisation of the port has created opportunities for redevelopment and the development of new industries. We are very excited about that, and we are looking forward to the employment and investment benefits that will flow from it. The privatisation has brought with it people with relevant skills and experience in port management. The previous management laid a great foundation, which the new management will build on. That will benefit not only the port but the industries around it and will result in an increase in the tonnage the port handles. Although they may seem small on the surface, those changes have benefits that flow on through a community such as ours.

Tourism employs many people in my electorate. Dromana has always been a popular tourist destination but now it is booming. It is reaping the benefits of the government's approach to tourism. We are aggressive marketers of tourism within our domestic area, the state, the country and overseas. Visitor numbers to Dromana have increased dramatically due to the great work being done by local tourism operators together with the tremendous support those operators receive from Tourism Victoria. They are encouraged to pursue what they are good at: to expand their horizons and to open up new tourism opportunities. They have seized upon the opportunity with both hands and have run with it. The employment opportunities and economic flow-on for Dromana are tremendous. It is wonderful to see an all-year-round tourism industry expanding within my electorate.

Recently the state government, in conjunction with the Mornington Peninsula shire and Frankston city councils, undertook a review of public transport in the Dromana area. The councils are following up a number of those findings. A number of much-needed cross-peninsula public transport trials identified in the

study that are soon to be undertaken will open up employment, tourism and further education and training opportunities for people from many areas across the peninsula. By its geological state the word 'peninsula' suggests all transport and trunk routes are directed towards a city — in this case Melbourne. The introduction of cross-peninsula routes is to be trialled. I wish it every success and hope it works.

The public transport study threw up a concern about the provision of taxis. The Minister for Roads and Ports has announced an extensive review of the taxi service in the Dromana area. The review will ascertain the areas of greatest need and decide how best they can be serviced. This lack of services is especially evident in the case of taxis for the disabled. Many frail and elderly people do not have access to cars and many are wheelchair-bound. A total review of the taxi services on the southern peninsula is extremely welcome.

A change in bus contracts has also been effected. Bus companies are now being paid by the number of passengers carried, not by the kilometre. That has been a great fillip for the public transport system as buses provide the only public transport on the southern peninsula. Such an initiative will have a profound effect. Timetables will be more flexible as new bus routes are introduced. The long, low bus is the only one of its kind in the country. When the bus pulls into a bus stop a passenger can step straight from the path or gutter level onto the bus — no steps are required. The doors are also wide enough to take a wheelchair and people can walk into or be wheeled right onto the bus. The service is a boon for the elderly, people with prams or shopping trolleys and those who are not steady on their feet. I pay tribute to the Portsea Passenger Service for this initiative and look forward to many more of these \$350 000 buses hitting the roads.

Another unsung area of the government is its tremendous commitment to libraries. The Mornington Peninsula shire library has received many new grants. Every couple of months I attend the opening of another library initiative — a flow-on from state government funding — especially in technology. All our libraries now have wonderful computer areas; they are accessible to all members of the public and are connected to the Internet. It is wonderful to see the number of bookings. The computer terminals always have somebody in front of them. Often they are people who cannot afford a computer or who do not have access to the technology in their homes or schools. Young children work on the Internet to research material for assignments; older people, for their own interest, are surfing the net or working their way through a computer package. Business people do their

business plans and students write up CVs to help them with future employment. It is wonderful to see such a wide range of users accessing technology. As technology in libraries expands it will provide a further opportunity for people to link into government services and information.

My electorate consists of a large number of elderly citizens and people living alone, which makes safety in the home and on the streets important. Safety issues are often raised with me. As the Governor mentioned in his speech, it is reassuring to know Victoria is the safest state in Australia in which to live. Yesterday I was at the Rosebud police station handing over a cheque for \$4500 — —

Mrs Maddigan interjected.

Mr DIXON — I was not locked up there! The cheque was for yet another tremendous state government initiative — a unique boating program. The local police station, through community efforts, has a boat that off-duty policemen and women use. They take it to various schools and youth groups. Children at risk are identified; they are taken out fishing, skibiscuiting and skiing. This summer some 1500 children have had access to that boat. It was wonderful to hand over a \$4500 cheque to contribute to the running of the boat for another couple of years. Members of the police force were pleased to be able to inform me that the rate in all areas of crime in the Dromana area is dropping. No fatal accidents have been reported. The number of road deaths and accidents is down, so there is a strong feeling of safety in the electorate.

City Link will join up with roads on the southern Mornington Peninsula. The improvement of the South Eastern Freeway and the opening of the City Link project will be a boon in lifestyle, business and tourism for my electorate. Businesses will be able to access markets in Melbourne, the Melbourne Airport and many businesses on the other side of Melbourne, and vice versa. Other transport companies will be able to bring in their goods, and companies will be able to do business on the Mornington Peninsula without taking an hour to move from the western suburbs through Melbourne or the outer suburbs.

Travelling times have already been reduced and will be further reduced. That makes the area even more accessible for tourists. These days tourists do not stay weeks and weeks in one place; they like to visit accessible areas. If people can drive from the city to Rosebud in an hour on the freeway without hitting a traffic light it will attract more individual tourist

operators to the area. It will make life easier for people meeting relatives at the airport or for people who need to drive to the other side of town. They will be able to do so without traffic lights and without all the extra time and delays associated with our old road network. It is a welcome improvement by the people of my electorate.

The Governor said:

The social advance of Victorians will be the central criterion in determining our state's future direction. The government will focus on consolidating Victoria as the kind of place that we are able to look on with pride as providing the ideal home, lifestyle and workplace of the 21st century.

The people of Dromana will look forward to this social advance over the next two years; it will make the area where they have chosen to live and work an even better place. I look forward to the development of the Rosebud foreshore. The Dromana area is an icon of beachside development and recreation of which the state and the country can be proud. However, it is in dire need. The government has instituted a management plan handed down by the minister. The plan identifies the areas that can be developed and the areas that need restoring. The plan will enhance the conservation values of the area and improve public access and enjoyment for locals and tourists. I look forward to further work on the foreshore.

I look forward to the successful completion of the public transport trials and, if the need exists, the adoption of a permanent cross-Peninsula transport corridor.

The schools in my electorate are not in dire need but have suffered from an inherited abandonment and maintenance backlog that is being reduced. It is anticipated that the backlog will be eradicated over the next couple of years, and the school communities and I are looking forward to taking advantage of the improved maintenance that will follow.

An exciting major opportunity in the area of tourism development and conservation is the future of the Norris Barracks, the army barracks at Portsea adjacent to the Mornington Peninsula National Park where large areas of untouched wilderness could be ideally added to the existing park. There is also the magnificent historic precinct of the former army buildings and the quarantine station, both of which have a unique history. It is an ideal tourist precinct, and I look forward to its sensible development.

The local community is very excited about the announcement in the Governor's speech of a \$60 rebate to be provided over the next three winters. The majority

of people in my electorate probably already receive a concessional rebate on their power bills, and in many cases the additional rebate will eradicate their power bills altogether, which is pleasing.

In his speech the Governor went on to say:

The government's approach will lead Victorians as they strive in their own lives and local communities, admittedly at times with great difficulty, to improve their position and the general environs of their lifestyle, and so to balance their own interests with those of an increasingly demanding world. We need therefore to examine what we need to do as a partnership of Victorians to strengthen the freedom and independence we enjoy, create a more vibrant sense of community, and mould a cohesive, caring society. We need to work at ways to ameliorate the uncertainty that some feel in an era of such runaway change. These will be the essential factors that determine the nature and strength of modern Victoria, and make a defining difference in the day to day lives of Victorians.

A highlight of my last two years in government has been meeting the people of Dromana, and I pay tribute to them. As the local member I have been excited by the wonderful people living in the area I represent. Many groups, service organisations and clubs work together to improve the lives of others less fortunate. When attending functions I often meet the same people who belong to other service organisations and sporting clubs. Those people are to be commended on the excellent way they work together.

I also pay tribute to the risk takers, people in tourism and business, who have decided to try something new in the same way the risk takers of 20 years ago decided the Mornington Peninsula would be a good area in which to grow grapes. There are now more than 150 wineries in the electorate, and I am trying to encourage primary industry. It is indicative of the spirit of optimism that is part of my electorate, and I encourage all those working in the community who are prepared to take risks to continue their efforts.

The Governor referred to leadership. I pay tribute to the ministers of this government. During the past two years a procession of cabinet ministers has come to my electorate to meet and speak with the people. Everyone comments about it; they have never seen so many ministers in the electorate. Constituents know they are now on the map and are being listened to and that the government is aware of both the challenges facing the area and its positive points. The people of the electorate and I are thankful for the interest taken.

Victoria has a wonderful government team. Its members come from varied educational, business and ethnic backgrounds and work together very well. As a new member of Parliament the support I have received

from my colleagues has been wonderful and is indicative of the team leading this great state into the year 2000.

Mr THWAITES (Albert Park) — I commence by congratulating Sir James and Lady Gobbo on Sir James's appointment as Governor. He has had a very distinguished career in the law and the community generally. He has contributed hugely to ethnic communities and the planning field and has played an important part in numerous community organisations. I feel sure he will fulfil his role as Governor with the same distinction he brought to his role as a judge and a member of various organisations.

While I congratulate the Governor, I cannot endorse the proroguing of Parliament nor the Governor's speech. It was, of course, written by the government or, judging by the content, the government's opinion pollsters.

The proroguing of Parliament was essentially a public relations exercise, an attempt by the government to portray a fresh start given its disastrous performance in the Mitcham by-election.

The government has claimed that this session is a turning point. In one sense that is correct because the Kennett government must now be judged on its own performance. No longer can it rely on blaming the Labor Party or the past. It has had five years —

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Mr THWAITES — As the minister at the table indicates, it can and no doubt will try. However, the problems of record hospital waiting lists, record ambulance delays and a crisis in the child protection system have been created by the government. It must now wear that and address the problems by doing more than using mere public relations and political advertising.

The response of this government to problems with social services has been to embark on huge political advertising campaigns. That is why this week we saw the Department of Education spend hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' funds trying to fool the public into believing the education system was better than it is. The document was totally misleading. The reason so much money is being spent on public relations is because the government has been unable to fix the problems it has caused in the social field, whether in health, education or community services.

The government has claimed that its agenda for this Parliament will see a marked change in emphasis. The government would have us believe it will adopt a

softer, gentler style and that all government action will be subject to a so-called social advantage test. Despite all the pomp and ceremony of the opening of Parliament, the 21-gun salute, the wigs and the breeches, some things remains the same: it is the same government with the same Premier, the same policies and the same personnel. We will not see any change. We will not see social advance in this state while the Premier and the government are in office, and that has been well documented by the events of the past week.

What was the main social welfare issue exercising the government's attention during the past week? What socially disadvantaged group has sought to be the first beneficiary of the government's so-called social dividend? Who among the underprivileged and the disadvantaged have lined up to be the beneficiaries of the Premier's newly acquired largess?

Not the kids who are dropping out of school in increasing numbers; not the disability advocacy centres which have been closed during the past year despite the fact they are the only voice of people with disabilities; not the victims of sexual assault or other crimes whose right to compensation has been removed; not groups such as Parents Anonymous, the counselling service that is about to lose its funding; and not the hospitals which have lost more than \$300 million in government funding each year under Kennett administration and in many cases their hearts and souls as well!

No, the first people to seek to take advantage of the so-called social dividend are none other than the \$50 million welfare cheats, Lloyd Williams and Ron Walker. They have come cap in hand to the Premier asking for a \$50 million gift.

Those two gentlemen have brought their problems upon themselves. They indulged in massive overspending and have mismanaged the casino. They paid their own company, Hudson Conway, more than \$100 million in management fees. It seems as though the more problems there are at the casino, the more they pay their own company in management fees. They paid \$100 million to their own company despite the fact that the initial prospectus indicated that management fees would be around \$14 million. Having bungled the building of the casino and overcapitalised, they now come cap in hand to Chairman Jeff for a gift of \$50 million in tax concessions and penalty waivers. Just imagine any other company that had overcapitalised and mismanaged itself coming to the government and expecting its payroll tax to be waived! Presumably the basis on which it was put was that if they do not get the \$50 million gift the casino will collapse and jobs will go.

As I said, those people brought their problems upon themselves and are now seeking to cheat the rest of the community and the welfare system out of \$50 million. Members of the government would be happy to pursue any other welfare cheats through the courts. They would not give them a cent and would vilify them. However, because Mr Walker is the treasurer of the federal Liberal Party the group is after the largess of the government.

Of course, the government is in great confusion about this matter, and that is why today we heard an extraordinary statement from the Minister for Gaming — not the Premier who has had carriage of the issue — who said that at this stage the company would not be given the tax concession. However, he would not say anything about whether the \$50 000-a-day penalty would be waived. In other words, the minister has felt the political heat. At the moment it is too hot to give this gift to the casino, but the door has been left open and I assure the house that it will be used by Mr Walker and Mr Williams week after week until they get their concession because that is the course they have successfully adopted to date. They have received everything they have asked for, whether it be an additional 150 gaming tables or changes to the planning arrangements or designs.

The \$50 million welfare cheats have been the sole beneficiaries of social advance under this government while ordinary Victorians have missed out. Ordinary Victorians are pouring millions of dollars into the casino. They fund the profits that end up with Hudson Conway and those two gentlemen.

I am interested in the social advantage test; it is something new and very surprising about the government. The government talks about testing all its actions against outcomes in education, jobs, safe and healthy lifestyles and in building confident and cohesive communities. If that is not just public relations hype I would like to see the test applied to a number of government actions in the portfolios I shadow — that is, health and community services. I would like to see a social advantage test applied to the privatisation of our public hospitals, the about-to-commence tendering of youth and family services and the user-pays fees in the community health centres. The latter policy will mean that in many cases people who cannot afford the fees for such things as physiotherapy or podiatry must miss out.

I would like to see the social advantage test applied to the closure of disability advocacy centres, the only voice disabled Victorians have. I would like to see it applied to the confidentiality clauses that all community

groups are being forced to sign, not for reasons of social advantage or better outcomes, but to prevent a group criticising government.

Finally, I would like to see the test applied to the child protection area of government, which the Auditor-General said has led to systemic abuse. In other words, the government, which is meant to be caring for these children, has in fact been abusing them.

One thing I would like to see which I know I will not see is some transparency — to use a popular phrase — in the application of the social advantage test. I would like to see the government release its decisions on social advantage in respect of every matter I have raised. This government has one of the worst records of secrecy and cover-ups of any Victorian government. All governments are inclined to release less rather than more information, but no government in Victoria's history has the reputation for secrecy this government has earned. No government has gone to the extent of destroying documents and becoming involved in a conspiracy to cover up documents in the way this government and the Minister for Conservation and Land Management have done in the case of Intergraph and the ambulance affair.

Mr Perton — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Albert Park is in conflict with standing orders by casting aspersions of wrongdoing against the Minister for Conservation and Land Management, the former Minister for Health. Although it is certainly true that public allegations have been made against a contractor and a former officer of the service, there has been no sustainable allegation of wrongdoing against the minister or any member of the government. I ask the honourable member to withdraw.

Mr THWAITES — On the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, this is another vexatious attempt by the honourable member for Doncaster to prevent me from speaking. He does this every time I speak. The honourable member claimed no allegations had been made about the cover-up of documents by the then Minister for Health or the chief of her staff, Mr Kerr. That is completely incorrect. Allegations have been made in this place and in proceedings before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Cunningham) — Order! I have heard enough on the point of order. The honourable member for Albert Park has made a passing reference to this matter but I caution him to take care that he does not breach standing order 108 and impugn honourable members.

Mr THWAITES — Before I was interrupted I was referring to the social advantage test and to child protection. Currently an inquest is inquiring into the death of Katy Bolger. Media reports have highlighted the tragic problems in the child protection system. In particular the fragmentation, lack of resources and a huge turnover of child protection staff have led to numerous problems, including situations arising in which young children have died unnecessarily because the system is not performing properly.

Instead of trying to fix the problem, all we get from the government is public relations glitz and the response that there is no problem. More children like Katy Bolger will die unless there is a change in attitude.

The Department of Human Services has charged a child who was supposed to be in its care with a criminal offence on the basis that the child was uncontrollable. Children with problems like attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity should be supported by the department, not charged with criminal offences. That is the type of response we get from the department and it is the reason that the child protection system is in crisis rather than providing the social advance which a Labor government would support.

The cases I have referred to already where I would like to see the social advantage test applied are numerous and include the privatisation of the health service, the closing down of hospitals and the tendering out of youth and family services. It is important to look at the effect government policies have on people.

I now refer to a letter the opposition received from a Mrs Marsh, a pensioner living in Altona, who wrote soon after the announcement by the Premier that he had awarded himself a generous retirement package. Mrs Marsh says that she has home care once a fortnight for two hours, but that the charge has just gone up to \$4 per week. She does not get Meals on Wheels, but the charge for that has also gone up and she feels sorry for people who need it. Mrs Marsh goes to physiotherapy once a month at the local community health centre, for which there is now a charge of \$6.50 per session. Pharmaceutical charges have gone up and she now has to pay extra for her blood pressure medication. Her doctor advised her not to change to a cheaper brand. Mrs Marsh has to buy cream for dermatitis, which is expensive. There is a new charge for rubbish collection and they have to pay 3 cents in the \$1 extra in rates to cover the superannuation black hole that Mr Kennett caused.

Mrs Marsh says that Mr Kennett has arranged generous retirement benefits for himself but pensions are not being increased. In Mrs Marsh's words, Mr Kennett:

... is just squashing pensioners all the time.

That is the real social test that ought to be applied: how do government policies affect people like Mrs Marsh? How do government policies which include the introduction of a user-pays fee for community health centres and increased fees for home and community care affect pensioners and older people like Mrs Marsh? They are the questions that should be asked of and answered by the government rather than it simply responding to the requests of its mates at the casino.

The Labor Party has a different set of values. It believes government has a social role and that it is wrong to equate government with a company, which is how those opposite believe governments should operate. The Kennett government believes that every government service should be turned into a business and all the citizens of the state ought to be treated like customers. Its attitude is that if the market system does not work for them, bad luck.

The Labor Party believes government has a purpose, that is, to deliver goods and services. The Labor Party believes in values that honourable members opposite have no understanding of: integrity, quality of service and a fair go for all citizens. The Labor Party believes government is concerned about more than major events. It is committed to providing a decent health system so that people can get a hospital bed when they need one or an ambulance when an emergency occurs; so that kids can get an education and are not tossed out or forced into classes of more than 30 children. The Labor Party believes there is a role for government and that is why when it returns to government it will provide decent government services rather than treat people like consumers in a market place.

The government is claiming it has a new social attitude, but unfortunately this government is incapable of changing. We have heard this all before. In fact, one year ago on the fourth anniversary of the Kennett government, the Premier made the same comment. He said he was going to make social advances; that he was turning his attention to the health and education systems. Of course, nothing changed. Nothing will be different now. Essentially this government is incapable of change. It has the wrong values and does not believe in government. If you asked members of the government what they think governments should do, there would be silence — because they do not know.

Members opposite believe government should get out of the way of business; that it should have as small a role as possible. That is why government services are now so poor. This government has no concept of or belief in the provision of decent services. This government is more interested in public relations exercises and in spending money on advertising leaflets or television advertisements than in delivering good health or education services.

The government will not change because it does not want to change. It is arrogant and does not listen to people. It does not learn from its mistakes and therefore it is destined to repeat them. There is no better indication of that than what has occurred with the privatisation of health facilities. I would have thought that given the record of the government in privatising health facilities to date it would be cautious before proceeding with its agenda this year to privatise hospitals and other health facilities.

One has only to look at the privatisation of the ambulance service to see what a disaster it has been. To date most of the attention has been directed at the Intergraph contract, but that was only one of about five or six major ambulance service outsourcing contracts that went horribly wrong.

The first was the privatisation of non-emergency ambulance transport. It turned out that the person responsible for handing out the contracts allowing the privatisation of the non-emergency ambulance fleet had a pecuniary interest in the largest private ambulance company in the state.

The second was the outsourcing of ambulance maintenance. This did not save money; it cost many hundreds of thousands of dollars more.

The tendering process itself was privatised. It was bungled by Henderson Consultants, which company was severely criticised by the Attorney-General.

The infamous contract given to Griffith Consulting, which was originally for \$45 000 but which blew out to \$1.4 million, is now being investigated by the police and may be the subject of criminal action.

The history of the government's privatisation of health is a bad one. Why is it that the government is going down the same track by privatising public hospitals such as the Austin and those at Knox, Berwick, Colac and Mildura? I have no doubt the same problems will arise, such as lack of service, budget blow-outs, cronyism and corruption. The corruption and cronyism that infected the ambulance service has reached into the Department of Health and the minister's office. The

former Minister for Health and her staff are now implicated in the ambulance contract scandal. They did everything they could to cover up the truth about those contracts and hide it from the public.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Cunningham) — Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is in danger of breaching standing order 108.

Mr THWAITES — Both sides of the house are engaging in a broad debate. When government members have criticised members on this side of the house, the Speaker, the Deputy Speaker and the Acting Speakers have not sought to intervene. I hope the same rules will now apply when the opposition is criticised.

The climate of corruption and cronyism that was evident in the ambulance service is now touching the minister's office and —

Mr Honeywood — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member is directly flouting the ruling you have just given. He said corruption is now touching the minister's office. If that is not an implication under standing order 108 about the minister's involvement, I do not know what is.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Cunningham) — Order! I will not uphold the point of order, but I ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to take care.

Mr THWAITES — I shall take care. Standing order 108 relates to members of this house. The minister's chief of staff, Mr John Kerr, deliberately covered up the existence of documents, and he has acted in a manner that means he could be subject to criminal charges. The government does not like information such as that coming out, which is why government members are attempting to gag me and prevent the release under freedom of information of documents that relate to these matters. Eventually the truth will out and those who are responsible will be held accountable.

Despite the government's talk of social advances, we see no action. If there is to be any action, we want to see it this year. We do not want the government to wait until shortly before the next election to claim once again that it will remedy the crises it has caused in education and health. There must be a fundamental shift in policy so that resources are put back into our hospitals and our ambulance service and the folly of privatisation, which has led to lower standards of service and higher costs for taxpayers, comes to an end.

Mr JENKINS (Ballarat West) — I congratulate the Governor, Sir James Gobbo, on his appointment. I am

sure he and his wife will serve the community well. Sir James is well respected by people on all sides of politics throughout the state, and I am sure he will carry out his duties in a manner that is satisfactory to the community. I also congratulate the former Governor and Mrs McGarvie on serving Victoria well, and I wish them all the best in the future.

The Governor's speech refers to the government's future policy directions. That is pleasant news. The pain we have experienced over the past five years should rapidly start to disappear, and over the next few years we will begin to see the benefits of the further development of the state.

The contents of the Governor's speech are mirrored in my electorate. Over the past five years Victoria has been rebuilt. When I was campaigning for the 1992 election, Victoria had a huge debt of \$30.6 billion. To a lot of people that is only a figure, but it was a huge amount of money. In 1998 the debt has fallen to \$11.3 billion, which has helped Victoria's credit rating. Victoria is now respected in financial markets both here and overseas, and I hope it regains its AAA credit rating in the near future.

The creation of jobs has been one of the government's achievements over the past five years. Many changes have taken place in our schools, and great progress has been made in education in general. Schools of the Future is an excellent program. Schools throughout the state are now being properly maintained after the neglect of the Cain-Kirner years, which left a huge maintenance black hole.

Health is another area that has received much attention. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition made some outlandish claims. I am not certain that he knows what is taking place, because new hospitals have been built throughout the state. Hospitals now have modern equipment, and improvements are being made to the local hospital network. I have two great hospitals in my electorate, the Ballarat Base Hospital and St John of God's Hospital. Aged care has improved, as has palliative care for those in their senior years.

I now refer to the Turning the Tide program and the drug problem. An article in today's *Ballarat Courier* reports on the heroin problem. It says that local ambulance officers are being trained in the use of modern treatments for heroin overdoses. The Turning the Tide program is a great boost for people with drug problems.

I now turn to information technology. Under the direction of the Treasurer, who is also the Minister for

Multimedia, great strides have been made in information technology throughout the state, especially in Ballarat.

I was pleased to see our road toll drop dramatically last year. We all remember 'Declare war on 1034', the road safety campaign run by the former *Herald* newspaper following the death of 1034 people on Victorian's roads in 1970. When we picked up our newspapers in those days we often read that 10 or 15 people had been killed on the roads that week. The great efforts made by the community and the police have resulted in a huge drop in the number of people killed on our roads. We can only hope the road toll will continue to fall each year.

There have also been significant improvements in the approach to law and order. As was stated earlier today, the crime rate is down throughout the state. The government recently introduced a \$1.2 billion water reform program, which will revitalise many regional and rural areas. Some \$50 million of that is being spent in the Ballarat area.

As the Governor's speech shows, the government has a great record of achievement over the past five years. It has shown strong leadership, it has clear policy directions, and it offers hope for the future.

I will talk later about the opposition, including its current actions and what I see it doing in the future. It has no record of achievement, no leadership and no direction, and it offers no hope for the future.

I now turn to the City of Ballarat and its environs. Ballarat is known as the heart of the Garden State, and we are proud of that reputation.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr JENKINS — It is the heart of the Garden State. Just come to the beautiful Begonia Festival! An article about Ballarat in the *Herald Sun* of 10 November 1991, under the heading 'One in five are idle in nation's dole', sadly refers to an article published in the *Ballarat Courier* and states in part:

Music teacher Simon Pedder was one of 80 teachers who qualified at Ballarat University College on Friday, only to learn that their job chances were nil.

The same day the local paper revealed that Ballarat unemployment was up to 22.6 per cent, making Australia's biggest inland city the unemployment capital of Australia.

I am pleased to report that since the Kennett government came to power in 1992 unemployment has dropped from 22.6 per cent to 8.5 per cent, which is a huge drop, and is continuing to fall. The local

community has made a massive effort to ensure all its citizens have jobs, especially the young people. People who are out of work are responding to the employment programs that have been established. Many of those programs have an 80 per cent success rate in getting people into jobs, which is encouraging to see.

Just recently another industry began employing handicapped people. It is fantastic to see young people with afflictions happily working packing Mars bars and flour products from the local flour mills. They are doing well in their new environments. No longer is Ballarat the unemployment capital of Victoria or Australia. Instead, Ballarat is firing on all cylinders.

A number of new factories are being built. The Japanese company Hakubaku is building a new noodle factory, which the Premier will open during March. I congratulate the managers and directors of Hakubaku on selecting Ballarat. The noodle factory will be the most modern of its type in the world, with special equipment to produce noodles more efficiently than in the past. We look forward to its opening: it will be a proud day.

Last year I had the opportunity to visit the company's headquarters in Japan. I discovered the managers were watching closely to see how the plant was being put together and so forth. From recent discussions I understand things are going very well. There was one blip when an over-enthusiastic union official decided to throw his weight around, but I thank the local Trades Hall Council secretary, Graham Shearer, for intervening to ensure the smooth introduction to Ballarat of the Hakubaku food company.

Another company I will pat on the back is Rivers Shoes. Last week we saw the humorous reaction of members of the opposition to a question on the textile, clothing and footwear industry asked by the honourable member for Prahran. Rivers works from a well-established factory in Sebastopol, a suburb I know well. It has moved forward with the times and has recently taken over the former Paddle company. Honourable members will recall the company's ads on television.

As I said, Rivers has a factory and office in Sebastopol, and it has another office in Albury. It is selling shoes by the bus load. People travel to the factory outlet to purchase modern, up-to-date footwear and clothing. I give Rivers a great big pat on the back for what it has done for employment in the region. It is continuing to expand throughout Victoria and Australia. I have also heard from my colleague that the company is about to expand into his electorate.

The Minister for Roads and Ports in another place recently announced the establishment in Ballarat of the Vicroads call centre, which will create 15 jobs. The special 40-plus program has been designed to create jobs for people over 40. Just recently I had pleasure in launching the Ballarat program at Peter Amor Motors, where Peter employed a senior gentleman of 63 years of age. Peter has found him to be a dedicated employee who is performing his tasks well. I congratulate Mr Amor on showing what can be done for our unemployed who are over 40.

I now refer to building permits. Under the heading 'Local builders going strong', the *Ballarat Courier* recently published an article saying that the building industry is generating a fair bit of work. The article says:

Figures released by the City of Ballarat yesterday show Ballarat's builders were going 'hammer and tongs' last year ... the council's strategic planning department issued 347 building applications for new single dwellings in 1997, a 28 per cent increase on 1996.

The areas where much of the building has taken place are in my electorate:

Alfredton remained the most popular urban area for detached homes;

Sebastopol had sustained growth;

Delacombe, Mount Helen and Wendouree continued to have moderate growth; and

The outer urban development of Invermay Park and Buninyong were also popular areas for building ...

Sebastopol in particular has seen a lot of development in this area, with older residents taking up the townhouse option offered on the Rosebank Estate.

I do not mind saying that we have gone through some difficult times in Ballarat. However, at last we are on the move and Ballarat is going places. Retailing and tourism are doing well, and more jobs are available for job seekers. Sovereign Hill and many of the other tourist activities are expanding all the time.

Many activities are taking place in the local schools. It is great that millions of dollars have been spent on the upgrading and maintenance of schools in Ballarat East and Ballarat West. In 1992 the principal of one of the schools that is special to me was seeking funds to enable him to place putty around the school's window frames. Children were at risk of being hurt because there was no putty in the frames and the glass was falling out.

I was stunned at the lack of maintenance. Funds were arranged. The school facade has since been restored and

now shines. Certainly no glass is falling out of the windows. The global budget system works very well. School principals and councils are very pleased with that new operation, as are the parents and students. The system is working well and school communities can manage their own schools in their own way.

The education union has been active in Ballarat, especially today — it is running rolling strikes throughout Victoria, and today is Ballarat's day. On the official count 36 per cent of teachers in the region decided to go out on strike today. This morning teachers held a protest at the electoral office of my colleague the honourable member for Ballarat East. Although 36 per cent of teachers in Ballarat were out on strike only 25 people turned up at the protest. The rest must have wagged school for the day. It was a lovely, sunny day in Ballarat. I could not believe that although they wagged school they did not go to the protest to make noise. I am sure the parents of the students who attend those schools will be disappointed that the teachers wagged school yet they did not attend the protest and parade in front of Mr Traynor's office.

Last Thursday the shadow minister for education and training made some dramatic claims about class sizes. He said:

Redan Primary School has classes of up to 35 students, and Ballarat North ... classes of more than 30 students.

I rang the principals of two schools in my electorate to get the story. I asked the principal of Ballarat North Primary School whether he was aware that his school was mentioned in Parliament the previous night. He said no. I told him it concerned class sizes and described the claim of the shadow minister. The principal said, 'Well, that is interesting, isn't it?', and took the trouble to fax me figures on the numbers of students in particular classes: prep class, 25; prep-1 class, 24; 1-2 class, 26; in another 1-2 class, 24; 2-3 class, 24; 3-4 class, 24; in another 3-4 class, 23; 5-6 class, 30; and in another 5-6 class, 32. The shadow minister was not far wrong. However, the crunch line is that the teacher in each 5-6 class is provided with additional support — there is more than one teacher in the class at a time. When we challenged the shadow minister to provide facts, he was again found to be putting up a furphy.

Redan Primary School, no. 1289, is a great school because it educated me. A recent big story about contamination at the school was a flop — it concerned a wee corner of the garden. Redan has one class with an average number of students of between 11 and 20, three classes have between 21 and 25 students, and four classes have between 26 and 30 students. Redan has no

classes with more than 30 students. The claim of the shadow minister was another furphy.

I took the trouble to ring Black Hill Primary School. I thought I should check with the school because it is pretty switched on and at times is a bit vocal about union activity, which is fair enough. The school has seven classes that have between 21 and 25 students and eight classes that have 26 to 30 students. There are no classes with more than 30 students. Claims made in Parliament on educational matters such as class sizes are often incorrect. I am only too pleased to inform the house that all schools in my electorate are very well run. The principals and councils of those schools are acting in a responsible way and providing children with good educations.

I turn to health and psychiatric services. Ballarat has a large number of psychiatric patients and the figures for expenditure on psychiatric services are of interest. At the local base hospital a magnificent and up-to-date complex for psychiatric services has recently replaced the former Lakeside Hospital for very seriously ill patients at a cost of \$5 million. It is a great improvement for both patients and staff, and the Lakeside complex has been decommissioned.

I turn to aged care. I mentioned earlier that Ballarat has a large aged population and a great complex for the aged known as the Queen Elizabeth Centre. Demands for facilities to care for the elderly are increasing. In response the centre has expanded its activities away from Ascot Street to satellite complexes around the Ballarat area and a major redevelopment is taking place on the Ascot Street site. Last Sunday I attended the formal removal of the first brick as part of the demolition of the old Queen Elizabeth building. The 60-year-old buildings will be demolished over some time and a modern, state-of-the-art complex will be built on that site at a cost of \$30 million.

The Queen Elizabeth Centre is well known for its training program. People are coming from overseas, especially Japan, to attend training programs and learn how to look after elderly people. I congratulate the centre and support what it is doing. The amalgamation of the base hospital and the Queen Elizabeth Centre has resulted in a great health service in Ballarat. It is working well and expanding rapidly.

I refer also to the Ballarat health services combined senior citizens centre, Cooinda, which was opened recently in Learmonth Road in my electorate. The Wendouree Senior Citizens Club contributed \$100 000 of its hard-earned money towards that magnificent new centre. If honourable members wish to see a great

centre in action they should visit Cooinda. I briefly mention the public transport upgrade of the Ballarat railway station, which was first opened in 1862.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mr JENKINS — The former parcels office — I am sure the honourable member for Morwell has been there — had an old tin counter. That dilapidated little office, which was stuck up in the corner at the top of a rough wooden staircase, was the home of the parcel service for more than a century. You will be pleased to know, Mr Acting Speaker, that the building has been stripped out and restored to its former glory. It is now the main reception and ticketing area for passengers at the Ballarat railway station.

The way the service has been presented is a credit to the minister, the PTC and the community. We are now waiting for an all-weather canopy for the buses. We have a bit of a problem with Ballarat weather in the winter. A large canopy will cover the buses so that passengers who travel from all parts of Victoria through the gateway of Ballarat will do so under cover. They will be able to have refreshments — a cup of coffee, a meal or whatever they want — in that magnificent new centre before catching trains to Melbourne or wherever else they are going. It is a great advance, and I am sure anyone travelling by train to Ballarat will enjoy the trip and the facilities when they arrive.

Mr Hamilton — Did they fix up the footbridge?

Mr JENKINS — Yes, the footbridge is going well. The Melton bridge is going well now, too. I briefly mention the \$30 million police station under construction at the corner of Dana and Albert streets. The pile-drivers are driving through the mud into the silt and the old mining shaft. They are moving to get the new police station up at last.

Mr Hamilton — Whereabouts?

Mr JENKINS — It is at the corner of Dana and Albert streets, at the bottom of the Dana Street hill. I mention public housing because the government has had a fair bit of stick from the honourable member for Altona, who seems to think she knows all about public housing in Ballarat. She spoke about houses being sold off and not being replaced. I am pleased to report to the house that yesterday morning I launched a \$2.4 million expansion of public housing in the Wendouree West area of Ballarat, a housing commission area developed in the 1950s which is extremely run down and in need of considerable attention. The area was abandoned by the previous Labor government. It rarely painted the

houses let alone maintained them. The magnificent new complex, which will provide 14 two-bedroom units for families and 17 one-bedroom and 3 two-bedroom units for the elderly. That will be a real boost to the suburb. It will provide much more comfort for users of public housing. I thank the Minister for Housing for her generosity.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr JENKINS — There's a lot more happening up there than that! In conclusion I refer briefly to the preselection of candidates. The Labor Party has been swamped with candidates from Ballarat. Two candidates are going for the seat of Ballarat West, and both have stood against me. The one for Ballarat East is a classic. It was mentioned on the television news the other night. I refer to the WIN TV transcript of a news item of 13 February. The newsreader stated:

The worst-kept secret in Ballarat Labor Party circles was finally confirmed today: Cr Geoff Howard nominating for preselection for the marginal seat of Ballarat East. Cr Howard is virtually assured of preselection and favoured by political experts to win the seat.

I have news for him!

But in a ... confusing twist ... if Howard is voted mayor at the upcoming election, he'll dump his political aspirations for the ALP in favour of mayoral robes.

The reporter then said:

Geoff Howard was today again hedging his bets, standing for ALP preselection, but also leaving open the prospect of running for the mayoral position, indicating should a councillor with conservative views consider the job, he would stand against them.

Talk about a two-bob-each-way bet! I could not believe it. It just shows how scared he is to stand against our member for Ballarat East, who I can assure honourable members will be back in that seat next time. Mr Howard may get on the council if he is lucky.

In conclusion, the Kennett government is moving forward, Ballarat is moving forward and my electorate is moving forward. My aim is to continue to serve my electorate well into the future.

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I echo the comments of my colleagues about the fine job being done by Sir James and Lady Gobbo following on from the fine work of Mr and Mrs McGarvie. A number of members have spoken about the work Sir James has done with ethnic communities in Victoria. His fine contributions to the arts community should also be mentioned. He has demonstrated enthusiasm and made a valuable contribution in a wide range of the arts.

Having him as governor will strengthen the arts in Victoria.

I refer to the Premier's comment about the social-advantage test. It is appropriate that I should speak shortly after the shadow Minister for Health. I refer to the considerable concern of Essendon residents about the government's decision last week to wash its hands of public health services with the closure of the Essendon Hospital. Residents are angry and distressed that the North Western Health Network has done a Pontius Pilate on Essendon Hospital. With the support of the Minister for Health, the network said, 'We are withdrawing from Essendon. We will see if the government wants to provide any further health services for Essendon'. Because it is a subject on which the residents of Essendon and surrounding districts have very deep and sincere feelings anyone who knows anything about the Essendon community will realise that that will not raise the stocks of the Liberal Party. To understand how important this issue is to the residents of Essendon it is necessary to appreciate a little of the hospital's history and the contribution towards its establishment and continuation by a whole range of community organisations.

The move for a public hospital in Essendon started last century. However, it was only during the 1916 influenza epidemic when the Essendon High School was converted into a hospital to meet the huge demand that Essendon residents started to campaign for public health services. After the Second World War the then mayor of Essendon, Cr Tait, chaired a meeting, the minutes of which, although sad, reveal the commitment of residents to their area. Cr Tait and his wife opened the meeting in February 1945, but left shortly afterwards. It was left to the town clerk to inform the many residents who attended the public meeting that the mayor and his wife had left because they had found out only that morning that their son had been reported missing while flying on a wartime operation. Because the Second World War had only just ended the Essendon Hospital was established in memory of those who fought and died. The commitment of the large community and the distress caused by the Second World War provided the impetus for the public campaign for funds to build the hospital. A leaflet advertising a fete in Queen's Park in February 1952 to raise funds for the hospital expresses how strongly the residents of Essendon felt about their hospital:

There could be no finer memorial for our gallant fallen. Essendon could offer no finer tribute to her dead, and the dead of the nation, than a hospital. This district hospital, a memorial commemorating the heroism and self-sacrifice of the fallen, will be no idle stone pile but a living, vital, house of mercy.

How sad those words are when one considers the government's decision not to continue supporting public hospital services for Essendon residents. The campaign for the establishment of the hospital was long and the first ward was a maternity ward which opened in 1964. It is sad for the residents in the area I represent and others in the north-western suburbs that one of the first acts of the Kennett government, in which Essendon was represented by a Liberal member, was to close that unit in April 1993. It is a great shame that the government that had just won the seat took so little notice of the strong concerns of residents for this facility.

I frequently meet people who tell me that their children or their grandchildren were born there. I have never heard anyone make a comment about the activities of those who work in the maternity ward suggesting that the ward was not of the highest order. It had the highest live birth rate of any hospital in Victoria, so one might question the logic of any government that would close it. It obviously had nothing to do with the performance of Essendon hospital but perhaps was related to some of the cost-saving measures which have wrecked the health services in Victoria and about which we have all heard a lot over the past few years.

Following the establishment of the maternity section of the hospital in 1964 the general hospital began operating. Rupert Hamer turned the first sod for the hospital in the 1970s and after that a number of further services were offered at the hospital.

On a number of occasions during the time of the Labor government it was suggested that perhaps the hospital should be reviewed but the then Labor government refused to close the hospital and gave the commitment that the hospital would be kept open for the residents of Essendon and the north-western suburbs. Indeed, when the Labor government was in power members of the Liberal Party in this place spoke at length about the benefits of Essendon hospital and why it should be kept open — a view they forgot very quickly once they were elected to office in 1992.

In December 1995 people at the western network, as it was then, said they would look at closing the hospital in three or four years with the development of Sunshine, Broadmeadows and Werribee. Their reason was that it was not a community hospital at all because only 18 per cent of beds were occupied by people who lived in the area. One reason given for that was that the government did not fund any more beds and therefore the range of services available at Essendon Hospital was limited. It was nonsense to suggest that was a reasonable approach to the rationalisation of hospitals. Another reason given

to residents in the area was that it was necessary to have health services in further developing areas like Sunshine, Broadmeadows and Werribee. The residents of Essendon totally support that aim. The government said it was necessary to close this hospital because health services should be close to the people who need to use them. Once again, we all agree with that. If it is logical to say that we must have hospitals in the outlying areas so that the services are accessible to residents, I would have thought the logical conclusion was that Essendon residents would also deserve access to services in their local area. The government has never been able to provide a satisfactory explanation to the many residents of Essendon for closing their hospital.

The honourable member for Mitcham asks, by interjection, who was the minister. The former Minister for Health is sitting in this house at the moment but luckily for her she does not have to respond to health matters any more!

The government has never given any reasonable or rational explanation of why the hospital should be closed. Despite many recommendations being made to it, government members play the game of saying it is not their responsibility but that of the people at the network. They say that the government has put this in place and will take the advice of the network. When the future of Essendon is discussed with people at the network they advance the convenient argument that it is not their responsibility; it is a political decision and they should not be blamed for it. This leaves the residents of Essendon in a very awkward position.

Immediately following the government's stated intention that it may close the hospital in three or four years a committee was formed called the Essendon Hospital Futures Committee. It was set up following a very large public meeting in the Moonee Ponds Town Hall which was chaired by a former local government commissioner. The committee comprises members of both political parties and many community groups, including the RSL which is particularly concerned about health access for its members. That group thought it was working with the health group network to find some reasonable outcome for public health services in Essendon.

In the past two years, a number of meetings have been held with the networks, including a recent meeting with the newly formed north-western network and its chief executive officer. We have been led to believe that the government and the network were interested in retaining public health services in Essendon. We were led to believe also that they were looking at

accommodation where some of the site, perhaps the old maternity section, would be used for day-care patients.

One can imagine the reaction when, about two weeks after the meeting with the chief executive officer of the north-western network, out of the blue we were told that the staff at Essendon hospital were being briefed and told that after November they will no longer have jobs. People at the health network are not prepared to tell us the reason for this. It happened in the week when the Premier was telling us that the government is now warm and cuddly and will be looking after the health and education interests of the people of Victoria. The residents of Essendon and the north-western area would be well within their rights to think that the words of the government are totally empty and dishonest. If the government is sincere about putting more money into the health network here is an excellent opportunity for it to provide public health services for the residents I represent. The proposal shows a total lack of understanding of the sorts of health services that Essendon hospital provides.

I was somewhat surprised to hear the Minister for Health in another place tell a deputation that Essendon is an old hospital — it has been there for 20 years — and it would be much better for the residents of Essendon to go to Sunshine or Broadmeadows because their technology is more recent. That is true, but most of the patients who attend Essendon hospital do not require the most recent technology; they require an accessible health service that meets their needs, many of which are maintenance needs. Each year Essendon has 14 000 day hospital visits — which is a lot for any hospital — and those people will shortly lose that facility.

The people at the health network have told us that they are closing Essendon hospital because they are losing \$250 000 per year. I do not know how a hospital loses money. I was not aware that hospitals were business enterprises. I thought they were state-run institutions that look after the public health and health of the residents of Victoria. I cannot understand how they can be losing money — unless they have appalling financial practices. What they mean is that a hospital costs a lot of money to run per patient and that is so at Essendon because the government will not allow patients to go there. It is hardly the fault of the residents of Essendon or the people of Victoria if the state government refuses to provide enough money to run the hospital properly.

The people who will be disadvantaged by this decision are, of course, those with the least political clout in Victoria and those who have the least number of friends among those of the Premier. I am referring to the

elderly and infirm. Many of the visits at Essendon hospital are by people from the Essendon, Brunswick and Coburg areas or people who can easily use the Broadmeadows railway line or the Sunbury bus line. They frequently go to Moonee Ponds for doctors' appointments and other medical treatment and they find Essendon hospital easily accessible. They are very concerned that they will be asked to go to Sunshine or Werribee on a regular basis.

Essendon hospital has a renal dialysis unit. Everyone knows that people who require dialysis treatment have to attend for three hours a day, three times a week. Is it reasonable to suggest that infirm people should have to go to Sunshine three times a week for such treatment? Do members of this government believe that is a good health service for residents? If so, I can only assume they have never suffered from any serious illness that necessitates making frequent visits to hospital.

Some of the other services available at Essendon are rehabilitation treatment, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and speech therapy. Once again, they are ongoing maintenance requirements in the health network. People who need such treatment do not need access to sophisticated equipment; they need a service they can get to with the necessary staff to assist them.

Another important facility of Essendon hospital is the hydrotherapy pool because there are not many hydrotherapy pools in Victorian hospitals. They are used extensively not only for rehabilitation but also by many people who suffer from arthritis. The health network for the north-west happily tells us that patients in new hospitals will receive treatment as good as they get at Essendon now, but it refuses to give a guarantee that it will provide another hydrotherapy pool. There are no plans for hydrotherapy pools in the new hospitals. How can the government justify its claim when it will not provide the same sort of support as arthritis sufferers get now?

The breast screening system at Essendon sees 24 000 women per annum free of charge. Essendon hospital is the only hospital in the state where women can have a breast screening, have tissue sampled and be operated on on the same day at the same location, yet it is to be abolished. The government has no concern at all for public health and I am not sure what it thinks its health policy is all about.

It is the same situation with education. The government is proud of running the most efficient education service in Australia because it spends less on education than other states. That is nonsense. It is not efficient and simply means not enough is spent on education

services. To boast about spending \$10 per head less on every pupil than is spent in New South Wales is meaningless. It means that students in New South Wales are getting a \$10 per day better education.

The main factor the government should be aware of in relation to Essendon hospital is that many people in my electorate who are Liberal Party members are distressed about the move and have written to the minister. The government does not understand the importance of the hospital in the community or the sense of community that is created by smaller hospitals.

The government's desire to run the cheapest services possible to provide the cheapest level of government has resulted in the amalgamation of councils and many other changes that have left people feeling disenfranchised in their communities. People were comfortable in the shire offices they knew. They had understandings with their local banks and schools.

Amalgamations of hospitals in communities such as Essendon and in rural areas result in a loss of community feeling and the loss of the networks of support and concern people have for each other — important elements in sustaining strong networks in supportive communities. There is a cost associated with providing good health services for residents. There should be no embarrassment in allowing the community to understand that if it wants good health services, it has to pay for it.

People all over the state would be pleased to see the government spending more on health and education and considerably less on the many illustrated pamphlets from the Premier that appear in their letterboxes, and which they consider a total waste of money. In question time today we heard of more useless information being provided to students who are starting school, yet the government has sacked 8000 teachers. To suggest that the government is producing a better health system and providing better education because it is providing them cheaper is absolute nonsense. The real concern is not what the government is doing in the short term but what effects it is creating in the long term for families and future governments.

The issue of accessibility of hospital services is crucial. Some elderly residents in my electorate will not go to Sunshine and Werribee for maintenance services that are essential if they are to stay in their homes and live as normal a lifestyle as possible. It will all become too much for them, they will neglect some of their maintenance visits, their health will deteriorate and in the long run it will cost the community more. It will cost the people involved more because they will lose

the ability to function in the community and lose their place in the Victorian social structure.

Essendon hospital has provided the sort of service residents feel comfortable with. They have been able to go to that smaller hospital knowing they will not have to sit there all day waiting for attention, will recognise the staff they are dealing with and will know the staff have real concerns for their future health.

Last year I spent a lot of time at Essendon hospital visiting a close relation. The high regard in which the hospital is held by both patients and staff was overwhelming, and the great sense of loss among Essendon residents at its going will remain for a long time. The Minister for Health in another place must decide whether he is prepared to provide public health services in Essendon. There is still an opportunity to continue those sorts of services, even if the full hospital services envisaged by the fundraisers in the 1940s cannot continue.

The retention of some accessible public health service would be received by the community as a measure of concern and compassion by the government for its plight. It will be a sad reflection on the government's concern for the community if it refuses to consider the health concerns of the residents. It will show that the Premier's comments on Tuesday were nothing but empty rhetoric. As a result of some of the polling done in the Mitcham electorate, I know that health was one of the many issues discussed at length. Opinion polling done by both parties showed that it is a real concern, and Essendon hospital is an opportunity for the government to put its money where its mouth is.

I turn to education, and secondary schools in the Essendon electorate in particular. It is of concern that because of the rationalisation of schools Victoria is facing a critical situation on access to secondary schools in the Essendon area. In my electorate, Strathmore Secondary College has an extremely long waiting list, Essendon-Keilor College has classes of 28 — significantly more than the honourable member for Ballarat East could find in the lower grades of primary schools — and Buckley Park is just across the border.

The location of the junior campuses of Essendon-Keilor College in Niddrie and East Keilor makes it very difficult for students, particularly in the Moonee Valley and Ascot Vale areas, to find secondary schools that are easily accessible to them and has led to extensive waiting lists at Strathmore and Buckley Park.

It is of major concern that as a result of a number of students not getting into Strathmore Secondary College this year and a parent referring a case to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman has held that sibling rights no longer exist and that the first criteria for selection is locality. In some families that will cause a great deal of financial hardship. Families can encounter great hardship trying to meet their children at various schools and organising functions. It is even more difficult for families with children spread throughout primary and secondary schools.

If one child is already in secondary college and a next child is to follow shortly, having the opportunity to go to the same school would make the child part of that school's network. The Ombudsman's decision means there is no guarantee that children from the same family can attend the same school. Huge savings in uniforms and books are achieved when children of different ages and the same sex attend the same school. School outfitting costs and voluntary fees are significant expenses. Overcrowding has forced the Ombudsman to make a decision that will in the future cause a great deal of hardship for residents in my electorate.

I turn to deal with what I will call compulsory voluntary fees. In the *Age* during January the Minister for Education was quoted as saying that people cannot be forced to pay fees as part of their voluntary contributions. Only yesterday I received a representation from a constituent who wished to attend the Victorian School of Languages, which is a Department of Education School of the Future. He has complained to the Department of Education but it has refused to take any action.

Part of the enrolment form for the school includes a Commonwealth Bank pay-in section for \$40. The form informs parents that they have to complete all these procedures before children can enrol. Parents who are aware of the voluntary nature of fees might omit the little form at the bottom, but the school of languages deals mainly with parents whose first language is not English. If my knowledge of English were limited and I received such a form I would assume that I had to pay that \$40.

Most of those parents are already paying voluntary fees for their normal weekday schools, and to suggest they should fork out another \$40 in this way means that children will miss out.

We pride ourselves on being a multicultural society and encouraging people from other countries to retain their cultures, but the government refuses to ensure that students from ethnic backgrounds have the opportunity

to retain their language skills; it does so by refusing to make it clear that 'voluntary' fees are not in fact compulsory.

I would like the Minister for Education to investigate that matter further to ensure that all students have access to whatever subjects are appropriate for their learning. That is one area where there is a great deal of unfairness.

The other area of particular interest to my school is that of special education. The most discriminatory legislation ever to be passed in this house was passed last year, and I am glad to say that the Labor Party opposed it. The legislation prevents disabled students from continuing at school past the age of 18 years unless they enrol for VCE. That is outrageous discrimination and I am surprised that members of the government passed the legislation without any apparent qualms. To suggest that because a person is disadvantaged he or she cannot remain at school for as long as any other student seems to me extraordinary.

I might add that because of legal action they took prior to this legislation, the students at Berendale special school can still attend school. Not only is there discrimination between special schools and ordinary state schools; there is also discrimination between Berendale school and schools for disabled people. That is a severe restriction on people's rights and freedoms. I understand that further action will be taken through the Equal Opportunity Commission in relation to this matter.

I have received many representations from parents of students at Ascot Vale school who are greatly concerned about what is going to happen to their children because of this government's harsh and uncaring attitude. The government says schools are not appropriate places for students aged over 18 and that they should go to other institutions provided by the Department of Human Services, but nowhere are parents or schools allowed to examine the actual requirements for each student. Certainly the schools and the teachers are in a better position to understand the needs of students than administrative officers of the Department of Human Services.

Once again, it seems odd that the government is compelling people to do things they do not want to do when there has been a perfectly good system in place that has already served Victorian students.

Overall, there is not much to look forward to from this government. Its policies towards health and education have provided a great deal of stress and concern for

many people in this state. Now that it says it has changed its spots and is re-creating itself there are obviously many areas where Victorians would like to see improvements. I have outlined some that are of particular concern to my community.

Once again, there is community concern about the nature of funding in the arts — the difficulty of finding out who makes decisions about funding and who gets community support funding in the arts area: that information is treated with the greatest secrecy. The government is unwilling to provide any information on funding guidelines, and the only way we have been able to obtain information is by seeking it through the Freedom of Information Act and then appealing when we have been knocked back.

There are many areas where the government should be more open in its funding decisions. The fact that the Premier has taken direct control over funding so that peer group assessment has been replaced by assessment by departmental officers is of great concern in the Victorian arts community, as is the fact that the nature of the funding makes many people in the arts community feel constrained in the sort of work they do, knowing that if they do anything the Premier does not like they will be told they are not performing and their chances of getting funding in the future will be severely diminished.

That is not the way to produce a healthy arts community. It is not the way the arts community in Victoria has been treated in the past by previous Liberal and Labor governments. Although the Premier has that shining interest in the arts and is re-creating — in a very strange way, some would say — the arts institutions, his understanding of the arts industry seems to be rather light on.

Speaking of institutions, I conclude by mentioning the Exhibition Building. It is pleasing to note that the National Trust has joined the Labor Party and arts community groups in opposing the blade on the museum and is even supporting World Heritage listing for the Exhibition Building. The recommendation for that listing cannot go ahead without state government support, and this state government refuses to support it.

There is much ground for the government to make up in the future if it wishes to regain the respect of the Victorian people. There are many ways it can do this. It will be up to the Premier and his ministers to show us in the next few months whether they will continue using the same old empty rhetoric or whether they have concern about the welfare of the residents of Victoria.

Mr RYAN (Gippsland South) — It is my great pleasure to join other honourable members in making my contribution to the address-in-reply to the speech made by His Excellency the Governor, Sir James Gobbo. What an excellent appointment Sir James has been to the position of Governor of Victoria! He comes to that important role having served the community magnificently over a period of many years, and it is wonderful to see that he will continue in that role for some time to come.

Sir James enjoyed an illustrious reputation in the law and was highly regarded in the years he spent on the bench of the Supreme Court of Victoria. I am delighted to see that Sir James and Lady Gobbo have taken on the role that is so important to the people of Victoria.

I pay appropriate tribute to the immediate predecessor to Sir James, the Honourable Richard McGarvie, for the wonderful job he did in filling the role of Governor in the five years in which it was his. I had various occasions to be in his company and that of Mrs McGarvie. They were both always extremely courteous towards the people with whom they came in contact, and they often visited my electorate during their term of service. I take this opportunity to pay due regard to them.

There are many other issues I want to address in the course of this contribution. They are based around the matters Sir James referred to in his speech and include issues at large and matters of relevance to the people I represent in the electorate of Gippsland South.

One of the main themes that comes through from the address by Sir James and the currency of politics and the way of life in this state and throughout Australia today is that change is upon us and is part and parcel of what we do in our everyday lives. The way we manage change is relevant to all of us, but the practical fact is that change is part of our way of life and we have to learn to embrace it. It will be with us whether we like it or not, and the real question is how we go about its management.

That is central to the way the Victorian government has gone about discharging its responsibilities since it was elected in 1992. It has tried to take us from the position in which we then were, languishing at the bottom of Australia's states' and territories' fortunes, to where we now are at the top. It has tried to give a vision for the state to its people and to set a framework within which that vision can be delivered. All of that has been built around the concept of change in its various ways.

In the opening of his speech Sir James Gobbo referred to the trading position of the state, as he termed it. It is relevant to reflect on that briefly. In 1982 Victoria was in debt to the extent of \$30.6 billion. Probably more importantly, that money represented 30 per cent of the gross state product of Victoria. Now the debt has been reduced to an amount of \$11.3 billion but very importantly that figure is only — when I say 'only' I use the term in the colloquial sense — 8.6 per cent of gross state product. Therein lies a huge distinction. The reduction of debt liability and the extent to which our productive capacity is reliant upon servicing that liability are a tribute to the people of Victoria and the government. We hope Victoria's AAA rating will come back sooner than later, although matters in Asia seem to have delayed things for some time. However, in practical terms it would seem that Victorians will be able to regain that rating within the next 12 months to two years. That will be another tribute to the people of Victoria. It then sets a basis for the appropriate management of the state's affairs over the next 10, 20 or 30 years.

It is a terrible shame that the \$19 billion that has been used to reduce the debt has had to be used for that purpose. It would have been an even greater thing for Victoria if that money had been available to devote to service provision as opposed to paying off the debts our predecessors accumulated. However, what had to be done has been done and the government is in a strong position to deliver the sort of government that the people of this state are looking to us for.

I shall discuss some of the policy areas to which the Governor referred in his speech. Victorians should take pride in the state of policing in Victoria. The annual number of road deaths is now down to 377. Of course, that means 377 poor souls have lost their lives and it is 377 too many, but one need only reflect on the 1970s, when the campaign to get the annual road toll under 1000 was in full swing — I think it started in concert with the *Sun* newspaper, as it then was — to appreciate it is an extraordinary achievement. Much of it has to do with the government's policy on policing, as given effect by the police.

The general crime rate in Victoria is about 19 per cent, under the Australian average, and it is a tribute to all concerned. I pay appropriate tribute to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, who has done a tremendous job in overseeing both those areas.

I also pay tribute to Senior Sergeant Brian Malone of Foster. He is a great character and certainly a renowned figure in the police force. I am happy to tell the house that this great man was the Corner Inlet citizen of the

year, and that was celebrated by the whole township of Foster. In the years when I was working in the law, Brian and I used to oppose each other at the bench in the courts in South Gippsland. We had some great dust-ups in those times, but it was always done in an amicable, although fairly direct, fashion. We always parted the best of friends. This man is renowned in the South Gippsland region and is part of the heartbeat of not only Foster but the area generally.

The government is now in a position to start offering tax reductions, which are of considerable significance. Over the past few years there have been announcements of the expenditure of \$1.3 billion in the water industry, with \$450 million of that going into country Victoria. The South Gippsland Region Water Authority will be the beneficiary of a total of \$16 million of that amount. That means some \$25 million of infrastructure projects can be developed in the region over the next five years. The people of South Gippsland who reside in the area served by the authority will not only have much cleaner water that is up to the appropriate World Health Organisation standards but will receive other benefits. Not the least of those is the development of the waste-water facility in South Gippsland that can service the important agricultural and processing industries in that part of the state. The project will add a new dimension to Victoria's ability to expand its processing industry in the years to come.

Recently the government announced a \$360 million package over the next three years for the reduction of power bills. In the past 12 months a \$106 million reduction in the excise for petrol and diesel has been introduced. That is of crucial significance to country motorists, who travel many more kilometres than people in metropolitan regions. Payroll tax has been reduced by \$103 million, from 7 per cent to 6.25 per cent. They are only part of a total of \$2 billion or more in tax reductions that have been provided since 1992. With the strong base to which I have now referred in place I am sure the situation will continue as Victorians continue to draw the benefit of the base that has been laid.

The Governor also referred to education. As I travel through schools in my electorate I see the number of projects that are now up and running, the extent to which technology is installed in schools and the way the teachers, parents and students have embraced the necessity for technology as a fundamental component of the education system. Some of those initiatives are absolutely wonderful for the various communities involved.

I spoke before about the \$4.5 million project at the Sale college. More than \$1 million has gone into the Leongatha Primary School over the past two or three years; \$2.5 million is about to go into a project in Mirboo North and a raft of other smaller grants have been made to small rural schools.

It is often trotted out that the government is guilty of nefarious conduct in closing schools. It would be about three years since a parent has come to me expressing concern about the way his or her child has been looked after in any government school, wherever that might be. It is my experience as I visit schools that with the process that occurred three years ago now well and truly concluded and with schools now knowing that if their enrolments get to fewer than 12 students they can continue in operation if their communities want them to do so, those factors have brought enormous stability to country Victoria, and there is no better example of it than in the electorate I represent. More is always needed and I am pleased to note the ongoing projects, which will achieve the required ends, but it is marvellous to see those initiatives occurring.

The Governor also talked about job creation, which is a pivotal issue in country Victoria. The government has been instrumental in assisting job creation in my electorate. Australian Leather Holdings established at Rosedale. It is now a \$14 million investment in what was formerly a disused pineboard factory that had been idle for eight years. Now, with an injection of some \$1 million of assistance from the government, it has 140 workers and is world class. Many other examples around my electorate are indicative of the same thing.

The privatisation of the prison system has resulted in the establishment of a new facility 10 kilometres west of Sale that houses 600 prisoners. About 200 jobs have been created directly through the operation of that private prison. Enormous benefits also flow to the general community because local suppliers of goods and services are able to negotiate contracts with the prison facility. Recently the head of the East Gippsland College of TAFE West Sale campus told me some 12 or 13 teachers are now employed full time to do nothing but provide the support systems to the private prison in accordance with the contract the operators have to provide training, education and rehabilitation for the prisoners.

There are many examples of cases where the government has stepped up to the mark to assist that sort of development. Another one is the contract let by the RAAF for the development of flight screening and flight training. The contract has been let across Australia and one of two places now left in the race is

Sale; Tamworth in New South Wales is the other. If Sale is able to win the contract, it will mean an addition of 130 or so highly skilled people to our immediate environs and many associated flow-on benefits.

I am confident that if we win the contract, more aeronautical enterprises will be established in the region. Already substantial bases operate at West Sale and at the RAAF base at East Sale. The location is ideal for future development. I am proud to say the Victorian government has stood at the shoulder of local government, particularly the Shire of Wellington, and the community generally to do what it can to win that bid on behalf of the community and the state. That contract would represent a healthy addition to what we now do.

In his speech, Sir James commented on the health portfolio. An article headed 'Waiting lists at record low' in the *Herald Sun* of 18 February by Helen Carter quoted Professor Brian Buxton of the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre. After saying that the waiting lists at the Austin have been cut, the article states:

The Alfred Hospital's waiting list is small and St Vincent's numbers in the 30s. Both lists could be cleared in a month.

The professor is reported to have said:

It's the lowest we've ever had it.

He attributed the improvement and that outcome to the government and the operation of health services in Victoria. Proper regard should be paid for the operation of our health system to the former minister, the Minister for Conservation and Land Management, and the current minister for the way in which they have discharged their responsibilities.

In my electorate the health services at Yarram have now entered the health streams structure so that funding can be pooled. Those services are an outstanding example of what can be achieved in a country environment by a community that wants to have a go. I hope the minister will formally open the health streams model in the next couple of months.

The hospital at Foster, with a mix of surgery and generalist acute care, continues to trade well. Last year it traded with a healthy figure in the black. A similar story can be told about Leongatha. The hospitals at Sale and Maffra will, in some way or other, become one. A campus will be operating in each of the two locations. We are now part way towards achieving a position whereby health services within the Central Gippsland region will encompass delivery through the Sale and Maffra hospitals.

I hope the facilities at Heyfield will be added to that overall service, together with the Sale elderly citizens complex. We want to develop a model that will offer a first in Victorian health services. That has all occurred as a result of the notion of management of change and the fact that people are prepared to accommodate change to achieve their chosen outcomes.

The Partnerships for Growth program has been an enormous success. Through that program the government has allocated about half the cost of the refurbishment of the Leongatha courthouse, which will see that old and battered building restored to its former glory — a \$25 000 project — and about half the \$26 000 flooring replacement project at the Mardan hall, built in 1912. I look forward to the reopening of that hall on 13 March. A project at Yarram will have pilot-activated lighting systems installed at the aerodrome at a cost of \$100 000, with about half that sum coming from the Partnerships for Growth program.

With the support of the Community Support Fund many projects are on the go — for example, \$625 000 has been allocated to the Sale gallery; \$250 000 will be spent on the restoration of the Regent Theatre; and \$180 000 will go towards improving the Maffra reserve. I could continue quoting examples of such important initiatives in my electorate.

The Partnerships for Growth and the Community Support Fund programs essentially ensure the maintenance of our rural communities. In this day and age, when the pressure is on communities to maintain their status, it is crucial that governments stand by and help them to achieve their desired outcomes. I am pleased about the numerous examples throughout my electorate where, in all the facets of its operations, the government has an ongoing involvement to achieve that end.

Last week the government announced it would amend the stamp duty legislation so that intergenerational farm transfers may be conducted without any stamp duty cost to the transferees. That initiative was first introduced in 1993. Legislative amendments were introduced in about September last year, but those amendments could have led to a lessening of the benefit of the policy. We have now reached a position where farmers will be able to make that intergenerational farm transfer at no stamp duty cost. No matter whether one is farming in the South Gippsland electorate or in Indiana in the USA, it is important that those communities be given every possible opportunity to develop in the best way possible.

The Thomson Reservoir is known in Gippsland as the Thomson Dam. This year Gippsland has been extraordinarily dry, following a season which was relatively dry and the previous season which was extraordinarily wet. The combination of those seasons has complicated the important roles played by our farmers. The Thomson Reservoir is always the centre of discussion in Gippsland. I shall concentrate particularly on what is called the Macalister irrigation district, an area of about 55 000 hectares stretching south-west from Maffra, about 35 000 hectares of which is available for irrigation.

Over time, particularly during that reservoir's construction, the government of the day said a flow of about 149 000 megalitres would be permitted from the reservoir into the Thomson River which flows through the Macalister irrigation district in Gippsland on its way to the sea. That flow figure has become something of an icon in this general discussion because the irrigators, particularly the Gippsland irrigators, are concerned that that undertaking has never been delivered.

The figures I obtained from Melbourne Water, the administrative authority responsible for the operation of the reservoir, disclose that last year 270 600 megalitres of water came from the dam down the Thomson River. I do not use that as the exact figure for each year, but the amount of water flowing generally from the river is at about the level talked about all those years ago.

How can we properly manage the water being accessed from the Thomson Dam to give the best benefit not only to Melbourne Water which has important responsibilities for its constituents in the metropolitan area but also for the benefit of the Gippsland community generally — and in this context I refer specifically to the Gippsland irrigators?

Over the past three or four months we have seen the classic example of every crisis producing opportunity; when things get tough, there is always the chance that some benefit can tumble from difficult times or circumstances. That is the path we are now on in trying to resolve that longstanding issue.

At present the Macalister irrigation district is serviced by two man-made sources. I will leave out the water the good Lord sends us directly from above and talk about the water that comes from our storages. The Glenmaggie weir has a capacity of about 190 000 megalitres. The current policy is to pump it as near to dry as possible to service the irrigation district. That policy must be looked at, because I doubt that it can continue.

That is supplemented by entitlements from the Thomson dam, which broadly comprise a bulk entitlement of 12 000 megalitres per annum; a 5000-megalitre operating reserve; and a 20 000-megalitre additional reserve. That consists of accumulated unused water from the annual bulk entitlement which is deposited into an account and which can build up to 20 000 megalitres. In addition, 10 000 megalitres of emergency drought relief water is available from the Thomson dam. That amounts to a total of 47 000 megalitres.

From April to November last year the inflow into the Glenmaggie weir, which is at the northern end of the Macalister irrigation district, was the fourth lowest in its 78-year existence. At the start of the season last year the weir was just half full — it contained only about 90 000 megalitres — and it never rose above that. It was immediately apparent that we were going to have a problem, and there was great pressure on those involved to supply the irrigators.

The Macalister irrigation district has total water entitlements of 124 000 megalitres. By the latter part of last year it had become apparent that the authorities would not be able to supply that amount of water. That was all the more worrying because the local farmers are geared to using about 130 per cent of their water entitlements. In other words, they are used to taking their entitlements and then buying another 30 per cent to top them up.

An arrangement was struck with Melbourne Water under which the farmers contracted to buy water to take them up to their actual entitlements, which amounted to about 30 000 megalitres. In the early part of this year the authorities contracted to buy a further 10 000 megalitres to give farmers in excess of their actual entitlements. A series of issues needs to be addressed. To his great credit, the minister responsible for water resources, Pat McNamara, has already announced a review to deal with some of them.

One issue concerns the use of the hydro scheme that operates using the Thomson dam. Last year it operated in summer, which meant that about 78 000 megalitres of water came down the river. This year it operated throughout the winter, and 73 000 megalitres went into the sea. The hydro scheme was turned off on 6 October. Farmers now ask how that could have happened. That issue needs to be investigated.

Secondly, we should look at lifting the guaranteed supply from the dam — in the Cain-Jolly budget of 1985-86 it was reduced to only 78 000 megalitres — so our irrigators can be guaranteed a supply greater than

78 000 megalitres. Thirdly, we should look at the drought reserve that must be kept in the dam. I do not know that 20 000 megalitres of water is enough. We should be able to deposit up to 30 000 or 40 000 megalitres to give us greater security.

Finally, farmers must grapple with whether their water entitlements are sufficient to enable them to operate their properties. I do not think they can safely go on for evermore being 30 per cent short of what they need. They should investigate the mechanics of buying water entitlements on the market to meet their needs. These sorts of issues arise every 15 years. Now is the time to sort them out so they do not recur. I commend the minister for taking up the cause of the irrigators in our region to ensure they get a better outcome.

I finish by that I am astounded at the opposition's lack of support for the endeavours of the NFF in trying to establish a container-handling operation at Webb Dock. That will soon have to be straightened out. When every other union in every other part of the state has opened itself up to the challenges that competition brings, I fail to understand why Labor is supporting the endeavours of the president of the ACTU, Jennie George, and others down at the docks.

It should do what the rest of the community wants it to do — support the NFF in its efforts to open up one of the last great closed shops in Australia and to stop rural Australians being held to ransom by that group of rogues.

Sitting suspended 6.26 p.m. until 8.05 p.m.

Mr HAERMAYER (Yan Yean) — The proroguing of Parliament to mark off two years of the Kennett government's term of office — the so-called bad years — to establish the so-called good years is something honourable members have seen before. It is meant to represent a new era. The term 'social dividend' has been bandied about; and we recall the Treasurer borrowing from Paul Keating and his reference to the notion of 'bringing home the bacon'. We are meant to believe this ruthless and corrupt Kennett government has suddenly become the kind and caring Kennett government. We hold in our minds newspaper images of the Premier laughing with kids. We have heard it all before. It is a bit like Fred Krueger masquerading as Doris Day!

In 1994 the Kennett government prorogued the Parliament. We were promised a new style, a new era: 'We have had all of the hardship. We have had all of the pain. It is now time for the gain'. But the gain did not eventuate. Instead we got cutbacks to the

ambulance service, schools, hospitals and the police — the same old thing; it just continued. We got more of the same government: arrogance and corruption is the hallmark of this government. The proroguing of the Parliament is about two things: pomp and ceremony, which we know the Liberal Party loves — the garden parties! — but, more importantly, it is about marketing. It means spending a lot of public money on advertising and glossy publicity to herald the so-called new beginning. It is about image rather than substance. The reality is that nothing much has changed. There has been talk about the reform of major services: health, education and public transport. There has been talk about the hostile response the government received from the public at the time of the Mitcham by-election. The disillusionment of the public had nothing to do with the substance of what the Kennett government was doing; it had nothing to do with ripping the heart out of education, the police force and the health system. It was about not selling the message properly. The government has not learnt one thing from the Mitcham by-election; it thinks all it has to do is pump out more glossy brochures and taxpayer-funded advertising. The electorate would then see the error of its ways! The behaviour the voters of Mitcham rejected so wholeheartedly last year is typical of the arrogance of this government. It is clear the government has not learnt one thing.

Victorians will continue to see the same sort of arrogance they have seen from this government in the past. The government has told us there is no problem with education — we just have not been told the facts! It says Victoria has the highest ratio of computers to students anywhere in the country. The fact that the computers were paid for by parents and not the government does not seem to enter into it. The government says we have the highest level of education spending ever experienced in this state. The fact that Victoria has moved from being the highest spending state in education to the lowest spending state, that our year 12 retention rate has dropped from 92 per cent to 72 per cent does not seem to enter into it.

Cutbacks in health and public safety continue. The government continues to tax savagely. Victorians have been promised a drop in the bucket in the form of a \$60 concession on electricity. Compare that \$60 concession with the additional \$2000 a year in taxes that each family has paid since the government came to office. That \$60 is small beer; it is a joke! I repeat: Victorians will continue to see examples of the government's arrogance and its contempt for the parliamentary system and accountability through its amendments to the powers of the Auditor-General and its refusal to launch an inquiry into absolutely anything.

In five and a half years of the Kennett government we have witnessed Intergraph and casino scandals. The government has refused to inquire into anything at all; it has not launched one single inquiry! Victorians can expect the government to continue in the same corrupt way. The casino, Lloyd Williams and Ron Walker will continue to call the tune and the Premier will continue to jump.

The Governor's speech dealt with justice and the safety of Victorians in their homes. He pointed out that justice and safety have been two important priorities under the government. The speech refers to tougher sentences and private prisons, and how supposedly the private prisons have become more humane. The fact that people hang themselves regularly in those prisons does not support the notion that private prisons are giving prisoners a better chance at life or that they are more secure. People are walking within one door of getting out of Port Phillip Prison due to an incorrectly coded security pass. What a bizarre joke! Prisoners are absolutely drowning in drugs and contraband. Prisons are committed to rehabilitation but they are hardly more secure.

The government talks about Victoria having the lowest crime rate and the best police force in Australia. Let us explore the government's claims in the context of its own performance in the areas of police and corrections. The dedication, honesty, commitment and professionalism of the vast majority of police officers is unquestioned, certainly by members on this side of the house. They are decent and well-trained people. The government talks about law and order — the emphasis being on talk — and a lower crime rate, but it is absent without leave in the action department. It is simply rhetoric. This is an advertising-led government; it is the hollow bumph of a third-rate advertising man.

Prior to coming to office in 1992 this law-and-order coalition promised the state 11 000 police officers. The last edition of the Police Association journal reported the current strength of Victoria's police force at 10 100, 900 short of 11 000. It is not even headed in the right direction because the figure has come down from more than 10 500.

Police stations across the state are short-staffed as a result of three years of recruiting cuts. This government has not lived up to its commitment to the Victorian Police Force. It is busy running it down while telling us it is the best police force in Australia. Last week a memo from P-district about savage cutbacks was leaked. I know from conversations with police in some of the elite crime squads and other districts that the cutbacks are not just happening in P-district.

The Premier was gladhanding in Seymour recently. The police station there is 10 officers short. The local member and the minister are obviously AWOL. The Premier opened a new police station in Kilmore but there are not enough police to fill it, nor are there enough cars. The districts of Kilmore, Broadford and Wallen are expected to have only one police officer available, not even on call, during the night hours when the most serious crimes are committed. Vacant positions at police stations and in some elite squads are not being filled. Police officers are unable to pursue their investigations due to restrictions on overtime and they are not permitted to use mobile phones or make STD calls.

Police cars are required to perform in high-stress environments, quite often in pursuit situations, but the vehicle maintenance schedules are being doubled, resulting in maintenance being carried out every 10 000 kilometres instead of every 5000 kilometres. There is also a shortage of police vehicles.

Survival training has been curtailed, so officers who are expected to risk their lives saving Victorians in the Alps or in other rugged terrain are deprived of the training they need for their own safety as well as the safety of the Victorians they are there to protect.

Last week an inspector ordered the police officers at the Greensborough station to start cleaning it, and the officers spent 5 hours doing that because the police force cannot afford the cleaners. Is that the most efficient use of the best police force in Australia? Maybe there was no crime that day in Greensborough.

The police force is equipped with AT and 386 computers which were state of the art when bought by the previous government. However, they have not been replaced by this government and the modern programs required by the police cannot be loaded on those machines. There are queues of police officers waiting to prepare briefs because the computing times are very slow. Laptop computers bought between 1989 and 1992 need to be replaced and are now sitting on the scrap heap because parts cannot be obtained. The traffic operations group at Broadmeadows has one 286 computer for use by 32 police officers. In computing terms that is the equivalent of a quill pen!

The Victoria Police budget crisis is impeding police in carrying out their duties. The force is not about getting on top of crime or becoming involved in pro-active policing; it is about playing catch-up. That is what this government is doing to the best police force in Australia. It is penny pinching. No wonder 12 police officers are leaving the force every week. No wonder

the crime rate is up. The minister keeps saying Victoria has the lowest crime rate in Australia. That is no thanks to him. That was achieved under the previous government, and we are now heading in the wrong direction because every year since the current minister has been responsible for that portfolio the crime rate has increased.

Mrs Henderson interjected.

Mr HAERMAYER — The Minister for Housing should have a look at the statistics. She spends a lot of time shaking her head; maybe there is nothing in it. Since this government came to office the number of violent crimes has risen dramatically. Home invasions are probably Victoria's biggest growth industry, and there is a vast increase in the number of robberies and assaults.

This government talks about the best police force in Australia but treats it with absolute contempt. Something more than soothing, sugar-coated words are needed. Decent working conditions and resources to enable staff to do the job to the best of their ability are what is needed.

We hear the repeated claim by this government that Victoria has the cleanest police force in Australia. I like to believe it is, but I worry about where we are heading. An overwhelming majority of our police are decent, honest people, but there are certainly some serious problems within the police force, such as the break-in at drug squad headquarters. The police commissioner himself has conceded that that was an inside job. However, 12 months later it is still unresolved.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr HAERMAYER — Because the minister thinks it is just a minor issue, that is why. When he was asked about the matter he said 'You'll find out this is just a minor issue.'

Obviously, the minister has his head in the sand. Is anything other than cleaning up the Greensborough police station a major issue to this minister? What action has been taken about the sexual misconduct of police officers at Maryborough? We have been told to forget about it because it is an old issue. There has been very little response to the Operation Bart window shutter incident or to the special branch files matter. The minister says these are all old matters and asks what we are going on about. Maybe if they were resolved and the community had some answers they would become old issues, but until then they remain current. The government's response to these issues is

denial, as it is to any other problem or example of corruption occurring anywhere within its domain.

The minister says these are just minor issues and we should focus on the honest police. It is important to recognise the good work done by honest police officers, but it is also necessary to deal front on with the very real and serious matters I have referred to that still remain unresolved. They cast a cloud over every single police officer in this state. No wonder morale in the police force is the lowest it has been since the days of the Beach inquiry. Police officers want these problems resolved; they don't want them dangling there to save the face of the government and police command.

The current system is not working. If we have not solved these issues under the current system maybe an inquiry is necessary so that witnesses can be subpoenaed and given the immunity or protection they require. A number of people have come to me with serious complaints about members of the Victoria Police, but they have indicated they will not give that sort of evidence to an internal police inquiry; they will do so only to an independent public inquiry where they are given the sort of protection they require.

Mr Cameron — But the truth might come out!

Mr HAERMAYER — That is precisely the point. They do not want the truth. The Wood report into police corruption in New South Wales dealt with this issue. Our very own former police commander, Allan Bowles, the person in charge of the major fraud group, referred to the bunker mentality that exists in the Victoria Police Force. It certainly exists within the minister's mind as well. The Wood report, under the heading 'Openness and honesty', recommends that the police force should be required to:

acknowledge bad news, address it rather than suppress it and accept that the complaint system and the internal audit process are valuable tools by which performance can be improved, rather than potential causes for embarrassment ...

That is the problem. They are too scared of being embarrassed so they allow the problem to fester. The report goes on to talk about denial and the bunker mentality. It states:

This kind of philosophy came to be expressed in a number of ways, each of which was inimical to prevention of corruption. They included: suppression and editing of adverse audit reports, or active discouragement of critical comment on the part of those whose task it was to identify problems; denial of the obvious, to the point where those who sought to bring the problem to notice became branded as 'troublemakers' and risked transfer out of any jobs of significance; ... early warnings and leakage of information to police under

investigation; fragmentation of investigations, thereby losing the opportunity of broad-based inquiries that may have thrown up systemic misconduct; and ineffective support for internal informants ... This kind of defensive mentality was an inevitable recipe for collapse of command responsibility for the maintenance of integrity, and for reinforcement of a 'them and us' attitude.

That is what we have: a 'them and us' attitude. It continues:

It sent a very powerful message to the ranks not only that the rhetoric to which they were exposed was empty, but that the opposite was what was truly expected. What must now be understood is that public disclosure of successful investigations into misconduct is not an indicator of failure. Rather, it should be seen as evidence that the system is working, and that there is a brake being applied to problems which would otherwise fester and multiply before the inevitable scandal.

The Wood royal commission refers to openness and facing problems front on. This government is about brushing things under the carpet lest it be embarrassed! It is more than the minister getting up and saying that he supports the Victoria Police Force. The best way for him to support the police force is to take appropriate action that will bundle corrupt coppers out of the force.

Mr Kilgour interjected.

Mr HAERMEYER — I am sorry, anybody who is corrupt is not a policeman in my book. The best action that this minister can take is to get those people out of the police force.

I also want to raise the issue of the Webb Dock riot gear. A confrontation occurred down at Webb Dock where the federal Liberal and National coalition has gone on a union-crushing crusade. Security guards protecting the premises have riot gear consisting of shields, batons, body armour and helmets. When the accusation was made that it was government equipment that was denied by the government. However, we found out that the equipment had Office of Corrections asset numbers on it. Suddenly the government had to double back. The Premier ran out and said that a prison officer had leased the equipment. Since when does a prison officer make a decision to lease equipment? He leased the equipment to a security company called the Australasian Security Group. I have done some checking and I find on the ASC database that its principal is Mr Peter Kilfoyle. We have heard his name before, haven't we? For want of a better term, he is the gentleman behind the Dubai fiasco.

It gets better! The Premier claimed the equipment was leased to ASG for the purpose of training a government department. Which government department other than

the police or corrections — which already have their own riot equipment, riot squads and training — would require training in riot gear? Perhaps it was the Department of Youth and Community Services or the Department of Education? What a bizarre claim. Did anybody bother to ask who this company was training?

Another factor that must be borne in mind is that equipment of the sort that was issued is prohibited under the Control of Weapons Act, which was introduced by the Minister for Corrections. That act specifically prohibits the possession, use or purchase of body armour without an appropriate permit. Did ASG have a permit? My information is that it did not have a permit to carry, use or lease the equipment, and no-one from the government checked to see whether it did. This offence carries a penalty of up to six months imprisonment.

There is also a suggestion that tear gas guns and canisters were issued. If that is the case the act provides for a penalty of four years imprisonment. I understand this was not simply a case of tear gas equipment just walking out of Barwon Prison with a prison officer saying to the guys on the gate, 'Look, I'm just taking this out to lease it to the Australasian Security Group'.

I have been advised that the minister made a telephone call to the acting prisons services director, Mr Bill Allgood, to issue the equipment. I ask the minister to make a full statement of the circumstances surrounding the issue of the equipment because serious offences have been committed. The minister may wish to make a denial or accept the accuracy of the statement I have made. I am not satisfied with the internal inquiry announced by the minister. He can say, 'It is okay' and not tell the house what the inquiry was about or its findings. I do not believe one word I am told by members of the government. I am extremely distrustful of anything that comes from the government. The opposition wants an open inquiry so the truth surrounding this fiasco relating to Webb Dock is revealed and the people who were responsible for or accessories to the breaches of the Control of Weapons Act, possibly the Firearms Act and even the Customs Act — because restrictions are placed on importing this equipment — can be dealt with. The government rides roughshod over the laws of the state, the Parliament and the community, and it must stop.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — In joining the address-in-reply I acknowledge the excellent leadership provided to the state by His Excellency, Sir James and Lady Gobbo. Sir James personifies the four virtues of wisdom, courage, justice and temperance. His predecessor, Mr Richard McGarvie, and his wife

Lesley also made a fine contribution to the state. After retiring from that role Mr McGarvie made an important contribution to the recent Constitutional Convention, especially from his perspective as a retired Supreme Court Judge and a former Governor of the state. He provided insights into what he regarded as the appropriate balance to preserve the longer term democratic values of the Australian nation. Although Mr McGarvie's proposal was not formally adopted by the convention, his remarks were salutary and provided wise guidance in the deliberations of the members. I note with interest how the influence of one person may be significant in shaping the next century of life in Australia.

I will confine my remarks in this debate to the particular aspects of the remarks made by the Governor in noting the endeavours of the government for its future term of office. He states:

The social advance of Victorians will be the central criterion in determining our state's future direction. The Governor went on to note the government's focus on ensuring Victoria will provide the ideal home, lifestyle and workplace of the 21st century.

I address my remarks to matters relating to Port Phillip Bay — which provides an important lifestyle amenity to Victorians, particularly those in the Melbourne metropolitan area — and to issues of planning. I convey three messages to the house. Firstly, I call upon the Minister for Planning and Local Government and the government to join appeals to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal when there are appeals from a council decision relating to the adequacy of a site analysis. Under the good design guide the site analysis procedural process underpins and determines the quality of developments that subsequently ensue. Earlier the Minister for Planning and Local Government indicated that he is prepared to join by way of test cases appeals to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. Some cases involve proposed developments in the Black Rock and Beaumaris areas of my electorate and I believe the minister's support would be of great assistance to the objectives of the residents being realised.

Secondly, I call upon a strong and united local council in my electorate to adopt a robust and vigorous approach to site analysis and assessment by council officers. Councils can play a constructive role in determining height, setback, streetscape and neighbourhood character. Additionally, councils have the opportunity of implementing variations under the good design guide which I shall comment on later.

I call upon the Bayside City Council to take a robust approach to vegetation control in the local area where green and leafy suburbs are strong characteristics. Recently I had occasion to take Wendy Morris, formerly the deputy manager of the urban design unit in the Department of Planning and Local Government before she set up her own consultancy, on a tour of my electorate. She made a number of pertinent remarks that could be implemented by the council. They include the mandatory planting of mature trees when a new development is contemplated that will have an impact on the streetscape. She suggested there be mandatory nature strip plantings. A number of developments have been undertaken on a site on the corner of Red Bluff Street and Beach Road, Black Rock. The bare walls of the project could be offset by the planting of local vegetation such as sheoaks, banksias or other indigenous trees appropriate to the area.

Councils have an opportunity to provide for the mandatory retention of perimeter trees on a property to soften the impact on adjoining developments and may be involved in determining what would be regarded as a suitable level of setback. In Mary Street, Beaumaris, where significant developments are taking place, the 60-year-old trees dating back to the Beaumaris bushfires in the early 1940s provide tremendous tree canopy space.

Finally, I invite the residents both individually and collectively to take advantage of the opportunities available under the Planning and Environment Act, particularly section 173, to instigate agreements either as individuals or collectively as a street to have one dwelling per lot or alternatively to determine what setbacks are applicable in the street and whether any appropriate orders may be contained in such an agreement under section 173. An alternative vehicle may be section 88 of the Transfer of Land Act. The Melbourne law firm Anderson Rice has done extensive work advising citizens how to take advantage of establishing a covenant that would express and fulfil the aspirations of people in a street.

Mr Maclellan interjected.

Mr THOMPSON — The Minister for Planning and Local Government says by interjection that a section 173 agreement would not cost the residents any money. I understand that to relate to liaison with council and providing volume and folio numbers. I hesitate to draw him fully on that undertaking that it would not cost any money. It is my understanding that banks may require a production fee for a duplicate certificate of title in the event of a mortgaged title being varied, and that fee could be in the vicinity of \$150. If

there is a coordinated approach the net cost to residents could be low and cost effective and fulfil the expectations of residents in the street.

In summary, I call upon the Minister for Planning and Local Government to join appropriate cases where site analysis is in question. He has indicated he is prepared to consider that course of action. Secondly, I call upon councils to take what steps they can to bring about or seek a variation to the good design guide under principles enunciated in 1995 under which, unfortunately, not many councils to date have taken advantage; and thirdly, I call upon residents of the City of Bayside and in my electorate to take advantage of the opportunity to apply for a restrictive agreement under section 173 of the Planning and Environment Act or section 88 of the Transfer of Land Act subject to obtaining sound legal advice on what the implications of such a course of action may be.

It is noteworthy, in terms of the breadth of development that is taking place, that in August 1994 the minister announced a review of Viccode 2 and stated that:

While the majority of developers seem to be using the code satisfactorily, there are too many examples of developments which do not meet the objectives of the code and some developers appear to be using the code to push poorly designed developments through the planning system.

It was with this intent in mind that the minister subsequently initiated the review. The review panel reported to the minister and instructions were given for the preparation of a code in simpler form, resulting in the good design guide, which is a powerful document. It enables the implementation of good design that takes into account the character, setback, streetscape and overlooking aspects of a building. A number of objections have been made to it by the opposition, but there are two essential points on overlooking: firstly, it was in the middle 1980s that the Labor Party introduced dual occupancy, not by way of application to the council but as of right. The opposition, like the government, may have had an interest in endeavouring to assist the process of urban consolidation and the development of an ecologically sustainable city. However, there were a number of errors and shortcomings in dual occupancy regulations. I can see the honourable member for Werribee asking what they were. Principally, under the dual occupancy legislation, while intrasite vistas and overlooking were precluded, there was nothing to preclude overlooking one's neighbour's boundary. Someone could build an elaborate dual occupancy development which could overlook important private residential areas of an adjoining block. This issue has been broadly addressed in the good design guide that covers two or more

dwellings on a site and where overlooking is to be limited on adjoining properties. I have seen town planners working in conjunction with architects and builders where good outcomes have been achieved already as a consequence of this reform.

As a matter of history, I shall articulate the reasons that town planning and urban consolidation are important in the City of Bayside. When the area was first settled in 1844 the Moysey family, the early settlers to the area — one of their children is buried in the recently rediscovered Beaumaris cemetery, but that is another story — described the area they moved to in the following terms:

The land was lightly wooded, with gum and wattle trees. Heath predominated among the native grasses, and in the springtime the place was beautiful with wildflowers. Parrots outnumbered the local birds, and the animal life included kangaroos, wallabies, possums, native bears, wild cats, wombats, snakes, lizards and an occasional dingo. A few swamps and soaks could be improved for water supply.

That was a description of the idyllic character of the area to which many families subsequently moved. Charles Ebdon, the first Auditor-General in Victoria, appointed in 1851, lived in Black Rock. The Moyseys, the Holloways and David Abbott, a Melbourne solicitor, lived in the area. They had large land-holdings that were subsequently subdivided. Each one of the subdivisions may have had the impact of reducing the natural environment progressively, but it is part of the pattern of population growth in the area where roads were made, rail and tram lines were put through, shops and houses were built and a certain level of industry was developed. That had an impact upon the overall amenity of the area.

In 1953 the Beaumaris Tree Preservation Society, which subsequently became the Beaumaris Conservation Society, noted in a pamphlet that:

The most sought-after houses in Beaumaris and those commanding the best prices are those where the home-builder has utilised the natural setting and kept the trees.

That view is germane today. The *Good Design Guide* as presently structured states that:

... densities may be increased or decreased if it can be demonstrated that the objectives of the good design guide may or may not be met. Local variations may replace or add to the techniques in the good design guide.

The Bayside City Council is working on a variation to the guide to accommodate local character, and it is expected to be made later this year. It is to be hoped that builders, architects and planners will be empathetic to the existing neighbourhood character pending the implementation of the variation to the

guide which may provide substantive protection to local streets and streetscapes.

In 1995 the Minister for Planning and Minister for Local Government, through ministerial direction no. 8, noted that it was possible to have:

... local variations to replace or add to the techniques in the good design guide.

He said they may be appropriate to:

... vary densities in particular areas to achieve better strategic outcomes;

reinforce the particular existing character of an area.

Who are the stakeholders in the building process? I have taken a keen interest in and have embarked on a course of wider reading on this subject. Among the first stakeholders were architects and design experts, who have been driving the approach to urban consolidation over a long period. Kim Dovey, Associate Professor of Architecture, Building and Planning at Melbourne University, argues that increased urban density, subject to qualifications in relation to height, bulk, privacy, street orientation and lot size, generally improves rather than diminishes amenity. He argued that it enables a richer social network, especially for children, is more environmentally sustainable and strengthens the viability of a huge range of services and amenities.

I understand that in England the Friends of the Earth support urban consolidation in the inner city of London. I introduce that example because the issue of urban consolidation is being addressed by governments and cities around the world to facilitate a more ecologically sustainable community.

As I travel about my electorate, one common cry I hear is, 'We believe in urban consolidation and in an ecologically sustainable society — but please, not in my street or my neighbourhood'. The funny thing is the same cry echoes in the streets of the nearby cities of Kingston, Port Phillip and Glen Eira.

Earlier I referred to Wendy Morris, whom I first spoke to three and a half years ago at one of the first public meetings in Victoria on Viccode 2. The meeting was about a development in Iona Street, Black Rock. Based on her experience as an urban planner, she made the following observations. Firstly, people have difficulty dealing with change. Secondly, the apprehensions of residents are usually resolved following the completion of developments that more often than not improve the amenity of the area. That contention is supported by studies undertaken at Footscray Institute. Her third

remark, which was somewhat more challenging, was that individuals should no longer have the breadth of opportunity to limit or delay the reasonable development of land owned by neighbours.

I understand the concerns raised by residents in Hampton, Sandringham, Black Rock, Beaumaris and Mentone. It is important to achieve a balance between development density and design quality in the City of Bayside so that its existing urban character is retained, which is in large part typified by broad tree canopies and open space.

From a bureaucratic perspective, under successive Liberal and Labor governments urban consolidation meant the better utilisation of roads, public transport, drainage, and school and health infrastructure. The change in the demographics caused by baby boomers is also an important factor. Instead of wanting large backyards for their general enjoyment, including barbecues and other outdoor activities, people are looking for smaller recreational spaces. For example, two working people in their 50s may prefer to spend their reduced leisure time actively engaged in recreational pursuits outside the home. There is also a strong demand for diversified housing styles, whether they be neo-Georgian, Tuscan, Federation or Victorian.

Some believe that a better utilisation of our urban infrastructure will lead to cheaper housing, releasing a pent-up demand for that style of housing compared with the demand in other states. Notions of equity also apply when urban consolidation is shared throughout a variety of suburbs. Also, while not underpinning economic activity in Victoria, the building industry provides a range of vocational opportunities for a number of Victorians.

The neighbours interest group has raised broader concerns such as overshadowing, the overburdening of infrastructure, increased noise, increased traffic, loss of privacy and loss of local amenity. I will return to those concerns.

The builder's principal interest in the planning process concerns certainty, viability, swift approvals and improved consistency. The average builder is not interested in buying a house for redevelopment and then waiting three months for the council to approve the work and then a further three to six months if it is rejected and to go to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal — especially when he has to pay the holding costs on his investment.

For example, if restrictive covenants were applied to limit development in the streets of Black Rock to not

more than one dwelling on each block, that would effectively resolve the concerns not only of the residents but also of any builder, who would know what his development options were rather than having to go through a process akin to some sort of lottery. The council's aim is to apply the *Good Design Guide* within the defined parameters while being responsive to community concerns.

A further stakeholder group includes the future residents of any multi-site dwellings in the City of Bayside. Fifty-two per cent of those who buy these dwellings lived in either the City of Bayside or an adjoining municipality such as Port Phillip, Glen Eira or Kingston. From their perspective, this form of accommodation enables them to live close to shops, transport, churches and the neighbourhood and communities they know. They have no need to move out to the Beacon Hills retirement village or to Pakenham or Melton to find other accommodation in their senior years.

Wendy Morris gave an example of a City of Kew councillor who had been strongly opposed to medium density housing all his life. Following his retirement and the death of his wife, he realised that most of all he wanted a form of housing that enabled him to live in and stay close to the community to which he had devoted his life by way of civic service.

I will deal briefly with a number of objections raised by neighbours about various developments. One concerns the overburdening of existing services, in particular drainage. Drainage in the City of Bayside is looked after by both Melbourne Water, which is the principal entity and which has responsibility for some of the main drains in the area, and the local council, which has responsibility for some subsidiary drains. In my view, residents whose neighbourhood is prone to flooding have good grounds for arguing against high-density development, especially if their street is in a basin or at the base of a hill, unless there is some requirement to retain on the site water that is caught by the roofs or non-porous areas of any new development. Melbourne Water has indicated that that is sometimes required when permits are granted.

I urge any concerned residents who are perusing my speech in *Hansard* to take photographs and to develop historical profiles of the flooding patterns in their areas so that when they make submissions to their council or to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal they have substantive evidence on which they can rely.

Vicroads looks after the major traffic conduits, and the local councils look after the subsidiary or minor roads.

The building of six new units in one street may not necessarily be significant when measured by vehicle movements each hour or each day. In other words, the effect may not necessarily be as great as some residents believe at the outset. Nevertheless, if there is widespread development in an area and access to main roads such as Beach Road is limited, it may be possible to aggregate the increased number of vehicle movements and to argue that traffic control measures need to be imposed. It is important that an appropriate balance be developed for the City of Bayside that will preserve the character of the area in the longer term.

I mentioned at the outset of my speech that I would like to cover a number of initiatives concerning Port Phillip Bay which I believe have been of great benefit to my constituency. They include, firstly, the renourishment of the Edward Street beach to the value of \$300 000. They also include the renourishment of Hampton beach at a cost of \$3.3 million; the re-establishment of the Beaumaris Jetty with some coast action funding; the initial inclusion in a Land Conservation Council report that has been reviewed by the Environment Conservation Council that parts of Ricketts Point be declared a marine park and a marine sanctuary.

In 1995 Melbourne Water discovered and ceased the practice of pouring 35 million litres of treated effluent into the Mordialloc Creek. That will improve the quality of water in Port Phillip Bay. The abolition of scallop dredging in Port Phillip Bay will improve reed beds on the bay and give migratory fish the prospect of breeding to a high level. It will also enable the food chain and the various marine biota which form part of it to prosper.

In December 1992 I instigated a measure whereby Office of Corrections workers had the opportunity to serve community-based orders for work along the Sandringham foreshore to help with the replanting of local vegetation and the removal of weeds that are not indigenous to the area. Significant work was undertaken through that program in concert with the very good help of the council and local residents, David and Shirley Joy.

I conclude by referring to the remarks of Sir James Gobbo, when he said:

This government is looking forward to —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perton) — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mr ANDRIANOPOULOS (Mill Park) — I have much pleasure in joining the debate on the address-in-reply to the speech made by His Excellency

Sir James Gobbo on the opening of this session of the 53rd Parliament on 17 February. I place on record my appreciation and the appreciation of my constituents for the service provided to the state and the people of Victoria by Mr and Mrs Richard McGarvie, the previous Governor of the state. I also congratulate Sir James and Lady Gobbo on his appointment as Governor for the forthcoming term. I wish them both well during his term of office.

A number of other members have mentioned that Sir James has served the state with distinction in the law as both a lawyer and a judge and has done tremendously good work for the many communities, particularly ethnic communities, and organisations he has been involved with over many years. As a member of Parliament from a non-English-speaking background I am indeed proud because it is magnificent to see one of us, if you like, reach the top position — the position of Governor of this state. I appreciate the fact that Sir James was born here; nevertheless, we consider him to be one of us because his parents took him back to Italy when he was a baby, but they migrated back to this country when he was still very young.

As the member for Mill Park I had an additional pleasure because one of Sir James's first official visits was to the City of Whittlesea. He came to the electorate last May and performed a magnificent service in opening one of the playgrounds in the area. I look forward to more good work and cooperation with him over his term of office.

One must keep in mind that the occasion of the Governor's speech was as the result of the Premier and government proroguing Parliament. One can get caught up in all the activity that surrounds the clearing of the Parliamentary agenda and the resultant pomp, ceremony and garden parties, but it is also an important event because it allows each and every one of us as members of Parliament to assess what the government has been doing over the past two years. More importantly, it allows us to critically examine its program for the next couple of years. It is with those thoughts in mind that I shall make my remarks tonight.

It is of interest that the basis of the speech written by the government centred around its economic achievements. The government boldly claims it has reduced state debt from \$30.6 billion to \$11.3 billion. One could easily say, 'So what?' to that proposition. When one looks at the costs to the state of achieving those targets one has to wonder whether it was worth while. One certainly has to question that outcome after taking into consideration what the state has sold off to

achieve that target. When one considers the break-up and sale of the multibillion-dollar State Electricity Commission, the sale of 350 school sites and the social cost of the cuts to many services including education and health one wonders whether the economic outcome is worth it.

In the Governor's speech the government set itself four objectives over the next two years of its term: improvements in education, job creation, healthy lifestyles and a cohesive society. I welcome those objectives but wonder whether the government is fair dinkum. Those four issues were highlighted in the Labor Party literature was circulated at the Mitcham by-election on 13 December. We all know how well they were received by the electors of Mitcham. There was a historic, mammoth swing of 16.5 per cent to the Labor Party! It is more than interesting to note that the government has adopted those objectives for its last two years of office.

I believe that is just rhetoric and a further attempt to hoodwink the Victorian public. I shall examine each of the objectives from the electorate's perspective, and I begin with education. The government has promised education will be a priority so that Victoria can build a dynamic future for the coming generations. It has said education will be the basis of a vital economic and social strategy. Putting aside for one moment the government's history, which has been the complete opposite, I turn to the well-known facts and figures. The government has closed 360 schools and 9000 experienced teachers have been taken out of the system. Class sizes have increased dramatically, in many instances to more than 30, and the year 12 retention rate has plummeted from 78 per cent to 69 per cent.

I shall outline the ramifications of those generalised statistics for Mill Park and explain what they mean at the neighbourhood level. Mill Park is located in a growth corridor. Houses are constantly being built and new families are moving into the area. Although the government's rhetoric is that it is spending up big to provide new facilities in education, its rationalisation policies in Mill Park have had a dramatic effect. Originally the Department of Education planned to open a new Mill Park North primary school to supplement the existing primary schools of South Morang, Mill Park Heights and Bundoora. However, the government chose to scrap those plans and rationalise by relocating the existing South Morang and Bundoora primary schools to new sites. The relocation of South Morang and the opening of the new facility only last year by, of all people, the honourable member for Caulfield in the absence of the Minister of

Education, has already resulted in massive overcrowding. The opposition predicted that would happen as long as seven years ago.

The *Whittlesea Post* of 18 February reported on the ludicrous need for larger class sizes, not because of insufficient teachers or an inadequate teacher-student ratio but because we have run out of classrooms! If that report is true — I have no reason to doubt it because it quotes the principal of the primary school — it is an indictment of the government and its rhetoric about improving education. In this instance class sizes have increased not only because of a reduction in the number of teachers available but also through the sheer necessity of a shortage of classrooms! I urge the government to proceed as a matter of urgency with the relocation of Bundoora Primary School to its new site in Blossom Park, because it is evident that the classrooms are needed now.

I will illustrate how drastic the situation is in the outer metropolitan growth areas. On 14 January I received a plea from the parents of a child who requires the services of Norparrin, a facility that provides for children with special needs from birth to 6 years. Insufficient funding means that the names of children with disabilities who need specialised services have been placed on a waiting list. I have forwarded to the Minister for Youth and Community Services the parents' plea to provide funding for an extra day at Norparrin. With your indulgence Mr Acting Speaker, I will not quote the parents' names, but the correspondence and the case are with the minister. I will, however, quote an extract from their letter. If it does not move people's hearts, I do not think anything will. It says:

Our child will be three years old in June and at present has not yet spoken his first word. Why is he being forced to wait when we know that the earlier intervention commences the more effective its outcome?

I ask the same question: why has the government allowed such a situation to arise? We have the facility in Mill Park; which was paid for by the local community. The problem is that the facility provides a service for only four days out of five. It does not take a genius to work out that for a very small outlay an extra day can be provided by an existing facility so that the names of children like this will not remain on a waiting list for well over a year. I take to heart the words in the Governor's speech about education. Over the next few years I would like to see the government turn its rhetoric into reality. I can assure honourable members of one thing — the people of Mill Park and the people of Victoria have had this government. That was obvious during the Mitcham by-election. I warn the

government that what happened in Mitcham will happen statewide next time around, because there are many cases like those of the South Morang and Bundoora primary schools and Norparrin special centre.

The government produced more flowery rhetoric about its proposals for jobs during the balance of its term. The Governor's speech claimed that employment has reached record levels. Nobody from the government is able to come out to the City of Whittlesea and say that to the thousands of people who continue to be unemployed or who have become unemployed over the past couple of years.

The statistics I was able to obtain for the City of Whittlesea show that unemployment hovers between 10 per cent and 11 per cent and has done so since December 1996, when it reached its peak figure of 13 per cent. When one looks more closely at the figures, it is apparent that basically two groups make up the figures. One group comprises older people from non-English-speaking backgrounds who for some reason have been left behind because they lack communication skills or do not have the necessary skills to cope with technological changes in the computer age. The other group comprises teenagers, who find it extremely difficult to break into the work force.

Although in general terms the government's rhetoric gives confidence to those people in our society who find themselves out of work, until such time as it comes up with concrete programs and proposals the government will continue to fail to support its argument that it has achieved economic prosperity for all Victorians.

The third main objective in the Governor's speech was that:

... the government will step up its already successful efforts to provide a safe and healthy lifestyle for Victorians.

What bunkum! Honourable members have heard the opposition spokesperson on police matters refer to statistics that show that crime is increasing and say the police force is underresourced, with resultant consequences for the community. I will concentrate not on the safety and policing aspects referred to by the Governor but on the health aspect. To my astonishment the Governor referred to the government's claiming as one of its achievements the recent opening of the \$70 million Epping Hospital, saying that it provides firm evidence of the government's success in delivering services to Victorians — in this case the people in the northern suburbs.

When I sat on the other side of the house I argued on numerous occasions that this hospital should be built. It is clear that were it not for the Kimer Labor government committing itself in 1992 to establishing the Epping Hospital this facility would never have materialised. The then shadow Minister for Health, Marie Tehan, categorically attacked the decision and on coming to government set up a review to establish whether the decision and the chosen location in Cooper Street were appropriate. Despite the efforts of the then Minister for Health to scrap it, the surveys conducted reached exactly the same conclusion as the previous government — that a facility was needed in the Plenty corridor growth area.

The unfortunate part is that in order to establish a facility at Epping to service the people of Epping, Mill Park, Thomastown and suburbs further afield like Broadmeadows and Craigieburn, as well as rural Victoria, PANCH had to be closed. As we all know, PANCH was providing an excellent service from Bell Street, Preston. The government has not provided the extra facilities that are necessary in a growth corridor but has simply closed one facility and relocated it somewhere else. Nevertheless, those of us who live in the far outer suburbs north of Melbourne welcomed the opening of the hospital on 2 February this year, and we hope the government will now continue to allocate the necessary recurrent funding so that the planned 250 beds can be provided.

In the short time that remains, I will refer to the fourth major objective in the Governor's speech:

... the government will work with the broader Victorian community on a range of fronts to create a more confident and cohesive society.

I hope it will do so because until now the government has been acting in a way that can be described only as divisive by creating a society splintered into two levels — the haves, who seem to be given more and more, and the have-nots, like the people I represent, who are given less and less.

It is interesting to note that as part of its program the government will concentrate on drugs, alcohol abuse, homelessness and youth suicide. I again accuse the government of mere rhetoric because when the government had the opportunity to do something about drugs it did not make the hard decision. Again, the Premier has been ready to play up the issue of youth suicide but has done very little about allocating money to address the problem. The results of the \$100 million so-called Turning the Tide program and the confidence he has expressed about money from the Community Support Fund being available to address the problems

in those areas remain to be seen in an electorate like Mill Park. Like most other electorates, Mill Park suffers from those debilitating problems. We would like to get our fair share of the cake in Mill Park and, indeed, in the City of Whittlesea.

I was flabbergasted to see another glossy brochure circulated last week, which announces the new winter power bonus to be paid to households and which on the same page details some \$2.17 billion in savings that have been made by Victorians. It is another exercise by the government to try to hoodwink people.

Last Friday a constituent of mine expressed disbelief at the blatantly fraudulent accounting used to achieve that figure. The government tells us it will give us \$120 million in reductions in electricity prices and achieve a \$180 million saving on the state deficit, yet it fails to tell us that it introduced the state deficit levy and increased gas and power charges by much more than the \$60 that is supposed to be rebated.

The government is about to deliver the budget. If it is fair dinkum the first thing it will do is look Victorians in the eye and say that, as a token of its appreciation for the hardships they have suffered, over the next three years it will refund the \$100 levies taken from every household. In my opinion it is unlikely that the government will do so.

Mr TREASURE (Gippsland East) — In speaking in the debate on the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech on the occasion of the opening of the second session of the 53rd Parliament I congratulate Sir James Gobbo on his elevation to the office of Governor. I am confident that he will fulfil his role with great ability and dignity.

Since 1992 the Kennett government has made great progress in managing Victoria. I have been proud to have been part of that reform process. I look forward to continuing to help make the state a progressive and vibrant place in which Victorians can look forward to a secure and good future, in which their children will know they will have opportunities and in which businesses can invest knowing full well that the state is well run and well managed.

I will touch on a number of issues. One of the vital factors affecting the state is education policy. I am pleased that since 1992 great changes have occurred in the schools in my electorate. Improvements in facilities for staff, pupils and school communities in general are beginning to come through in the results of children as they move into the workplace or on to higher education.

In 1992 the former government took an unsustainable course in many areas, and its education policies were no exception. There was a schools maintenance backlog of the order of \$640 million. I remember distinctly going to Bairnsdale West Primary School — the largest primary school in my electorate, with some 680 children — and seeing the run-down state of the buildings following neglect of maintenance for a large number of years.

Today it is difficult to recognise it as the same school. It has been refurbished, and as a result the students, staff and others involved with the school have a changed attitude towards it — they are proud to be part of the school. It is a more pleasant place for students to work and learn in and for staff members to teach in. There are a number of schools throughout the electorate, all of which have experienced major changes. The way the situation has been tackled and improvements have been brought about is a credit to both the Minister for Education and his predecessor.

I may have mentioned previously that probably throughout the years of the Cain-Kirner government the Paynesville Primary School was on the replacement list, yet nothing was ever achieved. I am delighted to report that a new school is presently under construction and that the pupils will move in later this year. It will be a much improved facility. The old school needed a vast amount of work and was not up to being repaired. As happens with old cars, sometimes buildings get to a point when it is no longer worth spending more money on them.

The old school was also on a confined block and had insufficient space. The town has grown over the past couple of decades and has become not only a popular holiday destination but also a very popular place for people to live permanently. Paynesville now has a population of more than 2000.

A couple of days ago the shadow minister for education and training talked about school closures and mentioned the Dargo Primary School in my electorate. What he said was a careless treatment of the truth and I would like to set the record straight. He implied that when the attendance fell below the required number it was closed by a ruthless department that cared not at all for either the students or the school community.

The truth is that during the last months of last year the school was down to one permanent and two part-time students. The department kept the school open for the duration of that year and was prepared to do a review at the beginning of the 1998 school year. Unfortunately

the school had only one pupil left at the beginning of this year and could not be kept open.

During last year it was not uncommon for the school to have more staff than students. For the shadow minister to allege that the government does not care about education, neglects or forgets isolated areas or does not look after small schools is completely wrong. Dargo Primary School is an excellent example of that.

There has been enormous change and improvement in the delivery of health services right across Victoria. The Bairnsdale Regional Health Service has revitalised the hospital facility in Bairnsdale, which services a large area and is pivotal in delivering an efficient health service to the area. I do not have the figures in front of me but I estimate that probably in excess of \$6 million has been spent at that hospital during the past five years.

A little more than 100 kilometres further east, the hospital at Orbost has a multi-care campus that offers all the various health services delivered by government. A large amount has been spent in refurbishing the old building, and \$3.5 million has been spent to ensure that Orbost does not lack a health service that any community could be proud of.

The honourable member for Mill Park talked about the closure of hospitals, mentioning the Preston and Northcote Community Hospital. I would like to talk about the Latrobe Valley Regional Hospital because it is in a similar situation to hospitals in other areas. The ALP has campaigned vigorously in central Gippsland to denounce the building of a new hospital in the Latrobe Valley that will result in the closure of the old Traralgon and Moe hospitals. However, the new Latrobe Valley Regional Hospital, which is three parts constructed and which will provide far better health facilities, will be approximately midway between Traralgon and Moe.

With one good modern facility it is possible not only to justify the technical equipment, the rooms and the various items that are needed but also to attract highly qualified people to the area, which is what it is all about in the Latrobe Valley.

The Latrobe Valley will have a far better health service in the near future when the new hospital opens because it will not only have better facilities and a more modern building but will attract the best specialists from Melbourne and other areas.

That is very important for Gippslanders. People who currently need to travel to Melbourne for complex operations will now be able to go to the new Latrobe

Valley hospital. It is certainly not a step backward; it is a step forward in the delivery of better health services. It is part of the plan of this government in the Latrobe Valley, and Gippsland residents are the winners because of it.

The Mitchell River is central to issues that are important to the electorate I represent. It is the largest river in Gippsland, the largest untapped river in Victoria and the provider of a rich and fertile valley along the Mitchell River flat. There is a great deal of horticulture and dairying in that area. Vegetables grown for direct export include asparagus, broccoli and carrots which are exported by air freight to Japan. For the local market the area produces brassica crops such as cabbages and cauliflowers, beans, corn and a whole range of other crops too numerous to mention.

In 1983 when the previous Labor government came to power it stopped the construction of a dam on which work had already commenced. The dam was to be constructed on the Mitchell River at Angus Vale and would have provided some security of water supply to the industries on the river. I hope some day that project will start up again because there is potential to create another Goulburn Valley if a large enough scheme were undertaken. The area between Stratford and Bairnsdale and between the Avon and Mitchell rivers, which would amount to tens of thousands of hectares, could be made into an irrigation area and turned over to high-value horticulture crops rather than being used to raise dryland merino sheep and beef cattle. I believe there is a great opportunity for such a project to go ahead in the future, but first we need to ensure better security for investors in the vegetable growing industry and other industries in the valley and to promote employment and general growth in the region.

The government has taken significant steps in regional and rural Victoria to improve the quality of water. The minister has given a commitment that by the year 2001 the vast majority of water supplies in country Victoria will be up to World Health Organisation standards. Not many people realise that in 1992 when the coalition came to government a considerable number of communities did not have water supplies that met standard WHO requirements. This meant that many people in country Victoria were drinking substandard water and that sewage effluent was not being properly disposed of.

I congratulate the government on having recently allocated \$400 million to country Victoria towards providing effluent disposal works and better quality water for country Victorians. In the East Gippsland

electorate some \$17 million has been allocated to provide better sewage disposal and better water supplies to many of the small towns that need it. Omeo is a case in point. I recall vividly on many occasions when staying in Omeo seeing a sign in the motel saying something like, 'Please do not drink the water' or 'Please boil the water before drinking'. That sign no longer exists in the motel or at the various overnight places in Moe because the water supply has been fixed.

Together with East Gippsland Water the government provided some \$3.5 million, an amount that a small community could never raise for itself, but there was a determination to ensure that this small community would have the best possible standard of water. A new water supply was found in Butchers Creek and a new processing, filtration and treatment plant was put in. The happy result is that Omeo now has a water supply that is second to none and it can look forward to attracting further investment and so have stronger confidence in its future.

Omeo now also has a new sewerage scheme. Omeo is north of the Great Dividing Range, and if the watershed goes north the vital headwaters of the Murray River will not be mixed with insufficiently treated sewage.

Mallacoota, a town at the extreme end of my electorate, has a population of about 1000. Anyone who is fortunate enough to have been there will know that it is a very attractive place. The water supply there was also of insufficiently high standard, but about \$1.5 million later the townspeople now have a new and better quality water supply. No longer does water the colour of weak tea come out when a tap is turned on.

The water is now crystal clear and of the best quality. That will be very important for Mallacoota's further development because it is not only a popular tourist destination but also an important centre for the processing of food for export — of course, we cannot afford to have our food processing industries using substandard water to wash the food.

Orbost is about to undertake a similar transformation of its water supply. East Gippsland Water is working on the scheme so that the Orbost water supply can also be upgraded. It is important to realise this is often one of the more difficult tasks to be undertaken and many people in the wider community do not appreciate the water quality. In fact, most people do not even think about the quality of the water they and their families consume every day, so long as it looks reasonably clear when it comes out of the tap and the price does not increase. It is time that governments of all persuasions across Australia tackled these issues, as the Victorian

government has done. We now have the best standard water anywhere in Australia.

It is important to note the improvements in the road system in country Victoria over the past five years, particularly in my electorate. The Princes Highway is the vital arterial road that links Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne to areas in my electorate. Therefore it is the main artery where the heaviest traffic flows occur. Over the past five years the road system has been dramatically improved and there has been a further fall in the road toll. There is a direct relationship between the road toll and road safety and the quality of the roads.

Many new bridges have been constructed in the area. They are a key issue in East Gippsland. The shire has a large area of unrateable land and has financial difficulty in maintaining all its bridges. I congratulate the Minister for Roads and Ports for helping to address the issue. He has realised the need for government recognition of areas where there is heavy logging traffic and an inadequate number of rateable properties. This government has done that.

In particular, a number of bridges that are vital to the whole road system in East Gippsland have been replaced in recent years. There is an old saying that if the road is full of potholes traffic can still get along, but if the bridge falls down everything stops. However, members of the general public give very little recognition to the importance of bridges. Usually motorists drive across them in a few seconds, so the average person does not think twice about the bridges. However, they are expensive infrastructure. There are many old bridges across Victoria, particularly in East Gippsland. It covers a huge mountainous area in reasonably high rainfall country, so it has many rivers that need to be bridged, and the shire has many bridges to maintain.

Over the years it has been attractive for governments to seal a few miles of road rather than replacing a bridge, which represents a very short section, because people can appreciate a new stretch of road. So long as people can get over a bridge they do not really think about its condition or whether they might be able to cross it in a year's time.

Midway through its second term in office the government is well on the way to where it wants to be in setting this state right. I know opposition members appreciate that point, even though they feel obliged to say otherwise. There will be more reforms in the next couple of years, the remainder of this term of

government, and I congratulate the government on its efforts.

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — I congratulate the Governor and Lady Gobbo on their appointment to their auspicious positions in this state. I congratulate them on behalf of many Victorians for their hospitality and the gracious manner in which they have performed their duties. I also congratulate the Governor on keeping a straight face when he read his address last Tuesday.

I attended the opening of the second session of the 53rd Parliament and was left wondering why we needed to spend so much money on the pomp, ceremony and grandeur for the opening when the Premier used that occasion to tell us he wished to set a new direction and that he was now warm and cuddly and wanted to look after Victorians. Words are cheap, but the pomp, ceremony and grandeur of that day were not.

If the Premier wanted to show he had a different view of government or display to the Victorian community how his government had changed direction he could have done that simply by introducing into Parliament legislation that focused on people and the needs of the Victorian community and resurrected the true role of government — that is, to look after Victorian citizens and to reaffirm there are citizens in Victoria and not just customers of this state. Actions speak louder than words and Victorians need deeds, not words, from the Premier.

I shall nominate just one area where I believe the Premier should have shown the way his government was redirecting its attention to the citizens of Victoria. I speak of family services. Every family in this state has a fundamental right to live with dignity and to be provided with decent services. Victorians require basic standards for their health, community services, jobs and education. Those things should be readily available. People should not have to beg for the means they need to live with the government's support.

In contrast to the coalition, Labor puts the needs of families as a top priority. Families in Victoria are neglected and alienated by the Kennett government. The particular area that I shall focus on is early intervention, which is a service provided — or that should be provided — for all Victorian children aged 0 to 6 years who have a disability. They are children who have autism, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis or Down syndrome. They and their families need the support of early intervention services, which this government has failed miserably to provide.

In the past couple of weeks I have had the experience of ringing around the state's early intervention services to determine where a family that came into my office could access services. They needed early intervention because their four-year-old child suffers severe autism. He requires speech therapy, educational support and special skills that would be taught in an early intervention program. The family could not get those services anywhere in Melbourne's north, and they were in diabolical straits. When their son was diagnosed with autism they had to wait nine months for access to the Broad Insight Group in Broadmeadows.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER — Order! Under sessional orders the time for the adjournment of the house has now arrived.

Sports betting inquiry

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Dandenong) — I raise with the Minister for Sport the ongoing bungling by his office of the government inquiry into sports betting. About 12 months ago the minister established a three-member panel to investigate all aspects of sports betting in Victoria. The main aim of the inquiry was to make the state service providers more competitive in offering sports betting services.

Sports betting is a growing industry in Victoria. The government is losing considerable revenue to Vanuatu and the Northern Territory rather than having Victorians' betting dollars stay in this state.

In October last year the panel handed its report to the minister, but he has refused to release it. I understand the minister is hiding behind the excuse that the recommendations affect national competition policy and that the report will be considered later.

The minister should certainly be aware that future betting practices hinge on the report. His continuing procrastination and indecision about sports betting in Victoria is not doing the industry any good. Tabcorp, sporting organisations and the Victorian Bookmakers Association made submissions to the inquiry in good faith. But the minister, representing a government that says it has a can-do image, has shown that image to be a myth. He is incapable of making a decision on sports betting in the interests of the state. The minister must be aware that the inquiry has cost Victorian taxpayers a substantial amount of money and his delay means the state is losing additional revenue.

The government should explain the real reasons for its delay in releasing the report. The minister should detail to the house the cost of the inquiry and release the report so Victorians can make up their own minds about sports betting. The minister should tell Victorians what has happened and not continue to let down bookies and sporting organisations which are struggling hard to gain revenue from sports betting. They are losing out to companies such as National Sportsbet which has been doing a lousy job.

Rather than being the minister for having a good time the Minister for Sport should run his portfolio properly and do the right thing by sporting organisations which, in a tight funding environment, are interested in earning revenue from sports betting — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Rail: graffiti

Mr COLEMAN (Bennettswood) — I raise with the Minister for Transport the removal of graffiti from particularly fixed railway property. I acknowledge that much of the graffiti present on transport vehicles some years ago has been removed, but it has not been removed from the fixed structures along railway lines in my electorate and probably in other electorates.

A number of public facilities and factories bordering the Glen Waverley railway line between Mount Waverley and Holmesglen stations are covered by large slabs of graffiti. It also adorns many bridges over the railway line. The minister should consider approaching some community service groups which, I am sure, would be interested in participating in a public program to remove the graffiti. Such a program would have the same good result as occurred when the state's rolling stock was similarly treated.

If the constant attention given to the removal of graffiti from the rolling stock — the outcome of which is that it is not reinfested with graffiti — were applied to the fixed structures along the railway tracks, I am sure the same result could be achieved.

I seek the involvement of the Minister for Transport in removing the graffiti from and repainting the Lawrence Road, Stephensons Road and Huntingdale Road railway bridges in my electorate. The removal of the graffiti would significantly enhance not only those bridges but the general environment. I ask the minister whether the graffiti can be removed from the fixed structures along the railway line so that patrons can enjoy the same improved service that has been provided to the users of the rolling stock.

Recycling: waste management inquiry

Ms GARBUTT (Bundoora) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Conservation and Land Management an inquiry by the honourable member for Prahran into metropolitan waste management and recycling.

I ask the minister to extend the March deadline of the inquiry to allow a realistic consideration of the issues; to produce a fully researched discussion paper with several options and to allow informed debate and comment on them; and to initiate a review of recycling in rural and regional Victoria, which the inquiry does not address.

Rumours abound that the minister has a secret agenda and that this inquiry is a sham and a cover for the minister's chosen option, which will suddenly emerge after a flimsy investigation process. The honourable member for Prahran gave the game away at a meeting with local government bodies this month when she said, 'The minister has the way forward'. I seek the minister's assurance that the inquiry is genuine and that local government in particular is not being conned. At another meeting with local government CEOs on 10 February, the honourable member agreed to issue an options paper. I ask the minister to hold her to that and to extend the deadline until the release date of the options paper.

This is an important issue for local councils and their ratepayers. The kerbside recycling scheme is in crisis. It now costs metropolitan local councils \$25 million a year — and the cost is rising — as recycling contractors face further pricing cuts for recycled products. From July this year the ACI will reduce the price of glass by another \$5 a tonne.

There is a deep mistrust of the inquiry. People are suspicious that the minister has a business in the wings that is waiting to be given a contract to run all the recycling for most of Melbourne — or a large slice of it. That would do away with the local government and the regional waste management groups that have developed our kerbside recycling system.

An options paper should be issued to allow discussions of a range of options so that Melburnians will not find their local recycling program suddenly handed over to the minister's favourite big business operator. The MAV, which supports that position, sent a letter to local councils saying:

The March deadline is considered quite inadequate ...

The options paper should set out the full implications of the options which are included ... It is critical that there should be a full and open process of discussion of the options paper with stakeholders following its publication.

That is the process the MAV suggests. The minister should give an undertaking that that is the process that will be followed.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Psychiatric services: border anomalies

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — I ask the Attorney-General to raise with the Minister for Health in another place the provision of acute psychiatric services to New South Wales residents attending Victorian doctors. There are a number of twin towns in northern Victoria that are separated by the Murray River — Albury-Wodonga, Yarrowonga-Mulwala, Cobram-Barooga, Echuca-Moama, Swan Hill and the hinterland, and Mildura-Wentworth.

In each case the Victorian town or city is the business and commercial centre servicing the town or district north of the River Murray. People from New South Wales cross the border to engage in commerce, to visit the butcher, the baker, the supermarket and the professions — doctors, lawyers and accountants — and for services provided by the garages, builders and plumbers. With the exception of the Albury-Wodonga area, in most cases health services are provided by Victoria. New South Wales residents attend Victorian doctors and present at Victorian hospitals. That is understandable as those New South Wales residents shop in Victorian towns, purchase their goods and services and attend doctors. That is fine for acute health care because under the Medicare agreement people can present at any hospital and not be denied treatment; but whether the hospital is paid for that service is another thing. Echuca Regional Health is out of pocket to the tune of about \$22 000 a year, which is bad enough.

Mental health is the real problem — for instance, a person may attend a doctor in the nearest town, which in this case is Echuca. Last week a patient presented in Echuca with an acute psychiatric episode; the patient was attending a doctor in Echuca but was not able to be admitted to the Bendigo psychiatric hospital. In this case the patient had to go to either Wagga Wagga or Albury. Both hospitals are more than 3 hours' travelling time away and are poorly serviced by public transport, which causes great inconvenience to family, friends and the treating GP. I appreciate these cross-border issues are longstanding and difficult to resolve. In this case it

seems relatively simple: where facilities are available in Victoria, New South Wales purchases the services from Victoria, and vice versa. In mental health that is not happening.

I ask the Minister for Health to raise this matter with his New South Wales counterpart at the earliest possible opportunity with a view to resolving once and for all this crazy situation. It causes great distress to patients, their families and their treating doctors.

Schools: Education Line

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I raise with the Minister for Education the gross inadequacy of the Education Line currently being promoted through the daily newspapers at great expense to taxpayers. I call upon the minister to scrap the service, which is providing taxpayers with no benefit whatsoever. The service operates via a series of recorded messages so that anyone looking for advice on when school terms start and finish might receive that information through a recorded message.

If people in Mitcham want advice on the realities of education in Victoria — for example, how much money has been ripped out of the system over the past few years, the growth in class sizes, or even the problems with the maintenance budget backlog — they will not receive that information by listening to messages. Instead, they will have to wait for an operator to come on board. Three times last week my office staff called the line to test how efficient it was. After waiting 12 minutes for an operator they gave up in frustration.

The minister supplements the information service with other sources of advice. One of those is a press release he issued last week after paying a very quick visit to Mitcham — and I am pleased he has rediscovered where Mitcham is! The press release announced an upgrade to the Mitcham Primary School for toilets and lighting. No dollar figure was appropriated for the upgrade. Nonetheless, it is pleasing the minister is following my suggestion — together with the suggestions of other opposition members — that schools in Mitcham need some attention.

Unfortunately, the minister could not quite get it right. The press release is dated Thursday, 18 February, when in fact last Thursday was 19 February. I suggest the minister may need to go back to remedial classes. While he is there he might do us all the service of scrapping the Education Line and putting those funds where they might do some good: into the classrooms

and schools of Victoria which have been so badly neglected by the Kennett government.

Firearms: registration

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I refer the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to legislative changes to the operation of the Firearms Act. Changes were implemented following the catastrophe in Tasmania and work was undertaken by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to achieve an appropriate outcome in Victoria. The minister indicated that the provisions would be reviewed when and if required.

I wish to bring to the minister's attention the problems experienced by many people regarding the detail — it is a document of 15 or 16 pages — required in applying for firearms licences. My constituents have complained and expressed concern about this, and I seek accurate information from the minister about when changes will be implemented to make the act more effective in its operation and to allow genuine firearms owners and legitimate shooters to apply for licences in the most appropriate manner.

I also request information on how the firearms registry is handling the registration of firearms. Concerns have been expressed to me over a long period about that issue, particularly under the administration of the previous government. If the minister provided the latest information regarding applications for licences and the operation of the registry system that would be of great assistance to firearms owners in my electorate and to people seeking to register firearms generally.

Parliament House: fundraising activities

Mr BATCHELOR (Thomastown) — I direct a matter to the attention of the Premier as the minister responsible for the Audit Act. I ask that the Premier inform the Auditor-General of the extraordinary and illegal events which took place in Parliament House tonight. The Auditor-General audits the accounts of the Parliament, and the misappropriation of parliamentary resources needs his urgent attention.

Tonight in room K a fundraising function was held in strict contradiction to the guidelines originally issued by the Speaker for the use of room K and other parliamentary facilities. It was originally intended that the rooms and gardens should not be used for fundraising purposes. A member of the Liberal Party tonight conducted such a function in room K. I saw an auction for a dozen bottles of wine — —

Mr Leigh — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance. I understand the Premier has no control over the precincts of Parliament House and that any approach in that regard would be made by you, Sir. I seek your advice as to whether this matter should be addressed to you or the Premier.

Mr BATCHELOR — On the point of order, Mr Speaker, I asked the Premier, who is responsible for the Audit Act and not for what happens in Parliament House, to request the Auditor-General to investigate what is going on. The Auditor-General has the powers of investigation and he should carry out an investigation of the parliamentary accounts which he audits.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member is referring to guidelines as laid down by the Speaker, but I am not sure which Speaker said that fundraising cannot take place in room K. It is news to me!

If he is raising the matter as a rule of Parliament laid down by a Speaker of Parliament, the matter should be raised with me. If it is a matter for which the Auditor-General or the Premier has responsibility, rightly he should raise it with the Premier. I find it hard to understand how a matter which, as the member says, is under my administration is under the administration of the Premier. Therefore, I uphold the point of order.

Schools: calculators

Mr E. R. SMITH (Glen Waverley) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Education the use of calculators in schools. Recently in the United Kingdom calculators have been banned because it is believed young people are not getting the opportunity of properly using their mental gifts. I am checking with the minister whether the situation that is occurring in the UK, where young people are losing the ability to use mental arithmetic, is occurring in Victoria. Over many years in many parts of the world young people have been using calculators and they have been denied the opportunity of exercising their own ability to mentally multiply, divide and so on.

Recently in the UK many subjects have been scrapped from the compulsory education programs, particularly in primary schools, except for those concerning literacy and numeracy. Before the election of the Labour government in the UK — I note that the honourable member for Dandenong is sitting at the table and he was in the UK when the Labour Party was elected to government so he may be able to confirm this for me — one of the great products of the UK education system had been the raising of its standards.

In Victoria the education system has been enhanced by many of the measures brought in by the coalition government. One of those has been to improve the ability of young people to use their own talents, imagination and ability to do mental arithmetic. I suggest that the minister examine the use of calculators in primary schools because if calculators were banned as they have been in the UK our young people would be obliged to use their own mental ability and other forms of mathematical assessment to do their calculations.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Rail: Lara boom gates

Mr LONEY (Geelong North) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Transport the operation of the boom gates at the railway crossing at Lara. Last Sunday at around 4.00 p.m. the boom gates came down, the lights started flashing and the bells started ringing, and that is how they remained for about an hour. During that time a huge amount of traffic lined up behind the gates. People started to drive across the railway crossing while the boom gates were lowered, and during that time three or four trains went through the crossing. It was a dangerous practice.

Local residents tell me that this is not an uncommon occurrence at the crossing and that has been confirmed today in checks with the stationmaster and Lara police. I am informed that while it happens in waves it can be as frequently as six or seven times a month. It seems the problem is vandalism. Local people vandalise the switches and the boom gates, causing them to open in this way. Some people have discovered that if they close the circuit that controls the switches that are normally tripped by the trains they may stay in this condition for some time. This is dangerous for pedestrians and cars using this major crossing on a busy standard gauge line that takes heavy train traffic.

I ask the minister to investigate the matter to see whether there is some way of protecting the switches from constant vandalism and providing protection for trains, cars and pedestrian traffic using the crossing to avoid an unfortunate accident and possible loss of life.

Trams: shelters

Ms BURKE (Pahran) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Transport the lack of tram shelters and seats in my electorate, which is well served by the multi-modal system of trains, trams and buses.

I refer the minister to the corner of Kelvin Grove and High Street, Prahran, where a large hospital which has a number of day operations, a radiology clinic and other services is located. Many elderly people frequent the area and use public transport to travel to and from the hospital. Many people attend the church on the northern side of High Street and both areas would be better serviced if shelters were constructed there. Although the electorate has many bus and tram stops some areas are more frequently used by public transport users, and this area is an anchor point for people who catch public transport into the city. The southern side of the street is subject to hot northerly winds and a shelter or cover for elderly people frequenting that side of the street would be much appreciated.

The area is well serviced, but I ask the minister to examine whether shelters can be constructed on either side of High Street, on the corner of Kelvin Grove, which services the no. 6 tram. The community would be protected from the rain in winter and sun in summer and the shelters would also provide comfort to people using the church, the hospital and the shopping centre. People would be able to sit and enjoy the beautiful surroundings and historic buildings of Prahran in comfort while being protected from the sun and the rain. I look forward to hearing the minister's response.

Old Calder Highway-Bonfield Street intersection

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Transport, who is the representative in this house of the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Old Calder Highway and Bonfield Street intersection in Keilor.

The SPEAKER — Order! The time for raising matters has expired.

Responses

Mr W. D. McGRATH (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — The honourable member for Murray Valley raised a matter concerning firearm applications. The first application form produced by the police was extensive, comprising up to 14 pages. After consultation with a number of people in the industry the police reduced the form to about five pages of information needed to ensure that all the details are accurate.

The National Exchange on Police Information, a national database, will have all the information on its database when the new form is available, which will

enable firearm owners to make their applications and get their responses in good time.

The honourable member referred to the problems some of his constituents are having in obtaining advice about the processing of their applications. I suggest that he provide me with the details of those involved and I will have the matter examined. I am sure the difficulties can be overcome.

The Firearms Act is working well and I hope the amendments that have been introduced will give a proper and sensible balance to the firearm industry. All the changes remain within the national uniformity guidelines that were agreed to on 10 May 1996.

Mr COOPER (Minister for Transport) — I thank the honourable member for Geelong North for raising with me a safety issue associated with the boom gates at Lara. Local residents have raised the issue with the police because the boom gates are being subjected to vandalism. They are blocking traffic, and vehicles are attempting to manoeuvre to get around them. I will take up the issue with the Public Transport Corporation as a matter of urgency to see what can be done.

The honourable member for Keilor sent his regards to the Minister for Roads and Ports, and I will pass that on.

The honourable member for Prahran raised with me the need for a tram shelter at the corner of High Street and Kelvin Grove in Prahran. The honourable member represents her constituency in a caring way and puts forward a good case for the tram shelter requirements at that intersection. I am aware of the area and tomorrow will raise the matter with the Public Transport Corporation and the contractors who install tram shelters on behalf of the corporation to see what can be done in the near future.

The honourable member for Bennettswood raised the matter of graffiti on railway property. Honourable members will be aware that in 1992 when the Kennett government came to power it put a high priority on the removal of graffiti from the public transport system. The program gave precedence to the removal of graffiti from rolling stock. The proof of the program's effectiveness can be measured every day, because it is now rare to see graffiti on the outside of trains. It is seen only occasionally — unfortunately, it is usually during school holidays. There is now far less graffiti inside trains than there was years ago. That is a tribute to the work of the train cleaners, who have discovered a method of removing the graffiti that eats into the plastic

walls of Comeng trains in particular. I also paid tribute to the fine work they do last year.

The greater confidence of the travelling public is reflected by the increased numbers who are using our trains. The graffiti on rolling stock and on public property certainly affected people's confidence. In particular, the graffiti that covered the outside of trains sent a clear signal that the Public Transport Corporation and the government were not in control of the system and that the hoons, galahs and vandals were. The 4 per cent increase in patronage each year for the past three years shows that when problems are attacked properly and a government is determined to improve things, people will come back to the system. Safety, reliability and cleanliness are important factors. The elimination of graffiti has been one of the many public transport success stories of the government.

The honourable member for Bennettswood raised the issue of graffiti on railway bridges and fixed structures along the lines. In particular, he drew my attention to the railway bridge at Mount Waverley. I would be more than happy to inspect that railway bridge and the rest of the fixed structures along the line with the honourable member to see what can be done.

Surprisingly, it is more difficult to eliminate or control graffiti on fixed structures than on rolling stock, but we will address the issue. Much of the graffiti on fixed structures along railway lines is not on public transport property but on adjoining private property, which takes it completely out of the hands of the PTC. However, I will be happy to have a look at the bridges and other fixed structures in the railway's preserve with the honourable member.

I thank the honourable member for Bennettswood for raising the issue because it needs to be addressed not only by the government and the Public Transport Corporation but by local community groups. If local communities start to take pride in their local railway stations and the railway property that runs through their communities, something effective will occur. But if it is left to the PTC and the government to address the issue, I point out that we cannot be there all the time. Local communities can do something about the problem.

I encourage community groups throughout the metropolitan area to take a greater interest in railway property than they have in the past. The stationeers program is one instance of local community groups doing just that — and I encourage people to extend that interest to the land around railway lines. If local community groups get fired up about it, I am sure we will be able to address the problem the honourable

member for Bennettswood has brought to the attention of the house.

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Conservation and Land Management) — The honourable member for Bundoora raised the matter of kerbside recycling and the involvement of the honourable member for Prahran as chairperson of a review I instigated following complaints and concerns raised by local government about stresses in the kerbside recycling program, primarily because of the decline in prices for the buying back of recyclable products.

In part the problem is the result of the remarkable success of the program of recycling in Melbourne. To a certain degree we are the victims of our own success. Recent research shows that approximately 80 per cent of Melbourne householders are now recycling their paper, plastic and glass goods, and are running proper recycling programs. However, because of increases in the number of products available the difficulty has arisen that supply exceeds the demand.

The demand side of the program has been affected by the Asian meltdown and the inability of some Asian markets either to continue to take the products, especially paper products, or to provide appropriate letters of credit to enable the recyclers to on-sell surplus paper products. As the honourable member for Bundoora noted, it is of concern that ACI has been reducing its buyback price for glass, and some of the big PET and plastic manufacturers are similarly squeezing prices for taking back these products. It is a complex problem.

Matters that are beyond argument include the necessity to find a process that will enable ordinary householders to continue with their recycling programs.

Householders are committed to recycling, and it is a vital part of the whole environmental program. The problem is being addressed at a number of levels, including the national level. Through the ANZEC meeting state ministers, the Australian and New Zealand environment ministers and the National Environment Protection Council are considering the matter from a national perspective.

The New South Wales minister, Pam Allen, and I met in Melbourne two or three weeks ago to address what leadership roles we could both take to expedite outcomes from various task forces and groups set up at a national level. I have been particularly delighted that the Minister for Planning and Local Government and I have been able to call on the honourable member for Prahran, Leonie Burke, to look at ways of improving

the efficiency and effectiveness of the local government kerbside program in metropolitan Melbourne.

As honourable members would know, Leonie Burke is one of the best qualified persons we could have to do this review because she knows local government well. Some years back she headed the Local Government Board and certainly has the regard, respect and full confidence of people in local government at both council and officer level.

I have received a number of letters of congratulation, as has the Minister for Planning and Local Government, for taking the initiative of setting up this review and appointing Leonie Burke to chair it. She is working with representatives from the EPA and Ecorecycle, officers of the Minister for Planning and Local Government and other persons who can assist her. She has consulted widely with representatives of local government, regional waste management groups and people interested in the problems of recycling and waste disposal.

I am confident that the outcome of the work Leonie Burke is doing will put Victoria, with its emphasis on Melbourne at this stage, in the forefront —

The SPEAKER — Order! I should remind the minister that she should refer to members by their correct titles.

Mrs TEHAN — I apologise. The honourable member for Prahran will deliver a report that will put Victoria, through what is happening in Melbourne, in the vanguard of reforms of a system that has many strengths but, because of the matters I have outlined, is not yet viable.

The process involves consultation with local government and the community in general. A recommendation is expected from the honourable member for Prahran within the next four to six weeks. There is no doubt that local government, including the MAV, will be kept very much apprised of the work of the honourable member.

Mr GUDE (Minister for Education) — The honourable member for Mitcham raised several matters. The first related to a help line and the second to the date of a press release. If the honourable member had been in this place a little longer I would call his contribution to this debate puerile, juvenile and irrelevant. However, I will put it down to the fact that he is just plain new.

The government has outlined a range of areas where it has delivered quality outcomes to the broader

education community. The increase in education funding that has taken place since the Cain—Kimer years to the current year is some \$351 million. That is a 14.5 per cent increase — a real increase of 6.1 per cent — over the past five years. No matter what the honourable member, the Labor Party or the Australian Education Union says, that fact cannot be denied. Those increases have taken place.

Much is made of the so-called disparity between the traditional area of the ALP — the northern and western suburbs — and other people. I take real pride in the fact that the Kennett government contributes something like \$34.5 million annually to the students of underprivileged families in both those areas and right across the state, including regional Victoria. I know that is a little difficult for members of the Labor Party to understand. They have an end-of-tram-stop mentality that does not enable them to engage the rural community. Nonetheless many people across the state are disadvantaged. When referring to the date of a press release the honourable member remarked about funding I granted recently to a school in the Mitcham electorate. He endeavoured to suggest that I had made a new excursion into Mitcham. The honourable member should know that that is not the case. One of these days, closer to an election, I might release a recent letter I received from the honourable member for Mitcham. The language in that letter does neither him nor the Australian Labor Party any credit. It may well see the light of day a little closer to an election.

The reality is that this government has taken over following the disgraceful neglect of the Cain—Kimer years and is currently committing \$1 billion — \$1000 million — towards upgrading schools. The government has done such a good job that schools that have not quite reached the top of the list also want to be part of it, and that is as it should be. Unlike the Labor Party, this government will deal with those matters with fairness, equity and justice. Its approach will not be based on political patronage which the honourable member opposite seeks and which his party sought to its distinct detriment when in office.

With respect to literacy, the honourable member suggests people have had difficulty getting through during phone-ins. I can understand his embarrassment. All honourable members, a substantial number of members of the education community and increasing numbers of the broader community understand that literacy and numeracy standards were above the national average in the 1970s before they crashed in the 1980s and early 1990s in the terrible Cain-Kimer years when the trogs currently running the Australian Education Union ran education into the ground. The

previous Labor government had to filch — 'siphon', I think, was the word used earlier today — funds from other areas simply to meet its daily obligation: the payment of salaries to decent teachers who did not deserve to be sold out. According to newspaper reports some of the funds came from the former State Electricity Commission.

The difference is that under this government, without any approach from the Australian Education Union — I know it is an embarrassment to the honourable member and to the Labor Party and an even bigger embarrassment to the Australian Education Union — teachers have received a 15.9 per cent increase since July 1995. That was not paid as a result of a claim by the union but was a consequence of the government's appreciation of the quality of service being delivered by teachers within the Victorian education system. I do not think there will be any problem.

Other very important issues include the \$140 million that has been provided to help students who have special needs, something that those on this side of the house and all caring and decent Victorians take great pride in but those on the other side of the house — obviously including the new honourable member for Mitcham — want to pour cold water on. This is a clear commitment. It is not a small increase but a very significant increase in our commitment to this area, meeting World Health Organisation standards to assess students with disabilities and impairments who might need extra funding.

It is a cruel hoax by the new member for Mitcham that he would want to bring this matter before the house at this late hour in a most unsavoury fashion. If he were genuinely a new member, one might have expected it and have said, as the honourable member for Murray Valley has, 'He does not understand; he is new' — but he was in fact a political apparatchik; he has worked for the Leader of the Opposition. When the honourable member was making his remarks earlier it was interesting to observe that the honourable member for Williamstown was — I have to be careful how I say this — almost salivating at the experience of the support that he was obtaining from the honourable member for Mitcham. Obviously there is a very clear link between the member for Mitcham and the member for Williamstown.

The honourable member opposite is getting very excited about this but the reality is that we have a very clear link — an undermining of the Leader of the Opposition. I can understand the member's embarrassment about all of this but the reality is that here is this new, juvenile, puerile little man, an

apprentice, coming into the Parliament and pouring it all out for us all to see on the very first day.

The government also takes pride in the way in which it is tackling youth problems. In 1998 an additional \$16.8 million is being directed to government schools to provide student counselling, welfare and support services and to tackle youth service items.

I suppose next we will see the new member for Mitcham jumping up and making a fool of himself as comprehensively as the honourable member for Footscray did earlier today. He is not here now. He is never here — just like the Leader of the Opposition, who is never here. I have to visit schools in his electorate and I am starting to have to visit schools for the honourable member for Mitcham as well. It is an embarrassment for the Labor Party.

The reality is that the princely sum of \$40 000 has been retained out of all of the funds for youth suicide to ensure that the overheads, the payroll tax and so forth, of the administrative functions of more than \$8 million are retained. The rest of the funds are all out in the schools.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr GUDE — He was not right at all. No, what he said was that one-third of the funds had been siphoned. The government and the people of Victoria know that the Labor Party is the expert at siphoning. As I indicated earlier, it siphoned funds from other areas of government simply to pay teachers' salaries. What a disgrace! Do the people of Victoria want to go back to that? Does the honourable member for Mitcham want to go back to that? Does he take pride in that? Stand up and be counted because that is what you will be measured against; that is the benchmark. Victorians have not forgotten that the benchmark is the Guilty Party. The benchmark is the unfunded liability in debts that were generated by the appalling years of the Cain-Kimer government.

Some \$48.4 million is being spent to help all Victorian government school students study a language other than English. I can understand the honourable member being embarrassed if people cannot have access to the quality of that detail. Isn't it sad that every Victorian student in our primary and secondary schools is being given the opportunity of learning a second language? Isn't it sad that \$175 is being given for every child in our schools undertaking a language other than English? Wouldn't it be a shame if, having enabled students to learn a language other than English, we further enhanced the quality of our multicultural society and

made it even more tolerant and gave young people an advantage and an opportunity for a job into the future? It would be an absolute crying shame if there was not a help line to tell the truth about that!

Isn't it a shame that the people understand that the computer to student ratio is 1 to 7.5? That ratio is the envy of the entire world and is recognised by the leading people in information technology. It would be a crying shame if they were enabled to know that!

Isn't it a shame that people may learn about Net Days, and perhaps in the future the honourable member for Mitcham might care to do as all members on this side of the house have done in helping to wire schools —

Mr Pandazopoulos interjected.

Mr GUDE — The honourable member for Dandenong is talking about hot wiring. He says we are ripping them off. I guess that hot wiring is a term he and the ilk he moves with are familiar with. The government is concerned about providing information technology. The business community has committed funds and community volunteers, including me and other government members, are ensuring that the schools are wired. There is nothing second-hand; it is all brand new; all decent and above board. That is in contrast to the Labor Party — tired, old, has-been and irrelevant to the community.

The government considers factors such as the rate and relationship of students staying at school. In 1997 more than 8000 students were enrolled in vocational education and training programs in government secondary schools. Of the 1996 vocational education and training school graduates, 95 per cent had the opportunity for further education, training and employment.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr GUDE — Again, the knockers whine, carp, whinge and moan. The negativism of the yabbering jackals of the Labor Party is evident at the table. Because of the very high rate of youth unemployment I should have thought all Victorians would be proud of the changes that have taken place as a direct result of vocational education and training programs in our schools.

A total of 95 per cent of those kids will be able to go on to tertiary education, to university. Some of them would and some of them would not otherwise have done so. Only yesterday I attended a meeting of people from outside the Department of Education who are working with government — it is a bit strange for you

guys, I know that — to assist gifted students. A point they made to me of which I was not totally aware until yesterday was the number of gifted students in this program who are seeing the advantage of vocational education and training, and of course the kids then find their way into permanent jobs.

I should have thought the Labor Party and even the new member for Mitcham would want to celebrate that outstanding result — 95 per cent of students have the opportunity for further education, training and employment.

As I indicated earlier, the rate of pay for teachers is 15.9 per cent above what it was in 1995, with a starting rate that is above the rates that apply to other professional graduates. I know the members of the Labor Party are embarrassed by the fact that the government has been employing more than 1000 new university graduates in our schools. Isn't it a shame, something to be embarrassed about, that we have given jobs in government schools to young kids coming from our universities? Isn't it a shame that government schools have more kids in them now and are growing, unlike the situation during the Labor years? These are the sorts of things that the public in Victoria is becoming aware of; these are the sorts of things that the facts line is all about.

The new juvenile member for Mitcham would do well to sit down, close the mouth, open the ears and spend a bit of time listening and seeing what happens in this place. Might I suggest, lad, you do the same thing in your own electorate before you rush around continuing to make a fool of yourself.

In my enthusiasm and worry that we have gone beyond 11 o'clock and it might cost Parliament, I neglected the third answer. The honourable member for Glen Waverley, in his normal caring and considerate way, raised a question of broader education which related to the issue of numeracy. The honourable member was concerned, as I recall, about the way calculators are used in schools and that their use may prevent young people from gaining appropriate arithmetical understanding.

The honourable member points to developments in the United Kingdom. I am not sure that is going in the right direction. The developments in education in Victoria and indeed in Australia have been good. A look at the Australian Council of Education Research results in the numeracy area showed that the result for Victoria was high in the 1970s, crashed in the Cain and Kimer years and is again back up and doing quite well. It can always improve, but there is much to be proud of.

A part of the learning assessment program was to test the whole population in years 3 and 5. The government is currently benchmark testing years 7 and 9 on a pilot basis. One of the things that have come out of that undertaking of which all Victorians should be proud, and certainly I am, is the Keys to Life literacy program. We have also detected a need in the numeracy area and the people who are part of that unit are currently developing this year, for commencement next calendar year, some work in numeracy for youngsters who fall behind in that area.

The contribution from the honourable member for Glen Waverley was a very thoughtful one, as I might expect from him. I will certainly have a look at the matter he raised and if there is anything that can be done to further enhance the quality and outcomes of education, particularly the futures of young Victorians, I will not hesitate to do it.. I thank the honourable member for his contribution.

Dr NAPTHINE (Minister for Youth and Community Services) — The honourable member for Rodney raised with me, in my capacity as the representative in this place of the Minister for Health, the provision of acute psychiatric services in towns along the River Murray where there are major health services on the Victorian side of the border and potential clients on the New South Wales side. I recollect that arrangements were made in the Albury-Wodonga situation. Similar negotiations could be held on a broader scale with New South Wales to

assist those who live along the River Murray.

It is important that we put the interests of people first and provide the services that meet people's needs in their own communities. If that can be achieved by negotiating with the New South Wales government so that people from, say, the Moama region can access acute psychiatric services in Echuca, for example, we should try to make those arrangements. However, it is important that the Victorian hospital and health system receive adequate financial recompense from the New South Wales government to ensure the services are provided at an appropriate cost to the state of origin of the people accessing the service.

I shall take up with the Minister for Health the serious issue raised by the honourable member for Rodney, and I am sure the minister will pursue negotiations with his counterpart in New South Wales.

Mrs WADE (Attorney-General) — The honourable member for Dandenong raised for the attention of the Minister for Sport his belief that a report on sports betting has been prepared and suggested there was some delay in its release. He further suggested the delay was somehow related to competition policy. I cannot assist the honourable member in this matter, but I shall pass on his concerns to the Minister for Sport.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house stands adjourned until next day.

House adjourned 11.07 p.m.

Wednesday, 25 February 1998

The **SPEAKER** (Hon. S. J. Plowman) took the chair at 10.05 a.m. and read the prayer.

PETITIONS

The Clerk — I have received the following petitions for presentation to Parliament:

National Gallery water wall

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria sheweth that the water wall at the National Gallery of Victoria entrance is a Victorian icon and enjoys the recognition of all gallery users. Your petitioners, therefore pray that the water wall should be retained in any redesign of the National Gallery of Victoria.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mrs Maddigan (32 signatures)

Schools: nursing program

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria sheweth that we believe that the school nursing program provides an effective and efficient means of monitoring the health of children within Victorian primary schools.

We oppose the abolition or reduction of the school nursing program in the primary schools of Victoria.

Your petitioners therefore pray that the school nursing program is retained in all primary schools in Victoria.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr Savage (178 signatures)

Dental Practice Bill

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of the state of Victoria sheweth that the Dental Practice Bill 1998 has the potential to undermine the high ethical and professional standards required of dental care by removing the restrictions on who may practise in the provision of dental services to the community.

Your petitioners therefore pray that:

dental surgery or medicine be regulated to ensure that only qualified and registered dental operatives be allowed to practice; and

the restrictions on who may own dental practices be maintained.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr J. F. McGrath (271 signatures)

Laid on table.

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Mildura be considered next day on motion of Mr SAVAGE (Mildura).

PAPER

Laid on table by Clerk:

National Crime Authority — Report for the year 1996–97 (together with comments made on the Report by the Inter-Governmental Committee).

AUDIT AND WORKCOVER LEGISLATION

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I move:

That this house calls on the Kennett government to immediately introduce legislation to repeal the provisions put in place by the Audit (Amendment) Act 1997 and the Accident Compensation (Miscellaneous Amendment) Act 1997 as a result of the people of Mitcham voting overwhelmingly against the government's attacks on the independence of the Auditor-General and the legal rights of injured workers as evidenced by the massive 15.8 per cent swing against the Kennett government in the Mitcham by-election and the Premier's claims that he will be less arrogant and more consultative and listen to views of ordinary Victorians.

The motion is essentially about Mitcham and how the Premier lost the Mitcham by-election, but as I entered the house today I heard on the radio that Victoria has lost something else: next year the AFL Brownlow Medal will be presented in Sydney!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — It has been announced. Melbourne is getting the tiddlywinks championship but Sydney is getting the Brownlow Medal count! Unless the government does something about it, we will lose the AFL Grand Final in 2001. Melbourne is the home of AFL football and the count for and awarding of the Brownlow Medal is a Melbourne tradition. The count to decide the winner of that famous medal must be held in Melbourne. The announcement will be made in Sydney today by the Premier of New South Wales and Wayne Jackson of the AFL. Among other things, we have lost the Australian Film Institute awards to Sydney; we have lost the open — —

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — You wouldn't! Look at today's Age.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Tullamarine is interjecting out of his place, and the minister is being —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Bentleigh.

Mr BRUMBY — We are having a spirited debate! I will not respond to the interjections from the honourable member for Tullamarine, other than to say that he is not telling Parliament and his voters that as soon as he can get rid of Tom Reynolds he will jump ship and move to Gisborne!

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition, on the motion.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — The honourable member for Wimmera has come back into the house. Yesterday —

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition, on the motion.

Mr W. D. McGrath interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Billy, if I were you, I wouldn't be buying too many suits.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr W. D. McGrath interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will remain silent when the Chair is on his feet. The Leader of the Opposition should come back to the motion and get on with the serious business of Parliament.

Mr BRUMBY — I am endeavouring to return to the motion, but I am being provoked by the honourable member for Wimmera.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition has done that bit. I ask him to come back to the motion.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the honourable member for Bentleigh to cease interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — I wonder how many others will jump seats! The Mitcham by-election was a referendum on the Premier's leadership style and on his failure to deliver jobs, his failures in health and education, his changes to Workcover and his attacks on the independence of the Auditor-General. The people of Mitcham sent the Premier an almighty message about all those issues. There is no doubt that the Premier's leadership style is on the nose in Mitcham.

Yesterday it was obvious that someone else is calling the shots. We heard the Premier's announcement about the honourable member for Wimmera; we heard about the embarrassing backdown on the taxation cut for the high-rollers at Crown Casino; and we heard him announce that he was dumping his good friend Mr Atkinson as the Parliamentary Secretary for Planning and Local Government.

Despite all the new advertising agency-inspired rhetoric in the Governor's speech about social advances, the Premier has not learned anything from Mitcham. He has not changed his spots in any way; he is as arrogant as ever. If he had listened to the people of Mitcham and if he had changed his spots he would be repealing the changes to the Audit Act and restoring common-law rights for injured workers. Instead, since the Mitcham by-election —

Mrs Peulich — They are not issues anymore.

Mr BRUMBY — I will come to that. I note that in the local —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have twice asked the honourable member for Bentleigh to cease interjecting. I think she needs a cup of coffee.

Mr BRUMBY — I note the interjection of the honourable member for both Bentleigh and local newspapers, who believes the changes to the Auditor-General's role and the removal of common-law rights for injured workers are 'not issues anymore'. I am sure all the injured workers in her electorate, as well as all the small-l liberals who are concerned about the independence of the Auditor-General, will be interested to read her comments.

Since the Mitcham by-election the Kennett government has sidelined the Auditor-General even further; and having got rid of common-law rights for injured workers, it is now planning to privatise Workcover.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Do you know where they all are? They are all asking McNamara about — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Tullamarine.

Mr BRUMBY — They are all asking whether this lame-duck minister will continue to quack, quack, quack.

Mr Finn interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! If the honourable member for Tullamarine does not wish to incur the Speaker's wrath he should go back to his place and cease interjecting across the chamber, which I remind him is disorderly — particularly his references to the Leader of the Opposition as 'John'. Otherwise, he will go right out of the chamber.

Mr BRUMBY — I will refer to some of the media commentary after the 16 per cent swing in the Mitcham by-election, one of the largest in Australian history. As Malcolm Mackerras pointed out in the *Australian* of 15 December, no Premier or Prime Minister has ever recovered to be re-elected after a by-election swing of that size. Malcolm Mackerras also said:

Is Kennett on the way to oblivion? A wise leader takes note of a reverse like this. Not Kennett. He cannot see that he could possibly have ever done anything wrong.

The *Australian* of the same day also contains articles under the headlines 'Voters turn on the bullyboy Premier' and 'Voters call Kennett to account'. The first article states in part:

One MP said the Premier needed better advice. 'He's got a sycophant cabinet and he has lost some good advisers. Somebody needs to tell him to pull his head in'.

Under the heading 'Mitcham massacre holds lesson for PM' another story in the *Australian* of the same day states:

... Liberal research carried out in the lead-up to the by-election showed the expected backlash was due to one factor — and one factor only: the arrogance of the Premier.

Under the heading 'Pescott warns on protest vote', an article in the *Herald Sun* of 15 December last year reports what Mr Pescott said, which is most interesting:

The former minister said unless the Premier consulted more and backed down on curbing the Auditor-General's powers and removing injured workers' common-law rights he could pay a much higher price.

'I felt all along that voters, in the end, would come back to the government and the two-party preferred margin would be around 8 per cent', Mr Pescott said yesterday. 'But 16.2 per cent ... the sheer depth of the swing means unless he changes in these areas it is going to be a difficult general election ...

The Mitcham MP also accused Mr Kennett of hijacking the Liberal Party, running a bad government and breaking his contract with Victorians.

The editorial in the *Australian* of the same day states:

... Mitcham represents disenchantment with Mr Kennett's arrogant style and the failure of the Victorian Liberal Party to carry even its own supporters on the contentious issue of diminishing the Office of the Auditor-General. The ALP capitalised also on the Kennett government's insistence on removing the common-law rights of injured workers to sue negligent employers.

Under the heading 'Slap in the face for Kennett' an article in the *Sunday Herald Sun* of 14 December 1997 states:

Labor easily won yesterday's Mitcham by-election in a stunning rebuke to the state government over Workcover, school closures and hospital cuts ...

Sunday Herald Sun reporters at polling booths were startled by the depth of the anti-Kennett sentiments expressed by voters.

There were strong indications they were telling him Victoria was unhappy with school closures, cuts to the health budget and Victoria's casino culture.

In an article in the *Age* of 15 December under the heading 'MPs point to compo, auditor as faults' the honourable member for Knox, Mr Lupton — I do not know whether he is in the chamber — is reported as saying:

... the government's decisions were sound but it had mishandled the Auditor-General and Workcover debate by not marketing the legislation properly.

'There is unrest and unhappiness because of the way the Auditor-General and Workcover situation has been handled', Mr Lupton said ...

Asked if he was happy with Mr Kennett's leadership style, Mr Lupton said: 'I'd do it a different way.'

Under the heading 'Drubbing tells Libs to listen' an article in the *Australian* of 16 December states:

A former Kennett government minister has conceded the government must listen more and improve its communication skills after Labor's landslide win in the Mitcham by-election.

The honourable member for Bendigo East, Michael John, admitted the result was bad:

'We do need to communicate better in the community. We need to listen more and explain more (of the government's achievements),' Mr John, now a backbencher, told his local paper on Sunday.

The Deputy Premier, Pat McNamara, said he did not believe the swing would be repeated. He said:

'Of the nine National Party MPs in the lower house, three wouldn't survive and I'd be one of them ... but I think you can virtually cut by half a general by-election vote.

If the swing was 15.8 per cent in the by-election, according to the Deputy Premier the swing would be around 8 per cent in a general election, which would devastate government members in most seats.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Yes, we could go through the rolcall. The *Age* of 16 December states:

Another prominent backbencher, Mr Victor Perton —

said —

'I am not interested in having a crack at the Premier or his style —

and that would be a first for Victor! —

but I just think we as a party really have to give the impression that we are listening and talking ... There is no doubt that we lost Liberal votes as a result of their perceptions of the Auditor-General debate'.

And I have dozens more quotes. The independent report by Monash University, which analysed the Mitcham result, is fascinating. The report headed 'Monash University Politics Department Mitcham By-election Project Survey' reveals that of 585 people in the Mitcham electorate a massive 53 per cent strongly disapproved of the Kennett government's decision to change the way in which the Office of the Auditor-General operates.

A Workcover survey was undertaken. The results recorded that 49 per cent strongly disapproved and 21 per cent disapproved of the government's changes to and handling of the workers compensation system; 46.9 per cent strongly disapproved and 31.5 per cent disapproved of the way gambling has been encouraged in Victoria; 28.9 per cent strongly disapproved and 28.2 per cent disapproved of the handling of planning decisions in the City of Whitehorse by the Minister for

Planning and Local Government. The survey by Monash University shows widespread disenchantment with the Kennett government.

I return to the issue of the Auditor-General which is immediately before the house. Since the Mitcham by-election there has been no change in attitude by the Kennett government. I should have thought a government that was in touch with and listening to the people of Mitcham would have moved to repeal the Audit Act or to strengthen the role of the Auditor-General, but the opposite has occurred. The Auditor-General has been sidelined even further. Having abolished common-law rights for injured workers the government now plans to privatise Workcover operations.

I will deal with the Auditor-General and the issue of credit cards, a matter that should be properly investigated. The credit card issue will clearly illustrate the extent to which the independence of the Auditor-General has been nobbled. On 14 January this year, after documents were released to the opposition under freedom of information, the shadow Minister for Gaming and shadow Attorney-General, Mr Hulls — the honourable member for Niddrie — wrote to the Auditor-General asking him immediately to investigate any breaches of government guidelines concerning the use of corporate credit cards. I will not read all of the letter as there has been some publicity about it. On 15 January the Auditor-General replied. In summary he said that having carefully considered the honourable member's letter he believed the issue of the use of corporate credit cards should be referred to the Parliament's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee for its consideration.

Although opposition members were at work through January after the holiday recess they had to wait for everyone else to come back! When members of the government returned to work in February the opposition wrote to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee requesting that it take up the advice of the Auditor-General that the matter be referred to the PAEC for consideration. The PAEC, chaired by Mr Bill Forwood, met on 13 February and rejected the motion moved by the shadow minister for an inquiry into credit card use. The house may think that would be the end of the matter — there had been an Auditor-General's inquiry into credit cards and a lot of issues raised publicly and in the Parliament.

The shadow minister had written to the Auditor-General suggesting further inquiries were warranted. The Auditor-General wrote back to Mr Hulls stating the matter should be properly

examined by the PAEC. Mr Hulls took the matter to the PAEC; and the committee, using its government numbers, knocked it on the head, so there was no inquiry. I am not sure whether government backbenchers are aware of this, but yesterday the Premier rewarded Mr Forwood for his loyalty, for doing his dirty work by shielding him from a credit card inquiry and from the scrutiny of the Parliament, by appointing him parliamentary secretary to the Premier.

Mr Thwaites — This is a pay-off!

Mr BRUMBY — I do not know whether there is any other way to interpret it. The chairman of a committee that covered the Premier's back and refused any inquiry into credit cards and any possible investigation into the Auditor-General and into the attacks the Premier made on the Auditor-General has now been appointed a parliamentary secretary. It is a pay-off; the biggest turnaround in political history.

But there is a more serious issue here. Think about the way Parliament works and the importance of the separation of Parliament from the executive. We now have a member of Parliament, a chairman of a parliamentary committee, whose role is to scrutinise the activities of the executive and of the government and after 1 July this year refer work or inquiries to the Auditor-General. The position must be a parliamentary position accountable to the Parliament, reporting to the Parliament through Mr Speaker.

The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is the most important parliamentary committee there is; it is the committee that scrutinises the activities of the executive. Yesterday the chairman of that committee was appointed by the Premier as the Premier's own parliamentary secretary. Imagine a day's work for Mr Forwood. He will now have the use of a car and driver for official purposes because he is a parliamentary secretary. He will rock into work around 9.00 a.m. and the first thing he will do is to speak to the Premier to receive his instructions for the day. In the afternoon he will attend the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, of which he is the chairman, where he is meant to be scrutinising the Premier and things such as credit cards and the executive. Whose line will Mr Forwood take? The Parliament's? Will he represent the parliamentary interests in this place, or will he be the voice of the Premier? Of course, he will be there as the voice of the Premier, representing the executive.

Mr Speaker, this is a matter that should concern you. This is a fundamental breach of the Westminster system. It is like appointing a minister as the chairman

of a parliamentary committee. Imagine the conflict of interest and the conflict between the executive and the parliamentary committee system.

Mr Baker interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — He says he will not get double pay.

Mr Thwaites — He is just getting the pay-off!

Mr BRUMBY — He is not getting double pay but he will get the other benefits of office.

Mr Baker interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition should address the Chair rather than addressing the caucus, which seems to be his *modus operandi* at present.

Mr BRUMBY — Members of the caucus are the ones who are most interested in issues about the Westminster system. Unfortunately the government is not interested in those issues or in basic conflicts of interest.

An Honourable Member — They are just interested in auctions in Parliament.

Mr BRUMBY — I do not know whether there needs to be an Auditor-General's investigation into some of the fundraising activities at Parliament House.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — It is not for me to say, but I understand some auctioning took place last night. The normal things were not being auctioned.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — That was not auctioned off. I am sure more will be heard about last night's auction — plenty of stories are doing the rounds of Parliament House. I would not want to be the person who organised the function or did the auctioneering, especially given the product that was being auctioned. Perhaps that is a matter the Auditor-General could look at.

I raise a further matter concerning the Auditor-General. The federal Auditor-General recently announced an inquiry into funding provided to projects across Australia by the National Heritage Trust — the environment fund of \$1.25 billion. An analysis done by the federal shadow minister, Mr Duncan Kerr, reveals that 99 per cent of the program's funding has

gone to seats held by the Liberal and National parties. Questions have arisen about political bias in the fund's administration and the federal Auditor-General, Mr Pat Barrett, has launched a preliminary inquiry to check those allegations.

As a result of changes introduced by the Kennett government, after 1 July 1998 the Victorian Auditor-General will not have the power to conduct such an inquiry into that fund or funds such as the Community Support Fund. After 1 July the Auditor-General will not have the power to conduct an inquiry into mismanagement and bias in the administration of public moneys.

The Auditor-General has a predetermined work schedule leading up to 1 July and after that will be unable to undertake any inquiry of the type conducted by the federal Auditor-General, except on reference from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. However, I cannot imagine that committee, chaired by Mr Forwood, a member for Templestowe Province in another place and the parliamentary secretary to the Premier, referring the matter to the Auditor-General.

National Heritage Trust grant allocations should be investigated because Mr Jeremy Gaylard, whom I could describe only as a National Party stooge, is responsible for assessing NHT grant applications in Victoria. Mr Gaylard was responsible for a black hole of \$17.5 million at the Shire of Moira during his time as the chairman of commissioners. The NHT program is being investigated by the federal Auditor-General, but the Victorian Auditor-General will have no opportunity to conduct an audit of the grant allocations.

Mr Gaylard has done pretty well out of the Kennett government. He is a former mayor of Shepparton. In December 1993 he was appointed chairman of the Melbourne Marketing Authority. He was appointed chairman of commissioners at the Shire of Moira from 1994 until the democratic election of councillors resumed in March 1997. In October 1994 he was appointed chair of the Victorian Catchment and Land Protection Council until it was replaced by the Victorian Catchment Management Council in October 1997.

In mid-1995 Mr Gaylard was appointed interim chairman of the sustainable regional development board of the Shepparton irrigation region. In September 1996 he was appointed chairman of the catchment management structures review working party established by the Minister for Conservation and Land Management. In October 1997 he was appointed to the newly formed Victorian Catchment Management

Council, the peak body representing the nine new catchment management authorities. In 1997 he was also appointed to the Victorian regional assessment panel for the \$1.25 billion National Heritage Trust. One would have to say somebody likes this man!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — He missed out on preselection for Shepparton, and this is the pay-off — and given the size of the pay-off he probably did better in the end. The options were being the member for Shepparton or receiving the silver spoon treatment from the Kennett government month after month, year after year of its time in office. It was an extraordinary set of appointments.

However, in December 1997 the independent audit report on the Shire of Moira for the period of Mr Gaylard's appointment as chief commissioner was released. The five options for an assessment of the job he did are: a good job, a fair job, a bad job, a shocking job or a very shocking job. I would have to go for option five, a really shocking job!

An Honourable Member — That is being kind.

Mr BRUMBY — It was an appalling job — an abominable job. I am searching for appropriate adjectives, but one would need a thesaurus to find the words to describe how bad a job this person did as chief commissioner. The result was a black hole of \$17.5 million at the Shire of Moira. It is not possible to find \$17.5 million at a shire such as Moira, and as a result the loss has crippled the council.

Mr Gaylard was subsequently appointed to head up the Victorian regional assessment panel of the NHT. I will not go through the funding allocations made in Victoria, but the picture is basically identical to what has occurred in other states — no rigorous program of checks or consistent set of criteria have been applied and the vast majority of the funds has been allocated to coalition seats. It is straight out political pork barrelling.

Mr Gaylard is a National Party member who missed out on preselection for the seat of Shepparton but has been rewarded with job after job and sinecure after sinecure. Although he failed in his major role as the chief commissioner of the Shire of Moira he has now been appointed to a plum job allocating NHT grants — and he has rewarded the hand that fed him. In allocating priority funding to coalition seats in an attempt to ensure the re-election of sitting members he has put back money into the biggest political pork barrel and political slush fund ever seen in Victoria.

The opposition will take this matter further. I raise it because, unlike the federal Auditor-General, who has already announced a preliminary inquiry, Victoria's Auditor-General has a fixed work program until 1 July of this year and will not be able to independently investigate the allocation of the grants; and after 1 July he will not be able to do it without a reference from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

A further issue arising from the Mitcham by-election concerns the Honourable Bruce Atkinson, an honourable member for Koonung Province in the other place. During the Mitcham by-election campaign a television station — I think it was Channel 7 — screened extraordinary and humorous footage of Mr Atkinson at Mr Munro's campaign launch, waving goodbye at the back of the room all through the Premier's speech. He may well have been waving goodbye — he waved goodbye to the Liberals in Mitcham with a 15.8 per cent swing!

The honourable member for Koonung Province, Mr Atkinson, has now lost his job as Parliamentary Secretary for Planning and Local Government. Mr Acting Speaker, I can see you looking quizzically at me, perhaps wondering how my comments are relevant to the debate. My comments are relevant because yesterday the Premier stated that Mr Atkinson, the honourable member for Koonung Province in the other place, would relinquish his position as parliamentary secretary to spend extra time in his electorate, which covers the Legislative Assembly seat of Mitcham.

Mr Baker — He can write more poetry.

Mr BRUMBY — The honourable member for Koonung Province has already been told that he will not get preselection for that seat again, so he is searching around for another seat. I thought at the time it was a silly statement to make. If I could I would encourage Mr Atkinson to seek preselection for the Legislative Assembly seat of Mitcham. The more time he spends in the Legislative Assembly seat, the more doors he knocks on and the more hands he shakes, the more the Labor Party vote will increase. The more he refers to the great deal the taxpayers will receive from the nobbling of the Auditor-General, the taking away of common-law rights of injured workers, the better for the Labor Party. The more this moonlighting member of Parliament is in the electorate the more the Labor Party vote will increase.

The honourable member for Koonung Province may return to his unsuccessful occupation as a poet because he will not win preselection for his upper house seat or for the Legislative Assembly seat of Mitcham.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perton) — Order! I appreciate that members of the opposition backbench are listening to their leader, but I would like him to address his remarks through the Chair without too much assistance from his backbench.

Mr BRUMBY — Mr Acting Speaker, some years ago I wrote a book about Bendigo, an almanac and a tourist guide, and 15 000 copies were printed. I use the adjective 'unsuccessful' because the book of poetry written by the honourable member for Koonung Province had a print run of 50 copies!

Mr Baker — It was a limited edition.

Mr BRUMBY — It was a very limited edition, although it got a big run in the *Herald Sun*. The honourable member for Koonung Province should have been sacked almost a year ago on 1 April 1997 when it was first revealed that he was still conducting his planning and retail consultancy. He should have been sacked when the Supreme Court of Victoria found that the question of Mr Atkinson breaching section 55 of the constitution should have been referred back to it by the Legislative Council. He should have been sacked when the close relationship between the principals of Ecologically Sustainable Design Pty Ltd, Wendy Morris and Chip Kaufman, was revealed. They were personal supporters and provided a letter to Mr Atkinson that he read during a debate in the other place denying he had ever done work for them in Victoria. I remind honourable members that this was before it was publicly revealed that Wendy Morris and Chip Kaufman employed Mr Atkinson to work on the East Richmond Urban Villages project. On 9 April 1997 Mr Atkinson read into *Hansard* a letter of support from Wendy Morris and Chip Kaufman which stated that he had:

... been absolutely explicit in declining personally to participate in any project that was funded by the Victorian state government.

Mr Atkinson should have been sacked when it was revealed that he was paid for the work he did as a consultant for the Environment Protection Authority on 'The Urban Villages Project East Richmond Case Study' report as a subcontractor for Fisher Stewart Pty Ltd in conjunction with Ecologically Sustainable Design.

He should have been sacked when it was revealed that clause 7 of the contract between the Environment Protection Authority and Fisher Stewart required the EPA to be notified in writing of all subcontractors, but there was no such record of Mr Atkinson's employment. Clause 7 is in plain English and states that

the EPA must be provided with written approval for the employment of some consultants for the East Richmond Urban Villages project. Did the EPA approve the employment of Mr Atkinson? There was no written approval in documents supplied to the opposition under freedom of information legislation. Clearly there was a breach of the contract between the EPA and Fisher Stewart. The Minister for Conservation and Land Management, the minister for cover-ups, did nothing about it. Did the minister seek legal advice on whether the EPA was entitled to retrieve any money paid under the contract to Mr Atkinson or any other party? Did she conduct an inquiry to find out why the EPA failed to enforce clause 7?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perton) — Order! I require the Leader of the Opposition to relate his comments to the motion. The Leader of the Opposition appears to be drifting away from the issues of audit, accident compensation and the Mitcham by-election.

Mr BRUMBY — The press statement issued yesterday by the Premier made clear why the honourable member for Koonung Province in the other place, Mr Atkinson, was standing down as Parliamentary Secretary for Planning and Local Government — that is, to spend more time in the Mitcham electorate — and the motion is about the Mitcham by-election. In fact, Mitcham is mentioned at least three times. The motion refers to the Audit Act, the Accident Compensation Act and the arrogance and failure of the Premier to listen to the views of all Victorians. Mr Acting Speaker, I put it to you that anything I say about Mr Atkinson is relevant because of his campaign in the Mitcham by-election.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perton) — Order! I appreciate that. No objection has been taken by members on the government side and I do not propose to stop the Leader of the Opposition doing that, but I need to remind him to relate his remarks to the motion when he goes to the next level and examines the conduct of third parties who are not necessarily subject to the Audit Act or associated with the Mitcham by-election.

Mr BRUMBY — I make it clear for the record that the Premier's statement released yesterday states:

Mr Atkinson, the member for Koonung Province, decided last week to relinquish his position as parliamentary secretary so he could spend extra time in his electorate, which covers the Legislative Assembly seat of Mitcham.

The Premier said Mr Atkinson wanted to devote the additional time to servicing his broader electorate but particularly the people of Mitcham who deserve to have a strong voice in government.

The people of Mitcham have a strong voice in government in the new member for Mitcham, Mr Robinson. In some booths the Liberal Party primary vote in the Mitcham by-election fell by 23 per cent. The only contribution the Minister for Education made to the by-election was to accompany the Liberal candidate when he lodged his nomination — that was the only time he got the day and the date right! The Treasurer claimed the government had a communication problem. I do not know who was handling the campaign, but it was the largest swing in Victoria and the second largest swing ever against a government in a by-election.

The swing against the government continued last week and this week in Parliament. This government has lost its way. Having lost the Mitcham by-election it has now lost the Brownlow Medal! It has also lost the AFI awards to Sydney. Melbourne has always been the great film-making capital of Australia where pictures such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *Mad Max*, which is at the other extreme of the artistic scale, have been made. This government has lost *Showboat* — the show never came to Melbourne. This government has lost the World Cup soccer final, the Australian Open Golf Championship to Adelaide, and the Thai River Festival. The government has lost a range of events as well as the \$1 million the Premier allocated to a yacht before it even got to Port Phillip Bay. The government does not learn. I refer to yesterday's release of the Grants Commission report, which is in all the newspapers. Page 3 of today's *Age* carries the headline 'Victoria still the country's top taxing state'.

Most Mitcham voters understand that they are paying more but getting back less. Victorians are paying the highest taxes in Australia, yet the government is spending well below the national average on education, health, law and order and roads. As well, Victoria has an Auditor-General who has been nobbled and a Workcover system that takes away the basic rights of injured workers.

I urge honourable members to support the motion, which, if carried, will require the repeal of the Audit (Amendment) Act and the Accident Compensation (Miscellaneous Amendment) Act.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — We have just heard a tired argument for a tired motion on behalf of a tired opposition. The Leader of the Opposition spent less than half his time addressing the motion, but the rest of his presentation was so lacklustre that no-one on this side felt the need to object.

The Leader of the Opposition spent most of his time demonstrating that there had been a swing against the government in Mitcham and arguing that the changes to the Audit Act and the Accident Compensation Act played some part in that. Government members hardly need the Leader of the Opposition to make that point, because it is generally accepted by everybody. Given the information that was presented to the public on both those issues, the result was hardly surprising.

I shall devote some time to the role of the media in relation to this, particularly its reporting of the Workcover issue, which reflects a broader concern about media standards in the state. The best way of demonstrating that is to invite honourable members to refer to the clippings record in the parliamentary library, encourage members of the public to visit newspaper clipping archives and urge journalists to look through their own newspaper cuttings. The contrast between the coverage of the debate on workers compensation reform in the mid-1980s and the debate on last year's reforms is noteworthy.

Many elements of the media — I single out the *Age* newspaper as being at the forefront — suffered from an acute bout of amnesia. They failed to look back into history and appreciate the context in which last year's debate took place — and therefore to do justice to the issue. That is particularly regrettable in the case of the *Age*, which claims to be a newspaper of record. A newspaper of record that loses touch with the record it has itself created finds it difficult to perform its job.

I will give one illustration of the differences in the coverage of the two debates. The 1984 workers compensation reforms that the Labor government put forward involved the total abolition of common-law actions for economic loss. In other words, common-law actions were to be available only for pain and suffering. The *Age* editorialised on the reforms on 13 December 1984. After examining the pros and cons of the scheme, it concluded:

However, the new scheme promises significant economies, is more sensitive to the needs of its beneficiaries and has the support of the business community. It deserves a fair trial. The claim that it will mean nationalised insurance seems odd: a similar system already operates in Queensland, the anti-socialist heartland of the nation. The emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation is particularly welcome, although which two separate bodies are needed to pursue this objective is by no means clear. Despite its limitations, the new scheme is a substantial improvement on the existing one.

As I said, the scheme involved the total abolition of common-law rights for economic loss.

In editorials during last year's debate the *Age* said the government's legislation struck at civil liberties, democratic rights and the like. The newspaper cannot have it both ways. One would have thought the *Age* would have been decent and candid enough to admit that the changes were part of a detailed debate going back several decades in which there were respectable views on both sides.

As Mr Hartigan, who represents Geelong Province in the other place, so eloquently explained last year, at the turn of the century the campaign for the reform and modification of common-law rights, including the introduction of no-fault remedies to overcome the deficiencies in the common law, was basically led by people who represented workers' interests. However, the *Age* in particular did not refer to any of that history during its coverage of the debate last year.

That is an indication that certain sections of that newspaper refuse to accept the current government's legitimacy and are determined to use any means, fair or foul, to bring it down. I do not say that of the whole organisation, and I certainly hope it is not true of the current editor. However, there is a culture in that organisation that endures, despite its different editors from time to time. The people involved are imbued with pushing their own ideology and not accepting the bona fides of any government that is not of the political persuasion they favour.

The debate about workers compensation is a longstanding one, particularly the debate about whether to abolish common-law rights. It is not only the *Age* that has failed to acknowledge the history of the matter; the same is true of the Australian Labor Party and the Leader of the Opposition. During the debate last year, attention was directed to the vote of the then federal member for Bendigo in favour of the commonwealth legislation that was passed in 1988. When that was raised the Leader of the Opposition interjected that the legislation did not involve the total abolition of common-law rights. Unfortunately *Hansard* could not pick up his interjection. When one checks the 1988 commonwealth *Hansard* it becomes clear that the bill for which the Leader of the Opposition voted involved the total abolition of common-law rights for commonwealth employees.

If the Leader of the Opposition were fair dinkum he would confront his voting record and explain how it is that he could vote that way in 1988 yet advocate with passion, both in this place and in the public arena, what an affront to civil liberties and democratic rights the abolition of common-law actions for compensation would be. He has manifestly failed to do that. One has

only to look at the division list on page 2755 of the commonwealth *Hansard* of 19 and 20 May 1988 to see his name among those who, during the committee stage of the bill, voted with the ayes to abolish common-law actions.

Over time there has been strong support in the Labor Party for the abolition of common-law entitlements. That position was eloquently put by the then commonwealth Minister for Social Security, Mr Brian Howe, in moving the second reading of the Commonwealth Employees' Rehabilitation and Compensation Bill, which the present Leader of the Opposition, then a member of the federal Parliament, voted to support, on 27 April 1988. He is reported at page 2194 of commonwealth *Hansard* as stating:

It is clear to this government that the common-law negligence action which bases its entitlement on proof of fault is a costly, inefficient and inappropriate mechanism for compensating injured workers. Delays in settling these actions act as a positive disincentive for employees to return to work and encourages them to maximise the extent and duration of their injuries. The provision of an adequate level of weekly income, substantially increased lump sum payments on death or impairment, payments for additional expenses for medical costs, aids and appliances and household help, combined with a commitment to rehabilitation and the return to suitable employment, make redundant any need for redress to the courts.

Those words could hardly put more eloquently the position the present Victorian government reached on workers compensation reform.

To prove that he had not been dissuaded from his original statements in the course of debate on that bill, in closing the second-reading debate the minister said:

We have removed the common-law provision not because it will save us money — although it will in fact make the scheme less costly — but because we see it as antithetical to the fundamental orientation in this scheme towards getting the worker back into the work force at the earliest opportunity so that he can feel independent and support his family.

That is a telling point. The minister later said:

Clearly, common law has, in the government's view, been an expensive and inefficient mechanism for compensating injured workers. The necessity to prove fault in what is essentially a no-fault scheme introduces a contradiction to the whole philosophy of the reform of compensation with its orientation towards rehabilitation. I must say that in terms of my initial discussions with the trade union movement, I found that no issue was raised more frequently than that of delays. There is no doubt that in the vast majority of cases the approach that we propose will resolve the problem of delays.

That is another considered and reasoned argument in favour of the elimination of common-law actions in an industrial injury context.

Mr Howe was not the only member of the ALP to have expressed similar views. I referred on a previous occasion to the views of the honourable member for Springvale who has, over many years, supported the abolition of common-law rights. If I recall correctly, in his contribution to the debate last year he did not criticise the government's legislation square-on because of the abolition of common-law rights. On 12 May 1993 the honourable member referred to weaknesses in the previous workers compensation scheme:

The opposition wants a system that delivers benefits efficiently, effectively and fairly rather than one that relies on the common law as a means of dispensing justice to injured workers.

Another member of the ALP has eloquently spoken in favour of the removal of common-law rights and about the difficulties of the common-law system. The former honourable member for Monbulk, Mr Pope, was regarded as one of the more able and perceptive members of the previous government. At page 597 of *Hansard* of 17 September 1986 he is reported as stating:

In its advertising, the Law Institute of Victoria stressed the protection of the rights of innocent victims. I point out that an entirely innocent victim who cannot prove fault receives nothing at common law, whereas a grossly negligent plaintiff who can prove some fault on the part of the other driver will recover a proportion of the damages ... what sort of justice is that?

... despite the claims of the Law Institute, the common law tends to undercompensate ... I now provide the example of the Woodhouse committee. Common law undercompensates the severely injured. In fact, as I understand it, the only head-to-head comparison that has ever been made was that made by the Woodhouse committee ...

The Woodhouse committee found that, of the 58 cases that were assessed, the common law exceeded the compensation benefit in 19 cases and was less in 39 cases.

However, in 11 of the 19 cases where the common law was greater, the total payment was less than \$20 000, thus confirming the well-known tendency for the common law to be comparatively more bountiful in cases of less serious injury and to undercompensate in the case of the severely injured. Yet, we have the position put forward by honourable members opposite and the Law Institute that all is well by keeping the common-law situation in existence.

The ALP has a strong record of questioning the merits of common-law systems in an industrial context. One of the more insightful and informative references to the role of common law and how it interplays with the ALP is to be found in the autobiography of James McClelland, entitled *Stirring the Possum*, published by Viking Penguin Books in 1988. At pages 82 and 83 he refers to the role of common law in Labor lawyer legal practices in New South Wales and states:

... the cream of the personal injury work was the common-law action for negligence. If the injury was caused by a fellow worker's carelessness or a faulty work practice or, in the case of a journey injury, by careless driving, the injured worker was entitled to sue for negligence.

Although some considerable reputations — for example, that of Clive Evatt Senior — were built on negligence work, it was never highly regarded by the more conservative sections of the profession and was openly despised by the lawyers' lawyers mainly because success at the bar in this type of work was regarded as depending more on an advocate's theatrical gifts in wooing a jury than on the exposition of complex principles of law ...

Still, personal injury work was highly lucrative and a few fortunes were made from it. The whole system was abolished by the Unsworth government (though partially restored by the Greiner government) because it was widely argued that the ballooning insurance premiums required to finance the ever-growing number and size of verdicts imposed an unendurable cost burden on industry. Throughout the years the nello lawyers understandably waged a desperate rearguard action for the preservation of their role in the scheme of things, employing in the process arguments of mind-boggling casuistry.

That leading member of the ALP gave frank views on the common-law system.

I am not saying that the ALP has always been wholeheartedly committed to the abolition of common law. Clearly, it has not. On this side of the house views have also differed and evolved over time. Many government members started with a strong presumption that the courts were an avenue that should be open to people and that they provided a means of redress. However, most government members have been persuaded by the sheer weight of experience that that position is not sustainable in an industrial injury context, that there are systematic tendencies to abuses and blow-outs. Although certainly common law has advantages in giving a greater degree of customisation of benefits to the individual case, there are other ways of achieving a fair measure of tailoring of benefits to the individual, and the sheer cost, inefficiency and abuse of the system is so great it cannot be sustained just for those benefits alone.

Certainly there have been divergent views across the community. In addressing this issue, however, the opposition — and, even more importantly for the sake of decent public debate, our media and particularly the newspaper that holds itself out as a newspaper of record in Victoria, the *Age* — needs to confront these issues squarely, honestly and openly, and consider workers compensation reform debate in the context of history and acknowledging the legitimacy on the range of views on the subject over time.

There was a manifest lack of that objectivity and sense of history in the public coverage of debates last year. Therefore, it is no wonder the electors of Mitcham were led to form a completely unjustified and incorrect view of what the government was actually proposing because its proposal never received an accurate report from the press.

The second issue covered by the motion is the reforms to the audit legislation which were passed by Parliament last year. In his remarks this morning the Leader of the Opposition again demonstrated the approach of the Labor Party to this issue: never address the legislation, never look at what is in the legislation, never consider the issue on its merit, never go out of your way to understand what it is all about — just make up the biggest whoppers you can on the subject, say them loudly enough and often enough and hope that people will believe you.

There was something of a reverse 'emperor's new clothes' phenomenon at work in the way the public debate on the issue ran last year. A large number of sincere and genuine people quite justifiably became concerned about the reforms, given what they had been led to believe. Any fair-minded supporter of democracy and the Westminster system would recognise that a strong and independent Auditor-General is central to such a regime. If there were threats to that independence and the effectiveness of reporting, members of the public would be entitled to be concerned about it. However, there were no such threats to that independence in the legislation.

My experience time and again with constituents who contacted me was that when I took the trouble to send them a copy of the bill and talk the issues through with them and provide answers to their questions, their reaction answer was, 'Well, all this looks fine; I just can't see what the fuss is about'. That has also been my experience when I have spoken at meetings and taken people through the issues — they have understood the facts.

People also understand the benefits that will flow to good auditing through the Auditor-General being made an officer of Parliament and being given access to the best and brightest people with accounting skills throughout the state, being given the flexibility to engage small, medium or large firms, suburban, metropolitan or rural firms — whomever he likes — to carry out audits, freeing him from some of the shackles of public sector employment requirements. Those reforms confer enormous benefits on the role of the Auditor-General.

The opposition has ignored all of that. If I understood the Leader of the Opposition correctly this morning he made a claim that after July of this year the Auditor-General will not be able to conduct various sorts of scrutiny. I was not sure whether it was performance audits or reviews of the probity of various expenditures, but the assertion was that the Auditor-General would not be able to do that without a reference from the parliamentary Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

I do not know where he got that claim. He did not give any grounds for it in the course of his remarks. I shall be interested to hear whether the honourable member for Williamstown, whom I assume will follow me in this debate, can spell out the grounds on which his leader says that after July the Auditor-General will be able to conduct certain audits only on the reference of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I certainly cannot find anything in the act to that effect.

I refer to sections 4A and 4B of the Audit Act, which were inserted by amendments made last year. Section 4A(1) states:

The Auditor-General is an independent officer of the Parliament.

Section 4B states:

In performing or exercising his or her functions or powers, the Auditor-General must confer with, and have regard to any audit priorities determined by, the Parliamentary Committee.

The parliamentary committee referred to is the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. The latter section is a very careful and sensible balancing of interests.

A dilemma that arises in the Westminster system is that on the one hand everybody accepts that Parliament should be supreme, that the executive should be accountable to Parliament and that the Auditor-General should be unfettered in reporting to Parliament, yet on the other hand the lower house of Parliament in a Westminster system is always, by definition, dominated by the government of the day either having a majority of members or at least having the confidence of a majority of members.

It generally follows that if all members of Parliament were combined the government party of the day would have the majority of members. On the one hand it is very easy for people to argue with great fire and enthusiasm that Parliament should be supreme and that the Auditor-General should report to Parliament, yet on the other hand the reality of the situation is that if this is taken literally, in effect the will of the government party

of the day will prevail, and the Auditor-General will report to the majority, the government party.

When the opposition is confronted with those facts the argument suddenly turns around: instead of being that Parliament is supreme, it is that it is absolutely terrible that the Auditor-General should have to confer with the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee because everybody knows that that committee is dominated by a majority of government members. The opposition cannot have it both ways.

There is tension in the Westminster system in the fact that the governing party tends to make up the majority in Parliament. Section 4B strikes an excellent balance in recognising that reality. It provides that the Auditor-General must confer with the committee and must have regard to any audit priorities determined by the committee, yet is not bound by the decisions of the committee in any way. He remains independent and can make his own decisions on the matter.

I would have thought that would be exactly the outcome an opposition would support. Members of Parliament who have served on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, or its predecessor, the Economic and Budget Review Committee, can bear out that that committee has on almost all occasions had a good and constructive working relationship with the Auditor-General, free of any impropriety or attempt by the majority of the committee to influence the Auditor-General.

There was no attempt by the government majority on the Economic and Budget Review Committee, on which I served when in opposition, to interfere with the autonomy or exercise of discretion by the Auditor-General. I am sure the same has been true of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee since the change of government. It is difficult to understand what the Leader of the Opposition was on about in his claims earlier today. Unless the honourable member for Williamstown can produce more information I must conclude it was another example of the Leader of the Opposition making a wild and outrageous assertion without reference to the facts and hoping that if he said it loudly and often enough people would believe him.

The audit amendment legislation passed last year has significantly improved the role of the Auditor-General. It has enhanced his independence and given him far greater flexibility at an operational level. Section 7 of the Audit (Amendment) Act makes it clear he has total control over his audit program. He is accountable to Parliament and not to the executive government — a dramatic improvement. Previously the Auditor-General

was answerable on administrative matters to the Premier, and his budget was determined as a subset of the budget of the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Calls for the repeal of the amendments made last year, as this motion is, are calls for a regime in which the Auditor-General is answerable to the head of the executive government and has his budget determined as part of the budget of that government.

Surely not even the Labor Party would be foolish enough to want to go back to that era. The changes were a significant improvement. By calling for the repeal of last year's improvements to the Audit Act — not for their modification, change, amendment or variation, but for their repeal — the motion of the Leader of the Opposition demonstrates a lack of attention to the facts. I will be interested to see if in his contribution the honourable member for Williamstown defends a regime under which the Auditor-General is answerable to the executive government in the way he previously was.

Under the new regime the Auditor-General's budget is determined by Parliament. There is provision for the Auditor-General to report to Parliament each six months during his appointment. There is no role for the executive in that process. The Auditor-General has total control over the conduct of the tender process.

The Auditor-General has already contracted out 75 per cent of his finance audits. There has never been any suggestion that the Auditor-General does not have proper control over that 75 per cent. The Auditor-General will have full control over the conduct of the audit firms with which he contracts. The Auditor-General will write and sign off on reports to Parliament. They will be his reports. The audit will be conducted by the contractor, but it will be the Auditor-General who compiles and presents the report to Parliament.

An examination of the detail rather than the rhetoric or illusion surrounding the audit legislation reveals that it contained significant reforms and improvements to the role of the Auditor-General. It was not designed to subvert or undermine the role of the Auditor-General. Time will tell: the provisions will endure and work successfully. I foretell that they will be taken up by other jurisdictions both in Australia and overseas.

Similarly, when the reforms to the accident compensation system are put into place, they will be seen to be effective. When students of history look back they will view the reforms as the culmination of a debate that raged over many decades and as reforms

that will endure for the benefit of injured workers for many years to come.

Mr BRACKS (Williamstown) — The contribution of the honourable member for Box Hill proves one thing: the government has learnt absolutely zero from the Mitcham by-election. It is comforting for an opposition to find that a government has learnt nothing from a 16 per cent swing against it. It was the biggest swing in Victoria's history and one of the biggest swings ever to occur in Australia. In the space of 12 months the government has lost a safe Liberal-held country seat and a reasonably safe Liberal-held eastern suburbs seat. Yet the government has learnt nothing! The sum total of the honourable member's 40-minute contribution was, 'There is no lesson to be learnt. The Mitcham voters told us nothing'.

The honourable member for Box Hill ran the same old lines as last year — how the changes to the Audit Act were justified, how unjustified the Auditor-General and the public were in criticising the changes and how the changes to Workcover were also justified. One can appreciate just how insulting the government's failure to listen to the people of Mitcham is by looking at what a member for Koonung Province in another place has done. After being forced to stand down as Parliamentary Secretary for Planning and Local Government he said he wants to devote more of his time to Mitcham. What an insult! Having that member for Koonung Province, Bruce Atkinson, as the principal advocate, key campaigner and, as I understand it, Liberal Party candidate for the seat of Mitcham is one way the government can be assured that that seat will be given to the Labor Party in perpetuity. Given his record and performance and the fact that he has had to stand down as parliamentary secretary, what an insult for the people of Mitcham. It is the second insult. The reality is that the government has learnt nothing and will compound the problems.

The purpose of the motion is to allow the government to amend the Workcover and Auditor-General legislation to ensure that the wishes of the voters of Mitcham are fulfilled. Not only the opposition advocates that. Let us look at the Governor's speech. The foundation for the motion can be found in the second two-year phase of the government's program outlined by the Governor. He clearly stated:

Each new measure and each expenditure proposal will be required to undergo the test of social advantage. This signals the next important step forward for Victoria. Budget programs, legislation and initiatives will be tested against four measures — in what way they might improve outcomes in education, increase job opportunities, encourage safe, healthy lifestyles and build confident and cohesive communities.

The government wants to market itself as the new caring, sharing government. It said, 'What we have done in the past five years will be changed. We will give back to the Victorian public'. That is the government's marketing exercise. The content is, supposedly, the social advantage test referred to in the Governor's speech. The opposition's motion provides the government with an opportunity to revisit the past. The government's first test is to encourage safe, healthy lifestyles. Why not revisit the Workcover legislation? Why not reinstate the 20 per cent and below impairment provision for the injured workers who will no longer be eligible for Workcover? Surely that would encourage safe, healthy lifestyles for Victorian citizens and injured workers. It is a chance for the government to actually do something rather than resorting to rhetoric. The government has an opportunity to give expression to the proposals in the Governor's speech. That is what the Leader of the Opposition and the honourable member for Thomastown propose with the motion.

A further social advantage test is to build confident and cohesive communities. By revisiting the audit legislation the government would bring about social cohesion and build confident communities. If the government reflected on the Mitcham message and the fact that people are not confident about the checks and balances — that is what the election campaign was about — that social advantage test would give it a chance to say, 'Let's build up the system and make sure people have confidence in it'. The repeal of last year's changes to the audit legislation would ensure that confident and cohesive communities are created. Victorians would then have confidence in the government and in the role of the Auditor-General to scrutinise.

The motion provides the opportunity for the social advantage test to be applied. I suspect the social advantage test will just wither on the vine. The government is paying lip-service to it. Victorians will not see it materialise in the form of legislation. The government has an opportunity to express the social advantage test in legislation, but it has learnt nothing. The government has not changed one iota. Not only has the government learnt nothing from Mitcham, it is compounding its problems. It is getting deeper and deeper into difficulty with both the audit and Workcover legislation.

In January the government released further proposed changes to the Workcover legislation that do not improve it — as proposed by the motion — but take it backwards by seeking to privatise the Workcover authority. A review of workplace accident

compensation legislation was released under the national competition policy review process. It proposed a number of things: principally, that the Victorian Workcover Authority be privatised. Not only has the government not taken account of what happened in the Mitcham by-election but it is also thumbing its nose and saying that it is going further under the competition policy principles.

It used the same principles when it legislated to privatise the Auditor-General's office. Audit Victoria will be set up and, as the Premier said, sold off within two years, and now the government is using the same principles to privatise the Workcover authority.

If the recommendations of the Treasury report on the review of the accident compensation legislation are implemented the Kennett government will once again have abrogated its responsibilities to the detriment of Victorian workers. If the recommendations are adopted, the Workcover authority will cease to provide reinsurance and all underwriting risk will be borne by private insurers. If that happens it will mean that the Workcover authority will no longer publicly underwrite the workers compensation scheme, and that means if private insurers become bankrupt workers will be deprived of their entitlements to compensation.

The Treasury review also says that the premium setting for workers compensation should be more decentralised, which means that centralised premium setting will be removed. That will force higher costs onto employers. Up to this point aggregation was the agreed principle of the Workcover scheme. Honourable members will remember that under the system in place before 1982 the high-risk industries paid 30 to 50 per cent of their salary bills in workers compensation premiums. Someone who had a sawmill or some other high-risk undertaking had to pay an enormous workers compensation premium because the risk was not spread across other employers in the state. The cost could not be aggregated. There was no arrangement when there was a band of premium risk to ensure that Victorian industry was competitive and did not have exorbitant on-costs added to labour costs. However, if the government privatises Workcover, which is what the Treasury report proposes —

Mr McArthur — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I direct your attention to the issue of relevance. In the motion before the house the only reference to workers compensation is:

... and the legal rights of injured workers as evidenced by the ... 15.8 per cent swing —

The only reference to workers compensation is to the legal rights of injured workers. The honourable member for Williamstown is making a broad speech on workers compensation insurance, its financial viability and the way it ought to be organised to provide economic advantage to injured workers. He is not discussing the legal rights of injured workers in any way. I suggest, Sir, that you bring him back to the motion before the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perton) — Order! The motion clearly asks for the repeal of the provisions put in place by the Accident Compensation (Miscellaneous Amendment) Act. Mr Speaker allowed the lead speakers in the debate to range in a broad fashion. At this point I do not uphold the point of order. I ask the honourable member for Richmond and the minister at the table to stop exchanging comments. Although I found the conversation at the table very interesting, I am sure they do not want it recorded in *Hansard*.

Mr BRACKS — Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for your ruling. Clearly the principle on which Workcare was established was to aggregate risk. The Workcover legislation was rebutted by the vote in the Mitcham by-election. If this situation is compounded by further legislation — the sixth legislative change in six years — to privatise Workcover to give expression to what was proposed by the Treasury under competition policy, it will be necessary to have several insurance companies competing across Victoria, and the chance of aggregating premiums will be reduced.

I can understand why this proposal has been made in the report, but I cannot understand why the government does not squash it by saying it has made five legislative changes in five years and, after the big change it made last year, it has set its course.

Mr Clark interjected.

Mr BRACKS — Why can't you squash it by simply saying that you want to lock in the changes? If you want to change anything you should look at the social advantage test the Governor spoke about in his speech, which is almost imploring you to consider the healthy and safe lifestyles of Victorians. That means revisiting the legislation to increase benefits and not reducing or privatising it.

It appears that nothing has been learnt from the result of the Mitcham by-election, because the government is prepared to go further. Yesterday there was an announcement that the chairman of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, who has a role in

scrutinising the work of the executive, has now been appointed to the executive role of parliamentary secretary to the Premier, in which he will be privy to decisions, discussions, expenditure arrangements, commitments and outlays. He will also retain his other hat as chairman of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. Which other Parliament in Australia has an arrangement under which a member of the executive also has a role as chair of a committee that is charged with responsibility for scrutinising the activities of the government? It is only necessary to look at the Parliamentary Committees Act to see how stupid that arrangement is and what a conflict of interest the honourable member will face. Can the parliamentary secretary to the Premier criticise some aspect of government mismanagement when he is wearing his PAEC hat? He cannot, because he would be seen as criticising the Premier when he is a member of the executive government.

This point compounds the issue raised at the Mitcham by-election. The government sent the upper house member Bruce Atkinson out there, and is also ensuring that the custodian of the Auditor-General role, the PAEC, has a chairman with an executive function. It is an insult. The Premier probably does not even understand the problem!

Section 4EB of the Parliamentary Committees Act states:

The functions of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee are to inquire into, consider and report to the Parliament on —

- (a) any proposal, matter or thing connected with public administration or public sector finances;
- (b) the annual estimates or receipts and payments and other Budget papers and any supplementary estimates of receipts or payments presented to the Assembly and the Council —

if the Committee is required or permitted so to do by or under this Act.

Clearly, the scrutiny role is paramount and the government should treat that role seriously.

The honourable member for Box Hill spent some of his speech addressing the relationship between the PAEC and the Auditor-General and the setting of an auditing program by the PAEC, but the chairman of the committee is also a parliamentary secretary to the Premier. Because he is on the executive he could run back to the Premier and say, 'Do you realise the all-party committee is about to set this program?'.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perton) — Order! I am looking at a ruling by Speaker McDonald, which says:

The Chair will not permit the house to be used as a forum for an attack on members of the Council who have no right of reply.

I believe the honourable member for Williamstown is straying into a personal attack on the Honourable Bill Forwood, and I urge some caution.

Mr BRACKS — I understand, and I thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. In my preamble I should have mentioned that I have a high regard for Mr Forwood, with whom I have a good working relationship. My attack is on the principle that the government has seen fit to appoint Mr Forwood, who is the chairman of the PAEC, to the executive and to allow him to have those dual roles.

It is the appointment I am criticising, not the person. I have a high regard for the person; he would testify to that. By making that appointment the Premier and the government illustrate that they do not understand the principle of conflict of interest. Following the results in Mitcham and what subsequently happened to the Auditor-General, the Premier should have said, 'You've received your promotion. It's therefore improper and inappropriate for you to serve on the all-party committee that is scrutinising the public administration of the state'. It seems illogical to me, and I am sure to anyone who has any regard for the functions of Parliament and the Parliamentary Committees Act.

The motion refers to two key pieces of legislation the government should reconsider in light of its social advantage test. The people of Mitcham have effectively had their noses rubbed in the dirt by the government's attitude to that legislation. The honourable member for Box Hill presented the government's case. In effect, he re-ran the same old lines. If he had said that in its future legislative arrangements the government will take into account the proposals in the Governor's speech, one could at least say there might possibly be a change in direction. But he ran the same old lines. He apologised for nothing and proved the government has learnt nothing from Mitcham. For him to produce a proposal to privatise Workcover and for the Premier to demonstrate conflict of interest by effectively neutering the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee clearly shows that the government has learnt nothing. It has not changed one iota.

The voters of Mitcham can be assured that the government has not changed its course. It is on the

same course it has travelled for the past five and a half years. It takes and does not give back. It does not uphold the principle of the separation of powers. It does not uphold the supremacy of Parliament. The government's actions since Mitcham have proved that that will continue to be the case.

I refer to one point raised by the honourable member for Box Hill. After 1 July this year the legislative changes passed by Parliament last year will ensure one thing, and that is where the Leader of the Opposition was correct. After the implementation of the transitional arrangements in the Audit Act, the Auditor-General will not be able to audit. He will be able only to contract to audit. He will have limited capacity to look at one-off matters which may arise from time to time and which require immediate resources.

Each time an issue arises the Auditor-General will have to contract with someone. His ability to handle issues immediately will be hampered. His role will be reactive rather than pro-active. He will have to contract out ministerial portfolio reviews. Although he will be able to ask firms to investigate some matters, on other matters he will be constrained by contractual and tender arrangements. As the Leader of the Opposition said, after 1 July the Auditor-General will not be able to direct his resources. His previous powers, which allowed him at any time to direct resources to matters requiring action, will be limited.

The motion should be supported by the government. It will allow the government to reflect on its proposals in the second half of its four-year term so that it can become a kinder, gentler, softer government that listens to people, communicates and consults. We have seen no evidence of that to date. Unfortunately, in his reply on behalf of the government the honourable member for Box Hill said the government will not change one iota. That is good news for the opposition. It is pleased with that outcome. It does not want the government to change; it can continue in the same direction. It suits the opposition and it will suit Victorians, because if the government remains on its present course they will get a Labor government.

Mr A. F. PLOWMAN (Benambra) — It is extraordinary that from the time the Leader of the Opposition commenced debating the motion there have been at the very most only two members of the opposition present. If members opposite really had their hearts in their attempt to carry the motion two fundamental issues are apparent: they would be present in the chamber and would be debating it.

The Leader of the Opposition led the charge by attacking the government. His comments were not strictly related to the two issues fundamental to the motion — namely, the repeal of the Audit Act and the changes the opposition considers necessary to the Accident Compensation Act. Those issues took up only a minor part of his contribution to the debate. His speech was largely comprised of personal attacks on individuals. I found it extraordinary that he was allowed to attack the situation in the Shire of Moira. What does that have to do with the motion? Opposition members did not have their hearts in it. They did not want to debate the motion because they know that on both issues the government stands tall.

There has been little opposition in the public forum since both pieces of legislation were passed at the end of last year, yet a shell of an opposition tries to deride the government for what it is doing. It was an attack on the Premier and an attack on individuals. It was an attempt to crow about the success of the by-election result in Mitcham. It was another attempt by the Leader of the Opposition to shore up his leadership position.

I have to advise the honourable member for Williamstown, who is obviously a chief contender, that the ranks were not fully behind him when he was giving his speech — however, to his credit at least he returned to the main points of the motion. I was astounded when, in trying to attack personalities, he attacked the chairman of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Mr Forwood.

Mr Dollis — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Williamstown at no time attacked the chairman of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. He — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perton) — Order! I have heard enough. That is not a point of order. It is an attempt to make a personal explanation.

Mr A. F. PLOWMAN — In his attack on Mr Forwood, the honourable member for Williamstown suggested that Mr Forwood's positions as a member of the executive and the chairman of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee were totally incompatible. The truth of the issue is that Mr Forwood is not a member of the executive. The honourable member for Williamstown is not only unsure of his facts, he is trying to mislead the house about the position of the chairman of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. The chairman of that committee, with the assistance — —

Mr Cooper interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perton) — Order! I ask the Minister for Transport to allow the honourable member for Benambra to proceed and be heard.

Mr A. F. PLOWMAN — The performance of the chairman of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee has been exemplary. The committee has conducted itself in a manner that has drawn praise from the Auditor-General. The honourable member for Williamstown is right off track when he suggests that the latest appointment, which is on merit, is totally incompatible with Mr Forwood's role as chairman of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

When the honourable member for Williamstown returned to the issues before the Chair he said that the reason for the review of the Audit Act was the policy directive of the state government concerning national competition policy. In that respect he is correct. However, it was premature of him to then line that up with the fact that in future — nothing to do with what the government has already done — there may be a possible privatisation of Audit Victoria.

The honourable member went on to refer to the privatisation of part of the current Workcover administration. Again, any such debate is premature, and it is totally misleading to line it up with the legislation passed by the house at the end of the last session.

The honourable member for Williamstown also talked about the changes to Workcover that were introduced after 1982 when he said there was an aggregation of risks. I agree that drawing all employers into one industry group provided the opportunity to share the risk — that is, the premium increase. What he did not say was that it led to a massive increase in premium for all employers. He failed to say that although some employers were hard hit by the premium changes before 1982, after that all employers were hit with an extraordinary increase in premiums. That approach has no credibility.

The two main issues in the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition are the request to repeal those parts of the Audit Act that were changed when the Audit (Amendment) Bill was passed during the last sessional period, and to return to the situation that existed in the Accident Compensation Act prior to the changes made in the last sessional period, as contained in the Accident Compensation (Miscellaneous Amendment) Bill.

I refer briefly to those two matters. One thing of significance about the Audit (Amendment) Act is that, to his credit, the Auditor-General has determined to ensure the changes are introduced in a way that maximises their chance of success. This reflects two things. Firstly, it shows that the Auditor-General, who was public in his opposition to many of the changes, has now seized the responsibility of making sure those changes work. Secondly, it indicates that the changes are workable, and that the criticisms that were levelled across the board, including those of the Auditor-General, cannot be sustained.

It is important to note also that the major editorial comment about the changes was that Victoria was single-handedly taking on the Office of the Auditor-General and that the government was saying that changes could be made under the national competition policy. The Victorian government had the courage of its convictions and said, in effect, 'We have no sacred cows. Every arm of government must stand up to the scrutiny of the national competition policy'. Victoria certainly leads the way in showing that all states can look at the Auditor-General's office and ask, 'Can the work of the Auditor-General's office be done more efficiently? Can it be done in a more competitive manner?'.

As I said, most of the concerns expressed in the community were about two things. The first was whether the independence of the Auditor-General would in any way be sacrificed by any of those changes, and the second was whether any change might lead to the Auditor-General not being able to do his job under the new regime as well as he could in the past.

The individual aspects of the work of the Auditor-General are, firstly, the conduct of financial audits. In the past 75 per cent or thereabouts went out to tender; now 100 per cent will now go out to tender. Secondly, performance audits were restricted to being undertaken by the staff of the Auditor-General's Office; now they can be done by any experienced people anywhere in the world. That opens the net and gives a far better opportunity for performance audits to be done by people with the expertise and the experience demanded by any matter on which a performance audit is requested.

Another area is portfolio reports. In the debate in the house in the spring sessional period it was obvious that performance reports give the Auditor-General the strength, power and opportunity to bring into question any public body or any issue before a public body. The opportunity for the Auditor-General to conduct a portfolio report has not changed. The independence and

responsibility of the Auditor-General have not been compromised in any way.

The question that remains to be answered is whether Audit Victoria will perform more or fewer audits of the public sector. If the experience in New Zealand is anything to go by it is likely that Audit Victoria will increase the number of public audits it undertakes.

The second part of the motion before the house, moved by the Leader of the Opposition and supported by only one or two members of the opposition, relates to the accident compensation system. The principal issue in the debate on this matter was the abolition of access to common law for injured workers. It was inflamed by members of legal firms that had a preponderance of their income paid for by the work they did in this area. I can understand that if you were in a profession that was likely to lose a share of its income that you, too, Mr Acting Speaker, would oppose that change. Those legal firms went far beyond their charter in inflaming workers by engaging in a campaign of deceit that did not point out the true position about access to common law. In many cases, members of those legal firms and their advertising put injured workers in an intolerable situation where injured workers who were worried about their future, their positions, their income and their ability to overcome their injury, were faced with advertisements showing an injured worker with his house up for sale and the 'Sold' sign across it, as if to say that once the legislation comes in those injured workers will have no rights at all, that their chance to receive compensation will be lost. The approach put an enormous extra pressure on the people we want to look after, that is, those who have been injured at work, and in many cases it had a disastrous affect on their lives and on their families.

Since the act was passed, no comment on or approach about injured workers has been made to my office. The whole issue has ground to a standstill; all opposition has stopped. Now people who were concerned can see that the changes obviously do not impact on their lives. One of the chief reasons for that is that when we introduced the act we ensured, through a few amendments to the original act, that there would be absolutely no retrospectivity.

The fact that we were successful in ensuring that no retrospectivity was introduced in changes to the Accident Compensation Act means that almost all injured workers are happy with the way the Accident Compensation Act now operates.

The issues in respect of common law are quite simple. Fewer than 2 per cent of injured workers used to obtain

payments as a direct result of going to common law. Common law was the major cause of a blow-out in expenditure in the Workcover agency, and increased Workcover costs were the main reason the government examined whether common law was a legitimate, necessary and valuable part of the Workcover means of compensating injured workers.

In many cases injured workers who received payments by common law were worse off not only in the amounts of money they received but because they had to wait up to three years for the common-law ruling before they could get payments, whereas if they had not used the common-law process the payments due to them may well have been the same and certainly would have come much earlier.

I therefore find the motion totally unsustainable on all counts. Firstly, members of the opposition have not debated their point about the need to repeal or make changes to the Audit Act or the requirement to change or return the Accident Compensation Act to the way it was prior to the changes made in the last sessional period. Secondly, that is exemplified by the fact that in their way they have done a character assassination of whomever they could rather than sticking to the subject of the debate before the house.

Mr DOLLIS (Richmond) — I pick up the final point the honourable member for Benambra made in his contribution to the debate on the motion when he said that the opposition is interested only in character assassination. Let me repeat what I tried to say in the point of order I made: in no way did the honourable member for Williamstown make any personal reflection on Mr Bill Forwood, the member for Templestowe Province in the other house. It is important for the honourable member for Benambra to understand that the honourable member for Williamstown talked about the importance of ethical standards and about a government that is perceived to be denying any opportunity to anybody and, more importantly, one that refuses to have any ethical standards.

The question of the appointment of Mr Forwood has nothing to do with his competence or lack of it; he is a proven performer. Rather, it has to do with perceived conflict that exists between the appointment of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Premier as an assistant when at the same time he is the chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. If the honourable member for Benambra does not understand the difference, he does not understand the ethics needed to guide any government. It is that same lack of ethics that brought about the demise of Mr Bruce Atkinson

because it was incredibly difficult for people out there to understand how any government could defend what is incompatible in terms of the activities of the former parliamentary secretary.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — The honourable member for Tullamarine is sufficiently well read, at least in certain aspects, to know the difference between an ethical standard that must be observed and a personal attack. I make that point because the honourable member for Williamstown in no way wanted to reflect negatively on the actions of Mr Bill Forwood. That should be made very clear.

Let me come back to the question of Mr Bruce Atkinson. I have been involved in this debate for quite some time, and in following it I can see the standards that were observed in attempting to justify what were clear conflicts of interest. It is important for the house to understand that differentiation, because the people of Mitcham were failed in terms of the standards that the government was prepared to observe. A government that supposedly enjoys a comfortable majority does not get a 16 per cent swing against its sitting member unless the people voting are sick and tired of that government's arrogance, lack of accountability, lack of ethics and lack of standards.

Government members interjecting.

Mr DOLLIS — I assure the honourable members on the opposite side that they are important ingredients in making certain. That view is very much part and parcel of the motion.

Government members interjecting.

Mr DOLLIS — I thought a point of order might have been raised, but the first 6 minutes of the contribution of the honourable member for Benambra were spent in discussing what the previous speaker, the honourable member for Williamstown, had said; at minute 7 he referred to Workcover and then went off on another exhibition of dialectics between his contribution and that of the honourable member for Williamstown. At approximately minute 10 he returned to the motion.

My interest in the motion lies in the part that talks about the massive swing. The fact is that the Premier and the government must display a less arrogant and more consultative approach to government. Unless they are prepared to listen to the views of ordinary Victorians, the result of the Mitcham by-election will

be repeated time and again against those in government who are not prepared to listen.

Let us take the portfolio that I shadow and consider the meeting that took place last night in Hawthorn. More than 1000 people attended a Save our Suburbs meeting.

A government member interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — They attended simply because there is anger out there about the government's arrogance.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! What is the relevance?

Mr DOLLIS — The relevance is that the motion talks about the government taking a less arrogant, more consultative approach and becoming a government that listens to ordinary Victorians. It is that fundamental point that I want to address — the inability of the government to listen to all Victorians; the ignorance of a government that continues to be arrogant despite the massive message it is receiving.

I will return to the subject of the meeting last night and the arrogant approach displayed by the Minister for Planning and Local Government. I will also return to the removal of his former parliamentary secretary and the many unanswered questions that action has left. The point about last night was that the minister has for years been going around saying, 'I am the minister; I am the planning system; I am it and therefore my door is open for business'. Five years down the track when the contradictions begin to appear he says, 'Well, don't look at me; it's those councils, it's local government'. Yet any local council that is prepared to listen — and the important word is 'listen' — to ordinary Victorians is told, 'Unless you do as you're told, you're out'.

Let us now deal with the *Good Design Guide*, because this is also something that prompted the people of Mitcham to send a strong message to the government. Planning was a very important issue in that by-election and the 16 per cent swing that occurred in Mitcham came as a result of ethics, the Audit Act, the Workcover act and, more importantly, the fact that the people of Victoria are sick and tired of having an arrogant government.

It came as a result of perceived arrogance at every level of government. The arrogance comes basically from government members, who are incredibly incompetent at listening to the wishes and aspirations of the very people who put them on the government benches — the ordinary people who elected them.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — No amount of disruption will divert attention from the simple fact that this is an arrogant government that has to change if it wants to have any credibility between now and the next state election.

Mr Finn interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The Chair has been extremely patient with the honourable member for Tullamarine. I ask him to contain his enthusiasm.

Mr DOLLIS — Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; I tried very hard to ignore the interjections.

Let me return to discussing last night's meeting and the concept of listening to ordinary Victorians. The *Good Design Guide*, which the planning minister has put up as the panacea that will make Victoria the most livable state — —

Mr A. F. Plowman — On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, I raise the issue of relevance. The house has been listening to the honourable member for Richmond trying to suggest that the *Good Design Guide* has relevance to the last line of the motion before the house. Having listened to him talking about the planning issue for the past 3 or 4 minutes I find his remarks have no relevance at all to the motion before the Chair.

Mr DOLLIS — On the point of order, if the honourable member for Benambra had been listening he would have heard my attempts to introduce planning as one of the important areas related to arrogance, consultative programs and listening to ordinary Victorians; but despite my numerous attempts to discuss the *Good Design Guide*, the honourable member for Tullamarine made enough noise to divert attention from the real and important issues. So, given the chance, I shall explain the relevance of planning to this motion.

Mr Carli — On the point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, the motion before the house refers to the Premier's claims to be less arrogant and more consultative. The honourable member for Richmond is indicating the failure of the government and the Premier to be more consultative and receptive to the community, and the meeting last night is just another example of how the Mitcham by-election has not changed the style of government. I believe it is relevant to the motion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. I listened to the debate in my

office before coming to the chair. It has been a wide-ranging debate, facilitated mainly by the wording of the motion, which questions various aspects of government business and public consultation. Therefore, the Chair is not able to uphold the point of order. However, the point of order highlights that speakers will continually need to show the Chair that the issues they are raising are entwined in various aspects of the motion. Therefore, I expect that as he continues the honourable member for Richmond will be able to relate the content of his remarks to the motion that is now before the house.

Mr DOLLIS — Thank you for your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker. The last part of the motion talks about a government that needs to be less arrogant and more consultative and that listens to the views of ordinary Victorians. The Kennett government's approach to planning — this is the point I am trying to make to the honourable member for Benambra — is having a detrimental effect on residents right across Melbourne. The government is in danger of allowing the attractiveness and livability of Melbourne to disappear.

One thousand people do not congregate in what is one of the safest seats the Liberal Party holds unless they are angry. People who have never protested in their lives will not protest unless there is arrogance in the way the government is dealing with them. The government would not change the Parliamentary Secretary for Planning and Local Government unless it knew it was in trouble, and it is in trouble because it is unable to listen.

This motion is part and parcel of the message sent to the government that a 16 per cent swing means the people of Victoria are very angry with the government and want it to change things. There is time between now and the next election to rectify matters and make certain it is not an arrogant government that competes with the Labor opposition. If this process continues, by the next election the swing will increase to more than 16 per cent. Government members have been warned: the people of Victoria cannot suffer for the remainder of this government's term simply because government members are unable to listen.

I welcome the new Parliamentary Secretary for Planning and Local Government, the honourable member for Prahran, into the debate. The problem of the Minister for Planning and Local Government, the Premier and the government became very obvious during the Mitcham by-election — their inability to listen. I hope the new parliamentary secretary will use her considerable skills to try to convince an arrogant

planning minister and an arrogant government that the people out there are hurting, and when they hurt they respond, and when they respond governments come down. This is the lesson government members refuse to understand.

I shall endeavour to limit my remarks so we can hear two more contributions to this debate because it is very important. It is important to note in this new parliamentary session that the government says it is prepared to change its ways, yet day in, day out the same attitudes are being broadcast to the people out there. When will the government begin to care about the effect its policies are having on Victorians? When will it begin to care about what it is doing to this state? When will it display a more consultative spirit and ability to listen to the views of ordinary Victorians?

The disasters that are occurring because this government is allowing the planning system to go out of control are prompting people to send a strong message to every single government member: either listen or you're out. Unless government members are prepared to listen —

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — I will repeat myself time and again until the government is prepared at least to pay some attention to the messages we are conveying in this house. If repetition is necessary, repetition is what the government will get because the message we are receiving from the people out there is that the government must be made accountable and less arrogant.

Mr Honeywood — Have you got a policy?

Mr DOLLIS — Let us start with my portfolio. I challenge the minister and the government to compete on policy. The Labor Party introduced Viccode 1; the minister introduced the famous Viccode 2, which we said would fail. We made a submission to the minister's review which basically mirrored Viccode 1. In the end the government was forced to admit it was wrong and did what we had been telling it for a long time to do.

Medium-density development is worrying every Victorian, because the *Good Design Guide* can be termed the design guide for greedy developers. But developers are not happy, and the public is not happy. People from both sides of the fence are giving the same message: 'Listen minister, it is time for you' —

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — I have been to Warrandyte more times than you have been to Richmond! What you have done since getting into government pales into insignificance beside the reforms that others introduced in the past.

In conclusion, I return to the point I made at the beginning: both the Premier and Mr Atkinson, a member for Koonung Province in the other place, have failed the people of Mitcham. The government cannot refuse to be ethically bound by standards that have been appropriate for all other governments. Unless the government is prepared to observe those standards it will again end up having to deal with issues such as those raised as a result of Mr Atkinson's activities.

The honourable member for Williamstown warned that before it is too late the government should pay some attention to the appointment of Mr Forwood as parliamentary secretary to the Premier, given that he is the chairman of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. That is not a reflection on Mr Forwood. Rather, it is a warning about ensuring that no conflicts of interest arise in future.

Opposition members gave the same warning about Mr Atkinson. It took a 16 per cent swing against him in a by-election before the Premier, in the middle of the night, decided to shift Mr Atkinson aside, using the cheap excuse that he had resigned as parliamentary secretary to better represent the people of Mitcham. How can that excuse be acceptable when that is the job he was elected to do in the first place?

The message the Leader of the Opposition has given to members opposite is that before it is too late the government needs to take notice of what the people of Mitcham have said. A swing of 16 per cent should be enough for government members to wake up and remember that what happened in Mitcham can happen to them.

Mr SPRY (Bellarine) — The contribution of the honourable member for Richmond demonstrates in no uncertain terms how easy it is to sway the opinions of the opposition on any of the tough measures that are introduced into this house. The motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition seeks to repeal the Audit (Amendment) Act and the Accident Compensation (Miscellaneous Amendment) Act. The debate has been characterised by the lack of attendance of most opposition members, which clearly indicates how trivial the issues have become. Honourable members will recall that the Leader of the Opposition spent most of his time preaching to his caucus with his back turned to the government. Even his own members had trouble

concentrating on what he was saying; his address was punctuated by interruptions from his own side.

Labor continues to fail to appreciate an understanding of the imperatives of government and opposition. The lack of depth in the contributions of members opposite is disappointing. The opposition too often spends its time trying to please the sectional interests that control it. It can fairly be said that those who occupy the opposition benches are enslaved by sectional interests — and I have seen evidence of that on more than one occasion.

The contrast in the characteristics that distinguish the government from the Labor opposition is stark. The government is determined to pursue the right policies rather than merely popular policies. It is never easy to face up to and deal with the hard issues. The two issues the Leader of the Opposition raised this morning concerning the amendments to the Audit Act and the Accident Compensation Act had to be dealt with by Parliament. The Audit Act needed to be brought into line with the national competition policy, and the Accident Compensation Act, an essential piece of legislation, had to be amended so that it was not only workable but sustainable.

The Leader of the Opposition used the debate to indulge in what members of the Labor Party characteristically indulge in during debates in this house — that is, free-ranging swings at the government. Often that simply amounts to character assassination, with little or no emphasis on the issues it claims it seeks to debate with the government. The Leader of the Opposition's lash at Jeremy Gaylard, the chairman of the Victorian Catchment and Land Protection Council and the chairman of the assessment panel involved in national heritage trust grants, was a disgrace. The suggestion that those appointments have been anything other than based on merit is just ludicrous.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SPRY — I take up the interjection from the honourable member for Monbulk and point out that Mr Gaylard was on the panel when Labor was in government, so it is hardly appropriate for members opposite to launch into a character assassination. But to go further and suggest that the land management grants made through the national heritage trust have been and will be based on something suggesting a gerrymander is equally ludicrous.

Let us look for a moment at the catchment management grants. Of course they are directed at country areas because, believe it or not, that is where

the catchments are. The rural areas of Victoria are precisely the areas we are concerned about in seeking to address catchment management and associated issues such as weed and vermin control.

It would be wrong to suggest that the government is not concerned about the 15.8 per cent swing it suffered in Mitcham. Of course it is concerned. I have already said that the government is prepared to face up to and deal with the hard issues. I am more concerned about our lack of ability to somehow get that message across to the people of Victoria. As the honourable member for Box Hill demonstrated in referring to some media reports on the subject, once issues are examined in detail, the merits of the government's intentions become abundantly clear.

When the government is not caught up in Labor's ill-timed criticisms of what it is trying to do, and when the merits of the issues are explained clearly and in a measured way, Victorians start to get behind us. That has been shown in the reactions to these two issues. The opposition constantly jumps at shadows and characteristically indulges in a preoccupation with trivia.

I will now comment on the motion. I do not intend to pursue in detail the issues we laboured over in this house in December last year during debate on the Accident Compensation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill and the Audit (Amendment) Bill.

Firstly, I will outline exactly what the government tried to achieve with its Workcover legislation. It focused on four elementary issues. These were: providing financial security for injured workers; encouraging a return-to-work mentality; penalising employers who were negligent in their responsibilities to their employees; and, finally, the government was intent on providing a system of compensation and insurance premiums that did not cripple business, our wealth generator, and drive it out of the state to the detriment of people seeking gainful employment.

The legislation on the Auditor-General was based on the need to conform with national competition policy. I am sure members from both sides of the house will agree that no legislation should be quarantined from the scrutiny and objectives of that policy, the introduction of which was an initiative of the federal Labor government. However, it was the Victorian government that adopted it and pursued it vigorously. I believe we are now ahead of the game compared with the other states. National competition policy is one of the driving forces of economic reform.

Australia must be able to compete internationally, thereby improving the employment prospects of its people. The government introduced the amendments to the Audit Act to insert an element of competition into the functions carried out and overseen by the Auditor-General. The honourable member for Benambra dealt with the issues competently, so I do not propose to go into them in detail.

In closing, I believe it is ridiculous to even consider the motion. To seek to reverse important legislative amendments that were introduced for the benefit of all Victorians is an utterly negative way to behave. A vote in support of the motion would be completely misplaced.

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I am pleased to support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. It is fair to say that, as the member for Mitcham, I am closer than most to the events that have led to its being moved. A true measure of the government's response to the Mitcham electorate's overwhelming message on 13 December last year will be whether it repeals both the Audit (Amendment) Act and the Accident Compensation (Miscellaneous Amendment) Act. Absolutely nothing less will suffice.

The events of the past couple of months have some parallels with that well-known story of the *Titanic*, the movie about which is currently doing great business at the box office. Most Victorians — indeed, most Australians — remember the story of the *Titanic*, the supposedly invincible luxury cruise liner that on its maiden voyage unfortunately hit an iceberg, with disastrous consequences. The Mitcham by-election was not dissimilar. The government, despite feeling invincible, struck an obstacle called reality, and the effects of that have also been grievous.

In recent days the Premier, in the role of captain, has started to clear the decks of the ship of state, which, he has recognised, has developed a list. The former Parliamentary Secretary for Planning and Local Government has been asked to walk the plank, which is most unfortunate for him. He clung to his position like a barnacle, but he has now been dislodged.

Yesterday in this place we saw the Minister for Police and Emergency Services keelhaunched by the Premier and thrown in the brig. We saw the ballast of the casino high-rollers tax break rolled overboard, and we also saw the Minister for Education being forced to get his own ballast into shape and take up my invitation to leave his plush ministerial seat and visit schools in my electorate.

Mr Honeywood — On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, although new members are given some latitude in referring to copious notes, particularly in a maiden speech, I put it to you that the honourable member has been reading his analogies to barnacles and other witticisms verbatim.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Unfortunately, the Chair was distracted just prior to the minister rising to his feet, so I do not uphold the point of order. However, I remind the honourable member for Mitcham and other honourable members that although some latitude is granted to members making their maiden speeches, from then on they are virtually on their own. I point out to the honourable member that he cannot read from a detailed speech but he can refer to notes.

Mr Batchelor interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! We can do without the help of the honourable member for Thomastown, who might go and have an early lunch!

Mr ROBINSON — I have, of course, been referring to notes and to the notice paper. The activities of the Premier in recent days show that the message from Mitcham might get through to the government. I say 'might get through', because there is no guarantee that it will. Nevertheless, we live in hope. However, his problem is that although his hands remain on the wheel of the ship of state, the mutinous voices around him continue to grow.

Earlier I heard the honourable member for Box Hill suggest that members opposite understood that the electorate's dissatisfaction with the changes to the role of the Auditor-General and Workcover was costing the government support. But in making that assertion the honourable member omitted to deal with the obvious question that raises. He did not say whether the understanding on the other side that those issues were costing the government support was something he and others were keeping to themselves while the government was pushing ahead regardless, looking to learn the lesson at great cost.

My recollection of the Mitcham by-election is that the Liberal Party went into the campaign believing that if it ignored the political realities in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne they might go away. What a novel approach to campaigning: if you ignore a problem, it might go away.

How unfortunate it is that the captain of the *Titanic* and its crew and passengers were not able to rely on that theory in the early part of this century. If they had just

pretended that the iceberg did not exist, they would not have hit it and there would not have been a problem. And if they had pretended there were enough lifeboats to go around, nobody would have drowned. What a novel approach! Of course, over the past few months the former member for Mitcham and the former member for Gippsland West both made a beeline for the lifeboats. They got off safely, but the question is: who will be stranded?

While talking about the technique of denial employed by the government during the Mitcham by-election campaign, I point out that my distinct recollection is that on the very first day of the campaign the Liberal candidate — with the blessing of the Premier, I understand — decided that the Auditor-General and Workcover were not issues the party had to deal with.

The Liberal candidate and the Premier said publicly that the people of Mitcham were not interested in the Auditor-General and Workcover issues and, therefore, they were not going to worry about dealing with them. That was an extraordinary revelation because there has been a great deal of community dissatisfaction about the changes to the Audit Act and to the Accident Compensation Act. Any intelligent observer of the campaign, anyone who had tried to understand what the electorate was talking about, would have understood the seriousness of those two issues.

It is one thing to insult the intelligence of voters by telling them what issues were not important when the community held a totally dissimilar view, but the Liberal Party was not satisfied with that. Having insulted the intelligence of Mitcham voters it then determined to rub salt into their wounds by trying to deceive them. The Liberal Party distributed two pamphlets throughout Mitcham — one on the Auditor-General and one on Workcover — designed to disinform the community about the effect of the changes. The interesting thing about the pamphlets is that they bore no obvious logo that they were Liberal Party material; they were dressed up to look like fact sheets, which of course they certainly were not.

I am not sure who was running the Liberal Party's campaign, but I know it was not well run if this was the sort of tactic employed. I expect even Jeremy Gaylard could have done a better job. Even he would not have been so foolish or short-sighted as to try to deceive the people of Mitcham as the Liberal Party did; even he would not have committed such a grievous error of judgment. You might not trust him with taxpayers' money but I think he could have been trusted with the Liberal Party's money in Mitcham.

Two months after the by-election the Premier's hands are still on the wheel of the good ship and the icebergs are starting to loom up on the port side. The question that arises is: does the Premier have the capacity to change course or will he take his party to a crashing collision with reality? The government has had a taste of reality in Mitcham. One thing is certain: if it does not change its course the government will cop more of the same at the next election.

All members of the opposition understand there is room for improvement in the Premier's style. He could improve in many areas. The most important thing he has to learn is to respect the views of people when they are not in accord with his. He also has to learn to say sorry and to admit that on occasions he gets it wrong. I know it would be new for the Premier, but I think we can encourage him to do that. He will also have to learn that his first instinct — to crash through — is not always correct; it does not always augur well for him or Victoria to be crashing through the way he has in the past. He may also have to learn to reorder his priorities. If the Premier can do all those things it may bring him to the conclusion that he needs to repeal the two pieces of legislation the subject of this notice of motion; he will then understand they do not enjoy the support of more than a quarter of the community. That fact can be borne out by any pollster.

Earlier in the debate a government member talked about sectional interest groups. If the Liberal Party wants to paint itself into a corner by backing the 25 per cent of people who believe this legislation is fine, so be it; but the fact is those people are helping the Liberal Party to represent minority interests. I suspect the Premier will find the changes he needs to make to his style unbearable. I do not believe he can change his style at this late stage. He will discover that being less arrogant and more consultative is too difficult to bear. He will find that he is not cut out to be a more pleasant and intelligent person. If the Premier tries to be more pleasant in his dealings with the public he will find it tedious, frustrating and uninteresting.

Perhaps the Premier will change, but it will be like wearing a new shirt: he will wear this new style uncomfortably, in the same way that you do when you put on a new shirt, whatever colour it might be. He will then have a problem with the collar, but he will discover it is not the label pressing on his neck that is causing irritation; it is the use-by date — and this Premier is well and truly past it and ought to go!

When the Premier's hands are finally removed from the steering wheel — whether it be by the Minister for Education in this house, or by the Minister for Industry,

Science and Technology or the Minister for Health in the other place — we may achieve the outcome so desired by the Mitcham electorate: the repeal of these two despised acts of Parliament which do no credit to the members opposite who supported the Premier in the first place.

Mr McARTHUR (Monbulk) — In response to the minnow from Mitcham, I can say that the Premier will give his comments all the attention they deserve — probably 10 or 15 seconds worth — and then treat them appropriately.

The Leader of the Opposition made some personal and totally outrageous attacks on an honourable member for Templestowe Province, Bill Forwood. The Leader of the Opposition's comments were completely ill-informed and unjustifiable. He has no information to back up his allegations; they were made using the privilege of this house and in the full knowledge that Bill Forwood is not in a position — and will never likely be in a position — to reply to his comments. It was a cowardly attack but one that we have come to expect from this man. It is typical of the way he has operated in this Parliament for the past four years. It is to be hoped that if anybody is to learn from their past practices the Leader of the Opposition should learn there are some reasonable rules for parliamentary debate and that an unjustifiable attack on a member of the other place is not allowed and should not be permitted to continue.

The Leader of the Opposition also misled the house. The information he presented was incorrect, which is not surprising as it was given to him by the honourable member for Niddrie. That member has made a habit of making misleading comments over the past few years and of launching personal attacks on people under the protection of Parliament and never abiding by the standard of behaviour or the rules this house has always expected of its members. It is not surprising the honourable member for Niddrie has misled his leader in that way; he has done it constantly.

The Leader of the Opposition said the Auditor-General had recommended that the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee investigate the issues surrounding credit card use by public sector employees and by a number of ministers. That issue arose because the honourable member for Niddrie had made similar comments. On 9 February the honourable member wrote to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee chairman, Bill Forwood — and this is the advice the Leader of the Opposition was relying on — and said:

I reiterate my concerns about the use of state government corporate credit cards and the view of the Auditor-General

that this matter should be considered by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee ...

As overseer of the public purse, the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee has an obligation to all Victorians to adhere to the recommendation of the Auditor-General and further pursue this matter.

The Auditor-General has never contacted the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee to suggest the matter be investigated; nor has he ever written to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and recommended the matter be investigated by the committee.

The Auditor-General's reply to a letter from the honourable member for Niddrie states:

In light of the findings of my 1997 report to the Parliament on this matter and the response provided by the department, I suggest that the issue of the use of the corporate card be referred to the Parliament's Public Accounts and Estimates Committee for their consideration.

A suggestion was made that the honourable member for Niddrie take up the matter with the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee for its consideration. At no stage did the Auditor-General make a recommendation to any department, Parliament or the parliamentary Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that the issue be investigated by that committee. For the honourable member for Niddrie to allege that the Auditor-General has done so is misleading. It is an outrageous attempt to politicise a personal letter to the honourable member for Niddrie.

The honourable member for Niddrie has made several attacks on the government and government members for attempting to attack the Auditor-General politically, yet in a political game play for publicity and press release purposes, and so he could appear on the 6 o'clock news on Channel 7, where he is well connected, the honourable member has attempted to ensnare the Auditor-General in a political brawl. That is contemptible. It does the honourable member no good, and certainly does the Auditor-General no good.

The Auditor-General is respected greatly by most honourable members. Nobody else criticises or attempts to involve the Auditor-General in party political discussions. The honourable member for Niddrie has tried to do it and has been happy to put words into the Auditor-General's mouth by stating publicly that the Auditor-General had made recommendations to a parliamentary committee when no such recommendations had ever been made. The honourable member for Niddrie was happy to do that for political purposes, and on the basis of his statements

the Leader of the Opposition has made similar misleading remarks.

Mr E. R. Smith interjected.

Mr McARTHUR — As the honourable member for Glen Waverley points out by interjection, that is not unusual. The Leader of the Opposition misled this place based on advice he received from a member of his frontbench, a person whom he would wish to be part of the executive he would form in a future government.

The Leader of the Opposition and the honourable member for Niddrie have launched attack after attack on the current executive for being secretive and not providing enough information to a whole range of people, yet they regularly mislead people, and expect to do it with impunity. They have no compunction in drawing an independent officer of Parliament into a party political debate, while expecting to be treated with respect both here and in the community.

The double standards of the Leader of the Opposition and the honourable member for Niddrie are appalling. The hypocrisy they exhibit time and again and the way they behave here and outside, while expecting others to behave by a separate set of rules, is outrageous and should not be tolerated by honourable members or the public at large. They make a series of allegations, building one allegation on top of another, all based on the assumption that the first allegation is proved or accepted — and people are expected to consider those issues seriously and assess Labor as an alternative government.

To understand that one need only consider what the Leader of the Opposition said in his attack on the Honourable Bill Forwood in his attempt to politicise the Auditor-General and to drag the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee into this debate when that committee has received no recommendation or official correspondence from the Auditor-General. The inventions of the fertile mind of the honourable member for Niddrie should be disregarded by honourable members.

Mr CARLI (Coburg) — I support the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition. When the former member for Mitcham, the Honourable Roger Pescott, resigned from this house on 11 November 1997 he called for the by-election to be a referendum on two issues: the changes to the Accident Compensation Act and the changes to the Audit Act. Undoubtedly they were the biggest issues. Anyone with a feel for people and who campaigned, doorknocked or conducted street stalls in the Mitcham electorate would

confirm that. The result of that referendum was a convincing 16 per cent swing — the second highest in the history of the state — against the government.

The response of government members in the debate has been that the government's message was not understood, and that the people were not educated or were misled. What government members have really been saying is that the electorate did not swallow the government propaganda distributed in the Mitcham campaign that endeavoured to justify the unjustifiable.

What lessons have been learnt? Ron Walker, who may have been speaking on the government's behalf, was upset that some of his casino customers voted against his government. It is not a question of people being customers but of people defending their rights as citizens to live in a democratic system.

Opposition members are nostalgic about democracy, which is less apparent these days following further government attacks on Victoria's democratic structure. Last night at a meeting of the Save Our Suburbs organisation I witnessed angry Victorians in revolt. The more than 1000 justifiably angry people who attended the meeting felt that the Minister for Planning and Local Government was responsible for making the suburbs a battleground. The minister's title is a misnomer. It should be the Minister for Anti-planning, Speculation or Development. One of the few things the minister does is be involved in decent town planning in this state.

The motion demonstrates that despite the Mitcham debacle the Premier continues not to consult. We still have the extraordinary situation of people having their rights taken away. Probably nothing is more basic than Workcover rights. The government has not listened to the people and now intends to privatise the whole system, as is shown by a review of workplace accident compensation prepared by the Department of Treasury and Finance.

Instead of looking at the immense problems associated with the Victorian Workcover Authority, many of which relate to mismanagement, the government is moving to privatise the entire system by putting the risks back on the insurers and employers at the cost of fair compensation to injured workers. The section of working people with the least influence — those we on this side of politics seek to defend — will be badly affected by the changes made by the government. Instead of increasing the efficiency of the Victorian Workcover Authority the government is washing its

hands of its responsibility to provide a decent compensation system.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.04 p.m.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

CSR Timber Products

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — In directing my question to the Premier I refer to the fact that he has finally agreed to meet CSR workers from Bacchus Marsh despite ignoring their initial letter dated 11 February and not lifting a finger since to help them. Will the Premier now do something more than talk and visit the factory at Bacchus Marsh, as I have agreed to do, and address the fact that 130 jobs are to be lost in a regional area already suffering from unacceptably high double-digit unemployment?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — The Leader of the Opposition cannot tell the truth. I have never refused to meet the CSR workers from Bacchus Marsh.

Mr Brumby — That is a stupid thing to say.

Mr KENNETT — I made provision to meet with a delegation of CSR workers after question time today once it was known they were coming to Melbourne. I reiterate what I said yesterday, that this enterprise has been assisted by the government consistently recently.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr KENNETT — What is the matter with this little man? You are such a little person! The Minister for Rural Development has been meeting with the company to see if anything can be done to retain its activities in Victoria. The meetings took place some time ago. CSR has decided to sell the plant.

Mr Brumby — I will get the *Hansard* to see what you really said yesterday.

Mr KENNETT — No wonder the man is in opposition, which is an appropriate place for him. The company tried to find a buyer for the plant but was unsuccessful. Approximately six months ago CSR announced to its staff it was reviewing its plans based on the particular demand for the product produced by the plant. I said yesterday, as honestly as I could, that there was no way any government could prop up a private enterprise organisation that has no market for its product. The manufacture of this product is

concentrated at the Queensland plant. More importantly, with new generational equipment a new product that has been developed is selling at a high rate. Obviously the Minister for Rural Development has indicated the company has assured him the site will be available for purchase if any one is interested.

The government is committed to doing what it can to attract a buyer but at the end of the day a commercial decision will be made. If the Australian Labor Party is saying that it would keep the site alive by using taxpayers' money, that represents a real difference between both sides of this house.

I also said yesterday that when the opposition complains about the loss of jobs, which is obviously a concern, it often reflects the changes in the business environment. Today I attended at the launch at Cheltenham of the new Southland Shopping Centre. That highlighted clearly that although we have some industries changing because of competition and the nature of new businesses others are coming on stream. The beauty about the Southland Shopping Centre is that over the next few years it will create 2000 permanent retail jobs and 1800 construction jobs.

It is important that the government create an environment in which industry can grow. Changes will always occur in the mix of businesses because of the quality and relevance of the product. Unfortunately, that seems to be the case with the CSR plant at Bacchus Marsh. I look forward to meeting a delegation of workers from Bacchus Marsh immediately after question time.

Taxes: NSW comparisons

Mr LUPTON (Knox) — In light of the release of recent Commonwealth Grants Commission figures, will the Premier inform the house of the government's achievements in reducing taxes and charges in Victoria to below the level of our major state competitor, New South Wales?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — In recent times two lots of economic statistics have been issued, one from the Australian Bureau of Statistics that was quoted widely in the media early last month and, more recently, yesterday or the day before, the Commonwealth Grants Commission released its figures for 1996 and 1997.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition!

Mr KENNETT — Both those figures have conveyed different outcomes for the latest year on which they are reporting, which is 1996-1997. The Grants Commission's figures indicate that Victoria is a higher taxing state than New South Wales. But the figures do not reflect the fact that since they were closed off on 30 June 1997 there has been a substantial reduction to costs in Victoria — for example, there has been a further \$103 million reduction in payroll tax; \$106 million in petrol franchise fees; \$30 million in land tax; and there will be an 18 per cent reduction in Victorian household water bills from 1 January this year.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Mr KENNETT — Last week through the Governor's speech the government announced a \$60 winter power bonus for households and small business each year for the next three years. At the same time the Carr Labor government in New South Wales —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr KENNETT — It has increased taxes by \$692 million. At the same time as Victoria was reducing its taxation, the Labor government in New South Wales was raising it.

Mr Dollis interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Richmond should behave himself.

Mr KENNETT — I can understand the Labor opposition not being interested. Those who observe this place on a day-to-day basis must always question whether those opposite are in any way suitable for the high office of managing the affairs of the state. One can only conclude that they do not justify the trust of the Victorian public.

During the past nine months in the same national environment in which Victoria has significantly reduced taxation, New South Wales has substantially increased taxes. Victoria is clearly no longer the highest taxing state in Australia, and with the passage of time that differential will increase.

Mr Leigh interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Mordialloc.

Mr KENNETT — Those are the dividends that the government committed itself to when it won office in 1992. It is true that the government had to take some corrective action when it came to office to get the state back on its feet. I am happy to say that we are in the process of doing that and that all Victorians, particularly small businesses in this state, will benefit substantially.

The SPEAKER — Order! I call the honourable member for Niddrie.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Members on the government benches will come to order.

Mr Elder interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Ripon.

Mr Elder interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Ripon will cease interjecting.

Premier: credit cards

Mr HULLS (Niddrie) — I refer the Premier to the fact that on 19 December 1996 his press secretary, Mr Steve Murphy, and his chief of staff, Ms Anna Cronin, spent \$974 and \$679 respectively at the Imperial Hotel on their taxpayer-funded credit cards and I ask: who authorised this expenditure of more than \$1600 of taxpayers' money, and what did it relate to?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — I thank the Marriage Wrecker for his question; it is an honour that he wears with a great deal of dignity. In the period that he has been a member of the house it is about the only thing he has done that has had severe ramifications.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr KENNETT — The Leader of the Opposition interjects and says, 'You poor thing'. I say to him, as I have said before, that the only thing Victorian ALP members are good for is the politics of personalities. They have not once put up an alternative policy idea. When the Leader of the Opposition makes public appearances he says the honourable member for Niddrie is a marriage wrecker.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Hulls — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, the Premier is clearly debating the question. This was a

serious question about the use or misuse of taxpayers' funds. I asked the Premier who authorised the use of \$1600 of taxpayers' funds at the Imperial Hotel?

The SPEAKER — Order! The question was clear and there is no point in the honourable member repeating it. I uphold the point of order and ask the Premier to address the question.

Mr KENNETT — I am not aware of any expenditure. I remind the honourable member that under the previous government, which can all be brought to account, all the press officers of the Cain and Kirner governments had expense accounts and they used them in order to fulfil their duties.

Mr Brumby interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting and asking questions across the table!

Mr KENNETT — I remind the honourable member that that practice was adopted by the previous Labor government. Members had credit cards and were able to entertain up to a certain limit. What the Marriage Wrecker is now — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have asked the Deputy Leader of the Opposition twice now to cease interjecting. If he does not cease interjecting he will leave me no alternative but to name him. I suggest he accept that as his final warning.

Mr KENNETT — The practice that has been followed is consistent with that set by both the Cain and Kirner governments, and I suspect that it would be a practice that would be followed by him if he were ever elected to office. If it is not to be a practice, he should say so now.

Planning: suburban amenity

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — Will the Minister for Planning and Local Government inform the house of government initiatives to ensure a balance between the demands of Melbourne's population growth and the preservation of inner suburban character?

Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning and Local Government) — The initiatives required to provide a better balance between the demands for variety, diversity and choice in housing, especially in already settled parts of Melbourne, and the demands for

the protection of the character of certain areas require careful planning.

I am delighted that a community organisation is emerging under the Save Our Suburbs banner. It will give everybody an opportunity to consult with a central organisation regarding those issues. I am in a position to advise the honourable member that we will be moving to improve design to complement neighbourhoods in a number of ways.

Councils, builders and developers will have to place greater emphasis on the preliminary planning and site analysis of their applications to ensure the best possible design outcome for individual neighbourhoods. One of the weaknesses of many of the applications that have been put forward has been the inadequacy of site analyses. The government will support councils which reject applications where the rejection is based on the inadequacy of the site analysis — a matter raised by the honourable member for Sandringham in this place, and to which I now respond.

The administrative tribunal will be asked and advised to ensure that an appeal before that tribunal, where that appeal relates to a site analysis which has been submitted to council for approval, is certified as being in accordance with the requirements of good design. That will be done by departmental submission to the appeal, which is entitled to be made in the name of the minister.

A further pride-of-place initiative will take place with \$500 000 being set aside from 1 July next for specific projects to improve urban design and to demonstrate quality decision making in the selection and development of sites that may be demonstration sites used to show how it can be done properly, together with a suitable education and information program for councils and the development industry to ensure that their capacity to make good planning decisions and to submit quality applications is improved.

In the case of environmental care, it is intended we will encourage councils to retain significant landscape features, as has been the case in Ringwood for many years. Honourable members from that area have fought long and hard to get appropriate vegetation controls over appropriate areas of municipalities, which will certainly lead to a better retention of the character and quality for which those suburbs and suburban areas have become famous. I am sure all honourable members will support that approach.

There will be administrative workloads and difficulties, but the retention of the overall green and treed nature of

our suburban environments, where those are the appropriate characteristics to be retained, is to be encouraged, and overlays suitable for the retention of individual large trees and general garden screening will be put before councils for their consideration.

Councils will need to ensure that designs complement neighbourhood character. That responsibility will rest squarely in the hands of councils. We will assist them, where possible, to apply good design principles and take into account particular local needs of special sites and special community interests in urban character.

Councils may wish to make local variations to the *Good Design Guide*; they have been invited to do so for more than two years.

Mr Baker interjected.

Mr MACLELLAN — One council is formalising its application or is about to make applications. I do not know whether the Brimbank or Wyndham councils from the area of the honourable member for Sunshine are about to do so, but if they have not undertaken those sorts of works, they should do so. If the honourable member ceases to interject I will seek to limit my reply to the question.

We will seek to encourage neighbourhood agreements whereby, as the honourable member for Sandringham said in this place — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister has been speaking for 4½ minutes. I ask him to round off his answer.

Mr MACLELLAN — We will be positive in having regard to section 173 agreements that lead to the retention of single dwellings only or single storeys only or the retention of character gardens in inner suburban settings.

We will look again at the questions of overshadowing and overlooking where privacy issues are involved to determine whether the codes can be strengthened to give greater emphasis and greater power to councils to intervene and effect the reconciliation of the conflicts that inevitably arise between redevelopers and existing residents on those issues.

Premier: credit cards

Mr HULLS (Niddrie) — I refer the Premier to the fact that the honourable member for Polwarth was forced to resign as Minister for Finance in May 1995 because, as the Premier stated, he signed a document that was not in accordance with government guidelines.

Given the fact that government guidelines on taxpayer funded credit cards explicitly prohibit personal purchases, will the Premier apply the same standards to any minister or staff member as he applied to the honourable member for Polwarth and demand his or her resignation if they breach the guidelines?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — I truly thank the honourable member for his question. Not only is he a marriage wrecker but he cannot even get his facts right. I clarify the first answer I gave to the honourable member's earlier question when he asked whether something like \$1600 had been spent at the Imperial Hotel. The answer is yes. About \$1600 was spent at the Imperial Hotel — but it was the Imperial Hotel of Tokyo!

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I will not continue question time until the house comes to order. If the honourable member for Doncaster interjects again, he will be named.

Mr KENNETT — It was during one of the Victorian government's financial road shows to that country. They have been very beneficial not only to this government but to the people as a whole throughout Victoria. It is absolutely typical of the honourable member for Niddrie. He would have known what that was for but he did not wish — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! the house, including the Deputy Premier, will come to order.

Mr KENNETT — As I understand it one of the major items included in that \$1600 was the purchase or hire of mobile phones because Tokyo operates on a different system. That country charges about \$100, \$150 or \$200 a call. It was deemed by my officers to be a lot cheaper and more beneficial for Victorians if two officers hired telephones during the period of their stay.

This individual opposite comes into this house with a grubby reputation. He is without doubt one of the most unattractive members of Parliament we have seen for many years. He was a major contributor to their loss at the last election — —

The SPEAKER — Order! That is not relevant to the question.

Mr KENNETT — He will continue to be a contributor to the ALP's loss because this man has not one policy idea in his head. As to the second part of the

question, which has been raised on a number of occasions, a number of guidelines affecting a whole range of interested parties — whether they be members of Parliament or public servants — are in place. The important thing with all those guidelines is that they be applied with commonsense, that they be used and that they be implemented with commonsense as its base. We will continue to do that, as we have in the past. The only thing paramount to us is that we continue to deliver good government to Victorians based on policies that are clearly enunciated and increasingly supported by the community of this state because of the actions of the honourable member for Niddrie, who stands as an absolute disgrace in all his performances in this place and outside.

Women's budget

Mrs MCGILL (Oakleigh) — I refer the Minister for Women's Affairs to the fact that the women's budget, which in previous years has been tabled, was not tabled last year. Will the minister advise the house on the government's proposals for future reporting on women's issues?

Mrs WADE (Minister for Women's Affairs) — I am sure you would be aware, Mr Speaker, that the last women's budget was tabled in Parliament at the end of 1996. No women's budget was tabled in the last session. I had been waiting for a question from the opposition as to why that was the case, but the opposition apparently did not notice that a women's budget was not tabled in the last session. That epitomises the opposition's approach to women. It is all about talking about but not looking to action that might be taken with regard to women in this state. I am grateful to the honourable member for Oakleigh for raising the issue this afternoon so that I am in a position to advise both honourable members and the women of Victoria generally of the government's proposals for the future.

In the past the women's budget has been a lengthy document covering everything that might in any way affect women in Victoria. It has been a very dense document to read and it has been difficult to obtain information from it. The format of the budget was reorganised a couple of years ago, but it was still not the most helpful document in assisting an understanding of the government's approach to meeting the needs of Victorian women.

This year the government will produce a two-year action plan for women. A much more strategic document, the plan will set out the government's understanding of the needs of women in Victoria in

both metropolitan and rural areas and the ways in which the government intends to meet those needs. Four key themes are proposed to be covered in the action plan: women's health and family structures, an environment where women feel safe, women in decision-making and leadership positions, and economic security.

Four reference groups have been established to look at opportunities, risks and likely scenarios on a whole range of issues for women in the future, including such matters as ageing, the work environment, technology, health, family structures and safety.

The new, pro-active approach has met with great enthusiasm across all portfolios, and a large number of people in all portfolios are involved in the development of a draft policy. However, that is not enough. The government does not want to tell women what they need. Input is needed from the women of Victoria on what they believe are their needs and where they believe government services can be improved.

The draft document will be released when it becomes available. I will be asking all coalition members to consult with their women constituents. Following input from everyone who is interested, it is hoped towards the end of this year to have a final document that represents the government's understanding from that feedback of the needs of Victorian women, as well as an action plan to meet those needs.

I expect that the opposition, in its usual way, will promise to reintroduce the old format of women's budget. I advise the opposition that no Australian jurisdiction continues to produce a women's budget. The author of the first budget, Dr Rhonda Sharp — she introduced the first women's budget in South Australia — has stated that documents of that kind are useful only in a developing economy. Given the vibrancy of the Victorian economy, the government wants to be in the forefront of a much more strategic approach to meeting women's needs.

Schools: class sizes

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I refer the Minister for Education to the fact that, despite his department agreeing to supply class size figures for individual schools to the opposition under FOI on 19 September 1997 and despite the opposition's payment of a \$200 deposit as requested by the department, the figures have not been provided. Why have the minister and his department breached their agreement to release the figures?

Mr GUDE (Minister for Education) — I understand it is necessary for a table to be constructed to meet the

FOI request. The process is somewhat complicated, I assure the honourable member that as soon as the department is in a position to provide the material to the honourable member, it will be done.

TRANS-TASMAN MUTUAL RECOGNITION (VICTORIA) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr KENNETT (Premier) introduced a bill to adopt the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act 1997 of the commonwealth and for other purposes.

Read first time.

ELECTRICITY SAFETY BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill relating to the safety of electricity supply and use and the efficiency of electrical equipment, to repeal the Electric Light and Power Act 1958, to amend certain other acts and for other purposes.

Mr BRACKS (Williamstown) — I ask the Premier for a short explanation of the bill.

Mr KENNETT (Premier) (*By leave*) — The bill concerns the quality of electricity supply. It is to make sure that under the Regulator-General the safety of the supply of electricity to the state is at the highest standard we can possibly predict.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr KENNETT (Premier) introduced a bill to amend the Financial Management Act 1994 with respect to accrual output budgeting and for other purposes.

Read first time.

EDUCATION (TEACHERS) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr GUDE (Minister for Education) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to amend the Education Act 1958 to provide for the disqualification from teaching of teachers found guilty of sexual offences involving children and for other purposes.

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

Mr GUDE (Minister for Education) (*By leave*) — The bill brings into synchronisation what happens in government and non-government schools concerning the dismissal or disqualification of teachers who are found guilty of sexual offences. The honourable member would be aware that the provision already applies in government schools. For whatever reason that is not the case in the non-government sector. The government believes it is appropriate in the interests of the state's children that there be a common approach across Victoria.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

SUMMARY OFFENCES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mrs WADE (Attorney-General) introduced a bill to amend the Summary Offences Act 1966 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mrs WADE (Attorney-General) introduced a bill to amend the Public Prosecutions Act 1994 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

GEOGRAPHIC PLACE NAMES BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Conservation and Land Management) introduced a bill to make provision for the naming of places and the registration of place names, to amend the Survey Coordination Act 1958 and the Local Government Act 1989 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

TERTIARY EDUCATION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr HONEYWOOD (Minister for Tertiary Education and Training) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to amend the Tertiary Education Act 1993 and for other purposes.

Mr HAMILTON (Morwell) — Will the minister give a brief explanation of the bill?

Mr HONEYWOOD (Minister for Tertiary Education and Training) (*By leave*) — The bill proposes to ensure that the government is able to collect information about student enrolments and overseas student participation rates from private tertiary institutions as well as from public institutions. There is currently a deficiency in the legislation because the government cannot obtain such information from private institutions.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed from 24 February; motion of Ms McCALL (Frankston) for adoption of address-in-reply.

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — When the debate was interrupted last night I was stressing the importance of every Victorian family having the right to live with dignity and to be provided with essential services such as health, education, community services and real employment opportunities. The Kennett government is neglecting Victorian families and further alienating them by the empty promises that are trotted out in the government's extensive publicity and PR programs.

I will address particularly the provision of early intervention services. The lack of sufficient places in early intervention programs is but one of many examples of the Kennett government's neglect of families. When children are diagnosed with serious disabilities, families go through a range of emotions. It is important that when parents are trying to come to terms with such diagnoses, they understand that early intervention programs are available for their children. They need practical support at that time.

My research reveals that Victorian parents searching for early intervention places for their disabled preschool children often meet an awesome brick wall. That brick wall exists because the programs are full, the waiting lists are long and when they finally find programs for their children they generally get only a small component of what is required. Parents understand only too well that a range of early intervention services is essential for their children's future. The key to success in early intervention programs is that the range of services — speech therapy, physiotherapy, cognitive development, behaviour management and social skills — is provided as soon as possible in children's lives once the diagnosis is made.

How accessible are Victoria's early intervention programs? There is virtually no immediate access to early intervention programs for children diagnosed with disabilities. They often have to wait 12 months or longer. Victoria has 52 early intervention services. In December 1997 a survey of 20 of the 52 early intervention centres in Victoria revealed that a total of 213 children were on waiting lists and three of the agencies were completely full for the 1998 school year.

In February, following a number of calls to my office, I surveyed half of the early intervention services, 26 of the 52. There were 134 children on waiting lists. Two of the centres were full, but because so many people rang up they did not even bother to have a waiting list. In metropolitan Melbourne the situation is extremely serious. In the centres I contacted in the eastern region there were 42 children on waiting lists. In the northern region there were 36 on waiting lists. In addition the Melbourne Citymission and Sunbury early intervention programs were full, and although they did not have waiting lists, their advice was, 'Don't bother ringing back for at least another term'. Of the southern region centres I surveyed, the Elwyn Morey Centre at Monash alone had 21 children on its waiting list. In the western region the situation is just as depressing. In one Yarraville centre alone, the Coverdale Early Intervention Program, there are 25 children awaiting places.

Notwithstanding the fact that some children do obtain access to early intervention programs, I found that the optimum number of hours available was 20 to 24 hours per week. Most children who were fortunate enough to have a spot in the programs were lucky to receive 12 hours assistance.

I will highlight one of the most dramatic examples of a family with a disabled child who cannot access an early intervention program. The family I refer to does not wish to be named in Parliament, but I have written to

the Minister for Youth and Community Services about the case. The child is a little boy I will call Jason. He was initially referred to the Broad Insight Group in April 1996 and had to wait 10 months before he was given a place at the beginning of the 1997 school year. In April 1997 he was diagnosed by Travancore as having autism. His mother at about the same time had delivered a baby. The combination of Jason's diagnosis with autism and the new baby's arrival meant that the mother was under extreme pressure. It was pressure the Victorian community could not support. The government did not have enough support to help her and she ended up returning to her homeland. When she arrived in her homeland a bereavement occurred in the family and she returned to Australia. Upon her arrival she found that her son Jason could not get into Broad Insight because there was a long waiting list. The harmony of family relationships and the mother's health are at extreme risk. Because the state has failed to provide an early intervention placement the implications for that family are grave. It is terribly important that early intervention services are provided for the children and families that need it.

The absurdity in the management of the early intervention program by the Department of Human Services becomes obvious when a child with a disability wishes to enter kindergarten. In most cases it is necessary to have the support of an integration aide to enable them to do so. In its wisdom the department requires that the child can have the services of an integration aide if he or she has a case plan which will ensure that the integration programs are helping the child. A family with a child diagnosed with serious disability when he or she begins preschool will find it extremely difficult to access an integration aide to ensure that the child is safe at kindergarten and able to access the available educational programs.

After speaking to some of the families involved, I have gained the overwhelming impression that the early intervention and integration aide exercise was designed by the Kennett government to break their spirit. Families have enough to contend with without having to go cap in hand to the department. A parent of a child with a disability who attended a meeting with others in his centre drew up this memo and asked me to pass it on to Parliament:

Memo: to the Premier and the Minister for Community Services

From: families requiring early intervention programs for their child with a disability

Re: early intervention program

Deeds not words are what we want.

I turn now to the impact on my electorate of the poor provision of educational services in this state. I shall describe particularly the effects of the closure of a number of high schools and the current provisions relating to special school buses and distance education.

In my electorate of Pascoe Vale one secondary school is continuing to operate, that is, the Pascoe Vale Girls Secondary College. Hadfield and Oak Park high schools have closed; Coburg Secondary College was amalgamated with Preston Secondary College; and the Coburg tech was closed. The implication for students, particularly those in the Oak Park and the Strathmore Heights area, has been particularly dramatic.

Last year I spoke extensively with people at Strathmore Secondary College, Oak Park Primary School and Strathmore North Primary School to try to work out how the children in my electorate could access their closest secondary schools. For children in the Oak Park and Strathmore Heights area their closest school is the Strathmore Secondary College. I have been approached by the school council president of the Strathmore Secondary College, Christine Rydberg, and the school council president of the Strathmore North Primary School, Heather Kennedy, to raise the fact that Strathmore Secondary College is grossly under-resourced in terms of permanent buildings. Currently, the college is 2100 square metres short of permanent building space, 1400 square metres of permanent teaching space and its non-teaching space is 700 square metres below entitlement.

For many years the school has been stacked with relocatables, which cannot be used for specialist rooms. They are short five technology rooms and two personal development rooms; they lack a general purpose room; they are short on library space; there is no student lounge; and they are short six lecture rooms.

The feeling in my electorate, which I strongly support, is that the government needs to spend the profits from the sale of the Oak Park, Hadfield and Coburg high schools on local students. The view expressed by people in Strathmore North and Oak Park, who cannot access Strathmore Secondary College because of the government's closure of other local schools, is, 'It's our money, Ralph!'. They believe their children deserve proper education and that the proceeds from the sale of school sites should come back into the community to enable their children to access their closest secondary colleges. However, at the moment the closest secondary college is full and therefore unable to take additional students. The school council and the staff have no objection to taking additional students, but they are unable to provide the necessary spaces because of a

lack of physical resources. They have the energy, the excellent staff and wonderful programs needed, but Minister Gude has yet to do something to improve the atrocious position with school facilities.

The second aspect that affects education in my electorate is the special school bus zones that the Minister for Education dreamt up over perhaps another bottle of whisky. Special schools provide education for children from age 5 to 18 years. My area has a range of children who have very different needs. Some wish to access the Ascot Vale Special School, local special schools or Concord School in Watsonia. Previously the Department of Education provided buses to enable children with disabilities to access the primary or secondary schools which best met their needs, but that is no longer the case. If a child without a disability made a choice between Pascoe Vale Girls Secondary College, Box Forest Secondary College or Strathmore Secondary College — if there were places — they could do so because they could ride, walk or catch public transport.

However, children with disabilities provide a different picture. Minister Gude has shown very poor judgment and absolutely no knowledge of education for special needs children because he decided that buses cannot pick up children outside their zones. For example, Joshua Rudnicki of Oak Park attends Ascot Vale Special School and he is collected by the school bus. Although there is a vacancy on the school bus for another child who lives a block away from Joshua and attends the same school, the education department prohibits the other child getting on the bus. Instead his parents must make a special trip to the school every morning and collect him every evening. That is hardly fair to the family. It does not allow a child in my electorate to access the school that provides best for that child. In short, it is blatant discrimination.

Dianne Miller is another lady who came to my office and spoke to me about her daughter, Lauren, who attends Concord School. She was enrolled on the understanding that she would be permitted to travel by bus, but now she has been told that she cannot do so. Her parents are prepared to drive to another location where the bus picks up another student going to Concord, but with sheer bloody-mindedness the department says that its rules stand and the child cannot get on the bus.

Mrs Miller put it to me in the following terms. I refer to an earlier newspaper article in which she is quoted as having said:

It is discriminatory because all children should be able to go to the school of their choice and there is only one special school in my area.

Mrs Miller said she visited five schools and took into account the many factors associated with her daughter's educational needs. She decided on Concord School because of its emphasis on integration, full-time classroom assistance and the use of curriculum that was close to that used in government schools. Lauren should not be denied an education that best meets her needs because of Minister Gude's poor decision in relation to special school bus zones.

I have also been contacted by Ann George from Maltravers Crescent, Cranbourne, who seems to have spent a considerable period of her life advocating on behalf of her son, Daniel, who, incidentally, came into Parliament and enjoyed a milkshake here. Unfortunately, he is not enjoying too much goodwill from the Minister for Education who, again showing a callous and cold-hearted approach to children at special schools, said that Daniel was not allowed to use the school bus that collects children near Daniel's home and then travels to Glenallen School in Glen Waverley.

Daniel is a delightful little boy with mischievous eyes, and not only have his parents done a great deal of work but he has battled hard to get as many opportunities as possible. His parents have decided on Glenallen School and, after listening to the reasons, I can understand why. The dilemma for the George family is that they have five children — two at secondary school; Daniel at Rangebank Primary School; and two preschoolers. Just so that she can get Daniel across to the Glen Waverley school on time using her own transport, Mrs George has to wake up the younger children, aged three and two, at 6.30 a.m. She wonders what will happen when her preschoolers reach kinder and school age. It is a nightmare for the family, a nightmare that I am sure contains recurring visions of Minister Gude.

The Minister for Education needs to change this discriminatory practice that does not provide special school bus access for children who live outside the zones allocated. Families should not have to beg for basic school public transport. They should not have to have their cases raised in Parliament — but, unfortunately, they do.

The final point I raise is distance education. I have been approached by Michael Smith of Pascoe Vale who attempted to access the distance education program only to find that metropolitan students over the age of 21 have been denied access. He is a shift worker with the railways and wishes to do his VCE by distance education. If he enrolled to do his VCE with the

Council of Adult Education he would be unable to enrol for the full program because of his shift work. The Department of Education brochure on distance education states:

In line with current policy, TAFE colleges and regional councils of adult community and further education have prime responsibility for educating adults — that is, students who are aged 18 years of age or over on 1 January.

That is a very clever cost-shifting exercise from the state to the federal government. It leaves yet another group of people discriminated against by this government — namely, those who require distance education. I would have thought Minister Gude would like to ensure that distance education remained for those over 21 years of age purely out of self interest. If he is unsuccessful in his attempt to become leader of the coalition he may wish to return to study and distance education may give him access to the VCE he has not as yet attained!

Finally, I refer to the double standards of the government with City Link and the Upfield line. A couple of weeks ago a tragedy occurred at the Box Forest Road rail intersection. It was another example of an accident that should not have occurred. The government should have ensured that boom gates were installed at that crossing as it promised. I suggest that if Minister Cooper wants to let northern suburbs residents know that the government wants to do the right thing by them, he put boom gates on the Box Forest Road intersection as well as at the Fawcner cemetery crossing and Barrys Road intersection. The bloody-mindedness of the government is revealed when one finds that the person who witnessed the accident was denied TAC counselling.

Mr J. F. McGRATH (Warrnambool) — I welcome the opportunity to participate in the address-in-reply and on behalf of the electorate of Warrnambool pass on to His Excellency's predecessor, Mr Richard McGarvie and his wife, Lesley, our appreciation for a wonderful term as Governor. They provided great leadership. They told me very early on that one of their challenges was to demystify the role of the Governor so that people could understand that the Governor was very much a part of the people.

The McGarvies constantly interacted with communities throughout country Victoria as well as with those in the city. They visited Warrnambool about four or five times during their term. By visiting many primary and secondary schools and other groups they positively progressed the office of Governor. Their open days at Government House involved the community in that particular path.

Sir James and Lady Gobbo have certainly fitted into the role very quickly. I congratulate them both on their appointment and look forward to working with them. Following discussions with His Excellency at the opening of Parliament I understand he will be visiting Warmambool and south-west Victoria to see what activates the citizens in that great part of the state.

As a 'home-grown product' of the area I feel privileged to represent Warmambool. I am unashamedly biased about the positive strengths it provides Victoria. For that reason we are always keen to invite people from all parts and positions in Victoria to come and look at what we have and what we are doing. In that way they can make any suggestions or provide advice as to how we can progress in the future. When they find the time to make that trip His Excellency and his wife will be welcomed by Warmambool's citizens.

There was much discussion earlier in a motion before the house about parliamentary behaviour that degrades the level of debate and the standing of parliamentarians in the community. I consider that to be unfortunate. I happen to have a very strong view about behaviour in this place. I believe it behoves us to behave in the same manner that we would behave in our own constituencies. When I look at the behaviour of some members of this place I do not believe that is the way in which, generally, we conduct ourselves. Sometimes when I am sitting in here, whether in this seat or in my role as the Deputy Speaker in the Chair, I am appalled. Sometimes I am ashamed to be a member of this house when I look up and see in the gallery a group of children from either a primary or secondary school and wonder what we are doing to those young people by sending them away with a vision of the parliamentary behaviour of this place.

With those few words, I trust that those members of this house who are listening or who might read this speech at some time in the future will start to think seriously about the responsibility that each of us has in respect of parliamentary behaviour.

As the elected member for Warmambool, I am here today representing 33 500 registered constituents and many thousands of other people who for a variety of reasons are not on the electoral roll. We have a responsibility, particularly to our young people, to set a pattern of behaviour that will encourage them to be forthright and honourable citizens in the years ahead. I am not sure that we are doing that now.

As part of that process, I challenge the media to become more informed about parliamentary process and political activities so that the reports of activities in this

place do it justice and do not seek to downgrade the importance of the responsibility of members of this place because, unfortunately, if one looks at the magical chart that sets out the public credit rating, if you like, of the various professions, it shows that parliamentarians and the media rate similarly right down the bottom of the scale. That is unfortunate. I am sure that members of the media take on that professional role with great enthusiasm, a vision and a wish to be successful at what they are doing. The challenge for both parliamentarians and members of the media is to seriously think about what we are doing and how we are doing it, and to lift the image we have in the community so that we can start to gain the sort of respect we want. Unless one provides people with the opportunity to give respect, one will not gain it. Currently we are failing dismally in that regard.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr J. F. McGRATH — I will leave that interjection alone because that can also be detrimental in terms of the code of behaviour. I hope the honourable member for Pascoe Vale will think about the sort of things that happen in this place and what we can do collectively to lift the image of people in our profession and in the media. It is all very well to throw around innuendos and other remarks but unless we can support and substantiate them they should not be expressed in this place.

The electorate of Warmambool which I represent is principally a dairy farming area. It has a wide range of both primary and secondary industries. In the south west of the electorate dairy farming is by and large the biggest contributor to the economy and it is recognised as the fastest growing dairy region in the world. In recent years milk production has increased by 8 per cent. If one looks at productivity across all the various sectors of industry, whether it be primary or secondary industry, retailing or whatever, one can see that no other industry sector has provided productivity increases — I am not talking about market increases but about productivity increases — of 8 per cent.

The Minister for Agriculture and Resources has said that in Victoria we intend to grow as a government and to increase exports from \$2 billion to \$6 billion by the year 2001. Western Victoria is recognised as the area that could contribute significantly to that growth, particularly through the dairy industry. Four major milk companies or processors operate in the area: Murray-Goulburn Cooperative, Nestlé, Bonlac Cooperative and a local manufacturer called the Warmambool Cheese and Butter Factory which works very closely in cooperation with Kraft Foods, an

extremely large processor. In recent years those four companies have spent tens of millions of dollars in upgrading their technology. I am delighted that \$90 million more will be invested by those four companies for the further growth of this industry.

If one considers the investment in the herds of the 2300 Victorian dairy farms, which in this day and age are stud bred herds of excellent producing quality, one must take into account the value of the herd, the property and the infrastructure and then start to address the issue of the productivity gains and the sort of pasture management and techniques farmers have had to utilise in recent years to remain competitive. I can remember that when I was growing up as a young boy on a property milked a cow to the acre, which was a pretty substantial effort. In those days very few chemicals and no water apart from the natural capacity of the property were used. Today we see a significant improvement in pasture growth and the technology that can be used has resulted in the capacity of a property to be increased significantly.

Much interest has been expressed from across the Tasman, from New Zealand, which is recognised by many as the best dairy farming country in the world. Over a long time Victoria's production and technology will be equal to, if not better than, the technology coming out of New Zealand. The farmers are very good at what they do. Many New Zealanders are coming to western Victoria, paying huge sums of money for properties and consolidating properties to go into farming in a very big way. Such production will be significant. In western Victoria the generation of jobs and cash flowing into the economies of the cities and towns will be significantly enhanced by the growth in the dairy industry.

As a result, many issues need to be addressed. The government has looked at several ways of improving the infrastructure. Because there are several I will not have time to talk about all of them, but I need to mention one significant issue: road funding and Better Roads Victoria. It is not unusual now for someone to get into a car, drive to Melbourne — which for me is a three-and-a-half-hour drive — and be stopped a couple of times, not by a policeman but because of roadworks on some of the off-highway roads. Imagine going to a meeting and being held up for 15 to 20 minutes by roadworks: a person could become anxious or intolerant. On the other hand, isn't it fantastic that that sort of work is going on?

Much more work needs to be done. Part of the road funding problem we now face is caused by the neglect that was obvious after 10 years of Labor government.

Labor did very little to improve road funding at state or federal level. The only major achievement the Labor Party could ever claim for road funding was the move by the then Treasurer of Australia, Mr Paul Keating, to index fuel taxes on Australian motorists. That turned approximately \$980 million that was produced in 1983 as a result of the national fuel tax and excise to a pool of about \$30 billion.

Unfortunately, the original concept of that fund, which was that it be used for roads, was never carried across. As a result, over a period of time a declining percentage has come back to road funds, which have now been depleted to less than 10 per cent. For that we can thank the federal Labor government. People are now paying significant fuel taxes but more than 90 per cent of that money is going into consolidated revenue for other purposes.

The Victorian coalition government made what many believed to be a brave move in imposing the 3-cent-a-litre Better Roads Victoria Fund levy. It was brave because it followed the dreadful Pyramid tax that had to be imposed for goodness knows what reason. Why a government would attach the failure of a financial institution to motorists is beyond my comprehension, but that is what Labor did, as the records prove. People therefore were very nervous about any sort of a levy on motorists; my own constituents argued vigorously at branch and public meetings about the 3-cent-a-litre Better Roads levy, but it has been an absolute bonanza. It is a credit to this government that it has been bold enough to introduce Better Roads Victoria. Of the millions of dollars in revenue 28 per cent is collected from country Victoria, but in recognition of the importance of country Victoria at that time the government allocated 33.3 per cent of the fund to country and regional Victoria. Right back then there was recognition of the importance of the role played by regional Victoria — despite the lack of numbers in the database — in production and particularly in export earnings for the state, and of the need to acknowledge that importance.

I am grateful for Better Roads Victoria. The challenge is to try to pick up on the many roads that have been left to deteriorate and the bridges that have been neglected by previous state and federal Labor governments. This government will continue to lobby its federal coalition colleagues for a better share of the fuel tax excise so work can commence on the many good road projects that need to be undertaken.

Moving on from industry and roads to health I point out that many may say that there are problems with health facilities in regional Victoria. I say, what's new? From

time immemorial there have been problems with health services as society has moved from one technology to another or from one era to another. However, it is the response to each challenge as it comes that has to be acknowledged.

As a result of provision of improved technology, changes in directions of funding and the building of incentives into the system during the past five years the health system is now providing more help and opportunities for help and treating more patients than ever before. Significant savings have been made. They came with some pain, but hospital CEOs with whom I meet regularly tell me they would never have believed they could find the savings to the system that they found; they would never have believed those savings were there.

In Warmambool there is a large regional hospital which provides a whole range of special services. The advent of telemedicine will be an absolute bonanza for country people, particularly those in Warmambool, because not only will it be possible to utilise the services of specialised people practising in Melbourne using telemedicine diagnosis and so on, but those people can also be used in the training of others. It is hard to estimate the value of telemedicine in training but the amount of time doctors spent on the road in country Victoria travelling backwards and forwards is enormous. Even more enormous is the financial, physical and emotional cost of taking people out of the health system to travel to Melbourne for appropriate training. A Warmambool health worker attending a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. meeting in Melbourne would effectively have to get up at 4.30 a.m., leave home by about 5.30 a.m., drive to Melbourne for a 9.00 a.m. start, sit through a training course, get back into the car at 5.00 p.m. or thereabouts and arrive home at around 8.30 p.m. That is a big day in anyone's life, physically and emotionally. That person not only has the trauma of driving down and back, which people find a tiring and challenging experience in itself, but must undertake 8 hours of training in between. Telemedicine will provide wonderful opportunities for country Victorians to tap into the services of the specialists who, understandably, locate themselves in high population centres. Health care in the country areas is, to coin a phrase, in a healthy state.

A new acute psychiatric care unit has just been built in Warmambool, moving away from an old 140-bed institution. Because we never want to go back to the style of treatment where people were medicated, put into their rooms and left there day in, day out; year in, year out, a new style of community-based treatment has been instigated. New acute care units are designed for

modern-day nursing management of the whole client base. The unit is not connected but adjacent to the base hospital where the service has been mainstreamed, so the savings made on managing the former facility have now gone back into hospital funds, providing more resources for community work and infrastructure. I am not saying it is right yet; there is still much to be done, but there has been a tremendous shift from an institution-based service to a community-based service.

The funds must be brought from the institution to the community, and the infrastructure and the right support mechanisms must be in place in the community to make sure the service is as good as it can be. We have a long way to go in that regard, but the government and the Minister for Health acknowledge that; the minister does not resile from that and will continue to work on it.

There will be a \$5 million theatre and accident and emergency upgrade at Warmambool and District Base Hospital, so the emphasis is on regional health. Hospitals and health services in Terang, Mortlake and Port Fairy are catering for local needs and working cooperatively with the regional hospital. It is important for them to be able to work together and share resources.

Timboon, east of Warmambool, is to all intents and purposes an isolated community. It services an area of the Great Ocean Road where many road accidents involving overseas tourists have occurred, so it is important to have a good health facility. The government has allocated funds to set up a service in Timboon as an extension of the hospital service that has been there for many years.

In 1956 the then Chief Commissioner of Police stood on the steps of the Warmambool police station and said words like, 'This is an appalling station and I will see it replaced'. Like the 1956 Olympic Games, that event has been and gone and the police station has been on and off the priority list on many occasions. To the great credit of the coalition government and the former Minister for Police and Emergency Services, now Minister for Agriculture and Resources, a new \$6.05 million police station is now appearing on the landscape at Warmambool. That is a good-news police story and will bring together into one building police officers who are now working in four different locations. Administration will be much better and the interaction between members of the foot police, the CIB, the mobile police and the general uniform branch will be much improved; they will be in a common meeting place.

A multimedia centre has been set up in Warrnambool as a pilot program. The claim has been made on more than one occasion, and no-one has disputed it, that this is the first government in the world to have a Minister for Multimedia. Students, the unemployed, people from the TAFE college or members of the general community can go to the centre and learn the basics of multimedia and computers, the Internet and all the wonderful opportunities that exist and will challenge us in the years ahead. At my vintage I am challenged by the technology of today's multimedia, but we must accept the challenge because that is where we are heading. It has been fantastic to have the multimedia centre established at Warrnambool with the government's support. The people of Warrnambool are really using the facility. I had the privilege of opening it along with my federal colleague David Hawker — because the commonwealth government also contributed towards its establishment, we had the pleasure of jointly opening the centre. It is of great benefit to the local community.

I shall make some comment about the Great Ocean Road.

Mr Hulls interjected.

Mr J. F. McGRATH — It is a lovely place for a trip. Imagine driving down the Great Ocean Road today! My electorate encompasses the majority of that road, which includes the Twelve Apostles, the gorge, what was London Bridge, and what is the best kept secret along the Great Ocean Road.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr J. F. McGRATH — The honourable member for Albert Park has just assisted me — the Bay of Islands. I have often asked tourists whether they have been down the Great Ocean Road, and they say they have. But when I ask whether they have been to the Bay of Islands they say no and ask, 'Where's that?'. Let me tell everyone: you have not seen the Great Ocean Road until you have been to the Bay of Islands. It is fantastic. When honourable members are asked if they have been along the Great Ocean Road they should tell people to make sure they go to the Bay of Islands before they come to Warrnambool.

The new work at the Twelve Apostles to provide services for visitors is a wonderful innovation in one of the most outstanding national parks and coastal areas of the world. There is no doubt about it. Those who have travelled overseas would see how the scenery in that area rates in comparison with that in other parts of the world.

I am proud to be the member for Warrnambool and a member of a coalition government that is delivering services right across the Victorian electorate. South-western Victoria is well placed to take up the challenges of the Minister for Agriculture and Resources, who in his former ministry provided it with the opportunity to take export earnings beyond \$6 billion after 2001. The farmers of the area are well placed to do that.

I look forward to continuing to serve in this place and to the forthcoming budget presentation. I believe the government has a focus on the whole of Victoria and, so far as the south-west is concerned, Victoria is certainly on the move.

Mr HULLS (Niddrie) — It is a pleasure to join the debate in reply to the Governor's speech. It is important to note that such speeches are supposed to set out the road map of the government's priorities and initiatives over the next few years. A great deal of community disquiet and concern has been expressed about the direction in which the government is heading. This culminated in an almost 16 per cent swing against the Kennett government at the Mitcham by-election.

Victorians require a newer, softer image of the government and the Premier. Not only ordinary Victorians but backbenchers and ministers require a much softer approach from the Premier. It was hoped after the Mitcham by-election that the Premier had learnt his lesson and would stop acting a way that make a former Queensland Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen look like a freedom fighter.

Mr McNamara interjected.

Mr HULLS — It is interesting to note the Deputy Premier believes Joh was a freedom fighter! That is an indictment more of the current Deputy Premier than the former Premier of Queensland. It was hoped the Governor's speech would give a clear indication that the government was prepared to change and that the Premier was prepared to be more consultative and transparent with Victorians. Unfortunately, as eloquent as it was, the Governor's speech did not deal with the real issues that concern ordinary Victorians.

The issues on which Labor campaigned in the Mitcham by-election and on which it will campaign at the next state election have by and large been ignored in the government's road map for the next few years. In fact, there was no admission of guilt from the government over the crisis it has created in Victoria's health and education systems. There was no apology

for sacking some 9000 teachers and closing hundreds of schools.

There was no apology in the Governor's speech for the government's undermining of a world-class hospital and ambulance system. There was no explanation for the government's overseeing a huge increase in unemployment and no apology to those young Victorians who have little or no chance of gaining employment under the current Kennett regime. There was no plea of guilty from this undemocratic Premier for tearing apart many of the basic tenets of a democratic society. There was nothing about the reinstatement of the independence of the Auditor-General or the reinstatement of common-law rights for seriously injured workers. There was no apology to those victims of crime who have had their compensation for pain and suffering stolen from them; and, of course, there was nothing about the reinstatement of those independent watchdogs that are so essential to a free, democratic and civilised society.

Unfortunately, a leopard never changes its spots. It does not matter what sort of soft cuddly words he uses in trying to set out his new agenda or who he tries to blame for his own problems, the Premier cannot change. He has not changed, cannot change and will not change. Since the Mitcham by-election his arrogance has worsened, not diminished. He has become more dictatorial and more of a mirror image of that now disgraced and known to have been corrupt former Premier of Queensland, Joh Bjelke-Petersen.

The events of the past few days confirm that the Victorian government is in decay. I have often warned government members that unless they take a stand against the Premier they will be tarnished for all time, just as those ministers and members of Parliament who were part of the corrupt Bjelke-Petersen regime are now tainted for the rest of their lives. I advise government members that their time of reckoning has now come.

An interesting article in the *Weekend Australian* of 29 and 30 November makes it clear what future generations will think of the actions of this government. The last paragraph of the article says:

Says one well-known businessman: 'Jeff Kennett remains in the ascendancy, despite some poor opinion polling recently. While it stays that way, you won't hear too much criticism of him ... But when things turn against him, as they inevitably will, everyone will be saying his behaviour was pretty disgusting'.

The behaviour of the Premier and the government has been obscene. When the history of the demise of the Kennett regime is written, people will refer to the huge

mandate and the huge goodwill that came with the election of the first Kennett government in 1992. They will also note that it was the Premier's failure to understand the notion of conflict of interest and the importance of keeping the office of Premier separate from any of his private interests that became the cancer that all the chemotherapy in the world could never cure. Whether it was the KNF affair, the Guangdong share scandal or other controversies involving the Premier's using his public office to line his pockets, the rot started to set in a long time ago.

There are three tests that can be used to ascertain the extent to which a government has lost the plot and its respect for democratic processes and has started the slippery slide down the path of corruption. The first test is whether a government so fears criticism and dissent that it silences its critics and gets rid of independent watchdogs. That has been evident over the years, and the opposition has cited examples of it time and again in this place, whether it has involved Moira Rayner, the former Commissioner for Equal Opportunity, the former Director of Public Prosecutions, the attacks on judges or the proposal for a super tribunal that gives the Attorney-General the power to sack its members if she believes they have shown bias or for any other reason. That is another extraordinary example of a government wanting to silence its critics. The government has passed the test of silencing its critics with flying colours.

The second test of whether a government is in decay is whether it bends over backwards to look after its mates at the expense of ordinary Victorians. That can also be confirmed by whether a government goes into bat for shonks and charlatans at the expense of ordinary Victorians. The final test that shows absolutely whether a government is in decay is whether it gives up on good governance and decides to line its own pockets and to loot the joint before it is voted out of office. I will refer to each one of those tests shortly.

In examining whether this government is bending over backwards to look after its mates, one need look no further than those two characters who have been in the media over the past couple of days — the good friends of the Premier, Lloyd Williams and Ron Walker. Why was the government even considering giving tax concessions to its mates at the casino, and why has it still not made a decision on whether it will take action against the casino for a fundamental breach of the licence? We all know Ron Walker is the federal Treasurer of the Liberal Party. He has been described time and again as the party's chief bagman. He goes around knocking on doors and collecting money for the Liberal Party to try to ensure it gets re-elected. Of

course, the wealthier Ron Walker gets, the more able he is not only to directly fund the re-election of the Liberal Party but also to guarantee the party's debts — as he did for the last federal election.

Lloyd Williams has a close friendship with Premier Kennett that goes back many years. As we know, in their earlier days the Premier was a suburban ad man and Lloyd Williams was a suburban property developer. Now they have formed a partnership that transcends the normal standards of good, open and accountable government in the best interests of all Victorians. The Premier has obscenely championed the cause of his mates, Lloyd and Ron, and in so doing has abrogated his responsibility to the wider community.

A number of articles have been published recently about the relationship between the Premier and the casino, including the fact that the Premier was considering giving further tax concessions to his mates, despite the casino's opulence and despite the waste and mismanagement of the past. Those tax concessions would have been immediately siphoned off to the shareholders in Hudson Conway.

This matter is not at an end.

Mr McNamara interjected.

Mr HULLS — The Deputy Premier says it did not happen, but the matter is not at an end. One only has to look at the press release put out by the Minister for Gaming yesterday, in which he makes it clear that the matter has not been finalised. Honourable members should have no doubt that when circumstances change — they are the words used in the press release — the government will give further consideration to granting the tax concessions. How could circumstances change? If, for instance, the Sydney casino is given similar tax concessions to Crown casino, will that mean Lloyd and Ron will come cap in hand to the Premier, knock on his door and say, 'We want further concessions.'? You can bet your life it will.

The Leader of the Opposition and the press have described Lloyd Williams as the Pharaoh. Given the waste and mismanagement and the changes Lloyd Williams has made, it is fair to say that the casino's opulence makes the efforts of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos look like those of small-time impoverished painters and decorators. Lloyd Williams spent hundreds of thousands of dollars removing staircases, and if he did not like his golf course he spent hundreds of thousands of dollars changing it. It has all been extraordinary.

A look at the favours that have already been bestowed on the casino should send alarm bells ringing in the head of every coalition member. There has been change after change and favour after favour. For instance, the original tender documents made it clear that a specialist casino operator had to be part of the consortium. Federal Hotels was part of the original Crown Casino consortium, but immediately after Hudson Conway won the casino tender it got rid of its partner. Who did it put in to manage the casino instead? None other than itself! A suburban developer with no experience at all of running a casino suddenly became the manager of the biggest monopoly cash cow in town!

A number of other changes have taken place, including those to the casino's design. The owners have been given handouts, such as the \$174 million gift that the Auditor-General identified as a result of the casino's being undercharged for an increase in the number of gaming tables. The Premier sought the extra tables himself. How extraordinary that the Premier was running around saying that he wanted more gaming tables at the casino. The government canned anti-gambling advertisements, but it also passed legislation to ensure that if somebody associated with the casino was charged with a criminal offence the other people associated with it could remain in business.

The Premier has attacked the commonwealth government's airport privatisation legislation, which would have allowed a casino to be built at Tullamarine airport. He also vehemently attacks anybody who asks important questions about Crown Casino. Of course the Premier has always denied he is closely involved with the casino. At one stage it applied to increase the size of its hotel from 350 rooms to 1000 rooms, which was at first knocked back by the Casino and Gaming Authority. An article in the *Age* of 25 February 1994 states in part:

... If Jeff Kennett's mates were getting favourable treatment, don't you think this process would have been approved.

But guess what? A couple of weeks later the approval was given, which absolutely confirmed that his mates were getting favourable treatment. The press release put out yesterday by Roger Hallam, the Minister for Gaming in the other place, makes it clear that the door is still open for the granting of further favours to the casino.

How obscene would it be if the government decided to do further favours for its mates while the propriety of those running Crown Casino is being investigated. People may have forgotten about the continuing fraud squad investigation into Hudson Conway and its

subsidiary, Gleem, which involves serious accusations that Gleem and Hudson Conway defrauded the state government to the tune of \$6 million. Unless and until that matter is cleared up, under no circumstances should this government consider, firstly, granting any further favours to the casino, and, secondly, waiving the casino licence conditions.

Crown's failure to build the second tower by 30 November 1999 does not only mean it should have to pay a fine of \$50 000 a day. It is all well and good for government members to say it would be unfair to impose the fine, but we keep forgetting that the building of the tower is a condition of the licence. If Crown breaches the condition and members opposite say that is okay, what other conditions will they allow it to breach and get away with? Another investigation involves insider trading and the failure to disclose certain information about casino shares. I do not want to say anything that may prejudice that investigation, but it is serious and ongoing.

These matters must be cleared up before the government even considers doing any further favours for the casino. We all know the Premier has handcuffed himself to the mast of the casino and aligned himself with people like Lloyd Williams and Ron Walker — and he has to live with that. In fact, his views have a fair amount in common with those of people like Ron Walker.

It is interesting to read an article by Sue Neales in the *Age* in 1994 entitled 'Casino bidder had a flying start', because it contains Ron Walker's views on conflict of interest. He was accused by the media of having a conflict of interest because of his association with the casino and the Grand Prix Corporation. He is reported as saying:

The grand prix to me is bigger than the Olympic Games for Victoria, and I'm so proud of having won it. Anyone who wants to level conflict of interest against me can go to hell'.

That is his view of conflict of interest. Talk about peas in a pod. The Premier's view is exactly the same.

Another comparison can be made between the Bjelke-Petersen regime in Queensland and the Kennett regime in Victoria. Joh Bjelke-Petersen continually defended people of dubious character, including the members of the white shoe brigade, which in Queensland was headed by a property developer named Mike Gore. He was able to persuade the then Queensland Premier to help him out with a \$10.6 million loan. At that stage one of Mike Gore's best mates was none other than Mr Kerry Packer. In fact, they went to the gym together — without much

success, I suspect, for either of them. Mike Gore was an absolute shonk, and he kept going cap in hand to the government for favours.

It is interesting to note the sorts of people the Premier continues to defend — without making any comparisons between them and Mike Gore. The Premier continues to allow Ron Walker to arrogantly park his car at the front of Parliament House without an appropriate permit, as though he is the Premier-in-waiting and the Premier is a de facto director of Crown Casino. Time and again the Premier has publicly defended people like Brian Quinn, Bruce Mathieson — Mr Bojangles — and Bill Farrow as well as Marie Tehan, the Minister for Conservation and Land Management, and Bruce Atkinson, who represents Koonung Province in the other place. The list goes on. The Premier ties himself to the mast of those people, but if they happen to be brought down he too will suffer the consequences and be brought down with them.

The last aspect of a decaying government is when it has given up absolutely on good governance, realises it is in the last throes of governing and decides to line its own pockets. As I said, it is a bit like the distasteful and disgraceful looting that takes place when a city faces a disaster such as a fire or a flood. Honourable members will recall the dreadful Los Angeles riots some time ago. When looting takes place good government is thrown away and criminal activity occurs, which is exactly what has happened with this government.

The coalition has given up on good government and realises it is in decay. It is in the last throes of governing the state and has decided to loot the joint. The government has decided to get what it can out of it! It may involve the approval of your own overseas trip and the spending of thousands of dollars that can be assigned to you in your official capacity, despite what the relevant guidelines say. It may mean using state government corporate credit cards for private purposes; it may mean giving yourself a very healthy retirement package. It paints the picture that the government has decided to loot the show. 'Loot the show before we go' is this government's motto.

I have raised the important issue of corporate credit cards many times before. Government members do not seem to understand how important it is. I continually refer to what happened in Queensland a few years ago because I do not want to see similar circumstances in this state. As a Victorian I do not want to see this state disgraced, which is what happened in Queensland. Ministers went to gaol for using their taxpayer-funded corporate credit cards for private purposes — and we

know who they are. People like Leisha Harvey, the former health minister, went to gaol for using her taxpayer-funded corporate credit card for private meals and going to the theatre — perhaps even the opera! It rings a bell. Don Lane, the former transport minister, went to gaol for 15 months for using his taxpayer-funded corporate credit card for private purposes. Brian Austin went to gaol for 12 months for the same thing. Geoff Muntz, the former tourism minister, used his taxpayer-funded corporate credit card for private purposes and went to gaol. Just recently in Queensland a minister got the sack for using his corporate credit card for private purposes. Why shouldn't you be punished? Of course you should be! The guidelines in this state are crystal clear:

Under no circumstances may the corporate card be used for personal purposes.

You can't get simpler than that. Even if you repay the money you can still be charged under the Crimes Act. In the Department of Justice before they get their corporate credit cards people do not just walk up to Jan Wade and wait for her to say, 'We like you; here is a card; do your best; go to the opera; do what you like'. A person must sign a form which says:

If I misuse the card (that is, use it otherwise than in accordance with the instructions given to me) I understand that proceedings may be instituted against me under either the Public Service Act 1974 or the Audit Act 1992 or the Crimes Act 1978 or by action under all acts.

The Crimes Act refers to obtaining a financial advantage by deception — that is, making out a purchase is official when it is not. That is why the credit card issue is such an important matter and why people went to gaol in Queensland. It is why the opposition will continue to ask questions in the house day in and day out on this issue.

It is not only in Australia that it is an offence to use your corporate credit card for private purposes. In 1995 Ms Mona Sahlin made a challenge for the leadership in Sweden. However, the challenge was derailed. An article in the *Australian Financial Review* on 19 October 1995 states:

It may not be clear until late December whether any charges will be levelled against Ms Sahlin following revelations that she repeatedly used government credit cards for private purchases and often took months to repay the debts.

Ms Sahlin was not using her corporate credit card for alcohol purchases and saunas and massages; she was using it to buy Toblerone chocolate and nappies. However, in Sweden it was considered such an inappropriate act that she was investigated by the director of public prosecutions!

This government is now looting the show. It is interesting to note the comparisons between Bjelke-Petersen and Premier Kennett. Just a few days after the Mitcham by-election the Premier was caught with his hand in the retirement till; he decided in the still of night to top up his retirement fund with an additional \$200 000. The Premier is already looking at \$2 million on retirement; he will now receive an additional \$200 000! The perks include free travel, a chauffeur-driven car for life and additional staff.

I refer the house to an article in the *Sun* of 31 August 1989 when Bjelke-Petersen was in the throes of looting the state. He made formal complaints because Mike Ahern, the then Queensland Premier, decided to strip Sir Joh of his \$120 000-a-year retired Premier perk package. Bjelke-Petersen wanted to give himself an additional \$120 000-worth of perks and the Premier of this state wants to do exactly the same thing. This bloke is Bjelke-Petersen revisited, no doubt about it! Members on the other side of the house have two choices: they can follow him down the path of corruption or stand up to him. My advice to them is to stand up to him because they are running out of time.

Mr SPRY (Bellarine) — I should bring a mop into the chamber to clean up after that last speech: there is blood and gore all over the place! I intend to introduce some optimism to the debate and, I hope, an element of moderation.

I welcome the opportunity to reply to the Governor's speech to the Parliament when it reconvened last week on 17 February. I pay a personal compliment to the Governor, His Excellency Sir James Gobbo, and Lady Gobbo and advise them that the support and goodwill of the people of my electorate will continue to attend their term in office. The proroguing of Parliament has given the coalition government an opportunity to reflect on its achievements to date, on where it is going and where it has come from. In my contribution I will respond more or less directly to the comments conveyed in the Governor's speech. In some cases I will reflect on the issues he raised as they affect the people of Bellarine and their objectives and achievements.

The Bellarine electorate is approximately 600 square kilometres of fertile land surrounded by a 90-kilometre coastline which, as I have often stated in this house, gives me a keen sense of the environmental issues that confront the people of Bellarine from time to time. I, too, have a heightened sense of my responsibilities in that regard.

In contrast to the honourable member for Niddrie's claims that the government completely ignores everything other than financial matters when it addresses the way it should govern the state, I remind him and other Labor members that one of the new benchmarks contained in the Governor's speech is social advantage, which this government intends to pursue in its remaining two-year term of office.

In his diatribe of complete negativity the honourable member for Niddrie completely ignored the spiralling costs that confronted the government on its election in 1992. His contribution characterised the contributions of opposition's members — they seem unable to get off expressions of negativity and get on to telling us what alternative policies they would put in place if ever Labor were elected — God forbid! — to govern this state in the future.

Victorians will have no opportunity to judge the opposition on its merits until it reveals its policies. Instead of indulging in constant abuse and personal invective, opposition members should get on to the positives and develop policies, because then the people of Victoria might start to listen to them. In the meantime absolutely no notice is being taken of them.

As I said, in 1992 the government had to face up to the dire financial situation in which the state found itself. Having turned things around through the use of direct and strong management, the government has earned the luxury of stepping beyond its tight bookkeeping measures and addressing pressing social issues.

Four main elements of social advantage are defined in the government's medium-term goals. The government will focus on benchmarks such as educational outcomes, employment outcomes, health and safety issues, and confidence and harmony in society. Those four elements are designed to focus on achievement and promote personal fulfilment.

When the coalition came to power the government was borrowing to fund its ongoing budget. In a domestic situation such action leads to misery — it is totally untenable and unacceptable. It defies imagination how the Labor Party expected to continue to govern under those circumstances. The former government had no perception of how to go about managing the state. When in 1992 the people of Victoria elected the coalition and when in 1996 they reaffirmed their confidence in the government, they were certainly aware of Labor's shortcomings and its inability to manage the finances of the state.

The reduction in Victoria's debt from \$30.6 billion, or around 30 per cent of gross state product, in 1992 to \$11.3 billion, or approximately 8.6 per cent of gross state product, today has been a major achievement. The people of Victoria are beginning to concentrate on what has been achieved in basic housekeeping. That has involved some very tough measures, but if it had not been put in order there would have been no opportunity for the government to develop social advantage aspects it will be attempting to develop in the next two years. The people of Victoria have suffered a great deal of pain, but the government has now achieved its objective and sustainable surpluses in budgeting may now be expected. I think that colossal achievement is appreciated by Victorians.

The honourable member for Niddrie mentioned with great relish cuts to various departments and some unfortunate results of those cuts. If the delivery of services by the big departments of health, education, social care and public transport had not been rationalised in line with sensible spending the state could not have pulled out of the debt spiral. Cuts had to be made — and they were made very effectively.

I will run through a number of issues as they appear in the Governor's speech. Many amendments have been made to existing legislation to ensure an effective focus on the issues of justice and safety. Victorians now have good reason to expect delivery of services in those areas.

In my electorate of Bellarine the police presence presently satisfies safety requirements, but there is a need to ensure that people continue to live in harmony and safety. Police stations at Ocean Grove, Queenscliff, Portarlington and Drysdale, on the eastern end of the peninsula, are manned by a total of some 21 personnel and are not served directly by police headquarters in Geelong. The residents of those townships have every right to expect the continuation of the effective protection they now enjoy. The challenge is to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated to cover the entire Bellarine Peninsula and that the deployment of officers is evenly spread to reduce response times to the absolute minimum. It is possible some work needs to be done in that area, and it is something I will be concentrating on throughout the government's second term.

Although the government can be proud that last year's road toll — 377 deaths — was the lowest on record, as the Governor said in his speech, it is still far too many. The Bellarine Peninsula is well served by the network of major and minor roads. The honourable member for Warrnambool drew attention to Better Roads funding

and how it could be applied in his electorate and throughout the state. Great advances have been made in the application of those funds. I would describe the roads on the peninsula as very good. In particular, the Bellarine Highway has been extended two or three kilometres, much to the delight of people who use it.

In his speech the Governor next mentioned women. As the father of three adult young women — two of whom are married — and the husband of a very competent, devoted and energetic wife, I am surrounded on a daily basis by women's issues. I am very conscious that women have a powerful place in society and that women and men march side by side. The government's achievements on women's issues cannot be denied.

The Bellarine Peninsula is not noted as one of the areas of the state with significant multicultural diversity. However, I am proud that there is no indication of intolerance towards the many people in my electorate who have come from different parts of the world, speak with different mother languages or practice different cultural traditions. The greater Geelong area has a healthy mix of people from all over the globe. I always try to attend at about this time of the year the Geelong Pako fest, a festival that illustrates the value of our multicultural society.

Not enough attention has been given to one of the great success stories of the government — that is, its record in reducing taxes over the past four or five years. Now Victorians enjoy annual tax cuts of approximately \$2.17 billion compared with the level of taxes in 1988. For example, tax cuts have come in the form of payroll tax exemptions for charities. The introduction of Workcover has resulted in an annual \$580 million tax cut for business. Land tax capping and a reduction in electricity tariffs also have resulted in real price reductions. Gas bills have been reduced significantly. Incidentally, the government is assisting in extending the supply of natural gas to the north-eastern sector of the Bellarine Peninsula.

The Leader of the Opposition should acknowledge that fact, because he visited the peninsula when he attended a meeting at St Leonards, where he would have heard expressed the passion that people have for the extension of the natural gas supply through that region. I hope he is gracious enough to acknowledge that I have been working very hard to achieve that outcome.

The government's water reforms are one of its greatest achievements. The community is beginning to see results from the allocation of \$490 million for water projects. In addition, water charges on homes, factories and businesses have been reduced by \$180 million.

Local government restructuring has delivered tax cuts of approximately \$260 million, the state deficit levy has now been abolished and government port charges have been reduced by \$35 million. I will not mention the many other reduced charges and tax cuts enjoyed by the community, but suffice to say they have resulted in what I described earlier as a lessening by some \$2.17 billion of the burden on Victorians, which is a major achievement.

One of the targeted areas of price reductions is the announcement of the 60 per cent reduction for every household in winter power bills. That news was greeted with great acclaim in my electorate.

I refer now to education on the Bellarine Peninsula. I am delighted that education is one of the four areas on which the government will concentrate with great vigour in the future, but particularly during the next two years. It is natural that the Bellarine Peninsula has a preoccupation with education, given the demographics of the area as one of the fastest growing non-metropolitan regions in Victoria. The relaxed lifestyle and the fact that it is surrounded by water and beaches are important ingredients in its growth.

Mr Wells interjected.

Mr SPRY — I welcome the interjection of the honourable member for Wantima. The lifestyle that people can enjoy on the peninsula attracts many young families, particularly in the fast-growing regions of bayside Drysdale-Clifton Springs and Ocean Grove-Collendina on the surf side. Retirees are also attracted in growing numbers by the lifestyle and particularly the excellent health infrastructure. One of the other attractions is reasonably priced land. As a former real estate agent, I am in a good position to know that the peninsula has plenty of well-priced and well-serviced land.

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Mr SPRY — The Minister for Sport takes up the interjection made earlier by the honourable member for Wantima that the area has a good local member. I am too modest to say that myself but I appreciate the comment from the minister.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics 1996 census figures entitled 'Population and Housing' published in the *Geelong Economic Indicator Bulletin* revealed that more than 6500 people were employed in the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors in the Geelong region. Those 6500 people service approximately 65 000 full-time and part-time students in the primary, secondary, TAFE and university sectors. The

education traditions in Geelong extend back 100 years or more and have always been regarded as a great strength of the region. In Bellarine I am extremely proud of the 13 government and 6 non-government primary schools that educate some 4500 students. Currently the two government secondary colleges and the new non-government secondary college have a total student enrolment of approximately 2100.

On 15 February I was fortunate to attend the opening of the newly consecrated Roman Catholic facility located beside the new \$12 million secondary college in the Drysdale area. I do not think the Minister for Sport has had an opportunity to visit the area recently, but in due course he will be involved in the provision of services to it.

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Mr SPRY — As the minister says by interjection, I am sure we will solve any problems we have. These are the challenges we face, embrace and eventually will solve. The Roman Catholic Archbishop, His Grace George Pell, opened the complex. My compliments go to Father Tom Doyle, the head of Catholic education in Victoria; Father Des Panton, the parish priest; Chris Malady, the principal of St Thomas's Primary School; Netty Broekman, the principal of the Catholic regional secondary college; and above all to the people who made it happen by putting pressure on the relevant authorities for the development of the college in their Catholic community at that end of the Bellarine Peninsula. Together with the new secondary college in that area it will constitute one of the most dynamic education facilities in Victoria. People who have visited the area and seen the facilities will agree with me because they would have seen the colossal advantages of those facilities.

While on the subject of education, I pay tribute to the majority of teachers in my electorate employed in this noble profession who are managing change cheerfully and responsibly. One of the changes they have had to make involves the use of new technology. For hundreds of years teachers relied on chalk and blackboards to deliver their message, but over the past few decades computer technology has come to the fore. For many of us, it has not been easy to come to grips with; but apart from people in business and industry, teachers are among those at the cutting edge of the new technology. They are the ones who are required to instil in their students the technological knowledge they need and how to apply it.

When the government came to office the then Minister for Education, the Honourable Don Hayward,

commissioned a working party to investigate the use of technology as an education communication tool in Victorian schools. The working party was headed by the honourable member for Glen Waverley and included the honourable member for Malvern, the Honourable David Evans, a former member in the other place, and me, together with Mr John Collard, who represented the Catholic Education Office.

The report was delivered in September 1994, and I have received a great deal of feedback from my constituents complimenting the work of the task force. I am staggered to see that some of the information is already well out of date. The report mentioned networking, which still has a place in the communications schedule of some schools, but increasing numbers of students now use independent PCs.

Recently I visited the Bellarine Secondary College to see the progress being made under the Victorian youth development program. The college is in the process of undertaking training with the Ocean Grove Surf Life Saving Club. I visited the school with the parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Education, the honourable member for Ripon. As we walked through one of the classrooms I was staggered to see 24 different computers, which the students were working on.

In front of me was a responsive screen, which I had never seen before. The teacher was using his computer to bring up on the screen something the students could follow. The technology training of primary and secondary school students is beginning to peak and reach a level one can understand and deal with. The importance of technology training in Victorian schools was acknowledged by no less a figure than Bill Gates at the Empowerment 2001 conference in Seattle last week, which was attended by the Minister for Education.

In his speech the Governor also referred to employment. One of the significant tasks we must attend to as members of Parliament is to generate more employment opportunities. Tax cuts, to which I referred earlier, are critical in attracting industry to the state to enable us to gain a competitive edge and employ more people. As I move around my electorate I am encouraged by the constructive lateral thinking that is going on as small businesses try to get up and running.

Health is another significant issue in the Geelong region. Bellarine is part of the region, so some of the larger service delivery units are focused on the centre of the city of Geelong. I am pleased to see the development of an integrated health structure in my electorate. The integration of the Geelong Hospital, the

Grace McKellar aged care and rehabilitation centre and three community health services — the Corio health service, the Geelong community health service and the Surf Coast health service — means they are now under the one governance structure. At this stage the Bellarine Peninsula community health service has chosen to remain outside the umbrella structure. It will be interesting to see how it progresses on its own. I remind those who run the centre that if they ever want to become part of the overall structure I will be more than willing to help them get through the transition period. I wish them well in their endeavours to remain independent.

Bellarine is not only keeping pace with the rest of Victoria but forging ahead. Its infrastructure is generally in good condition, but there is always room for improvement in the areas of health, education, the environment, public transport, justice and safety, to name a few. They will continue to be issues, and as the member for Bellarine I look forward to having the privilege of focusing on them on behalf of my constituents.

Ms DAVIES (Gippsland West) — I am pleased to take part in the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. I congratulate the Governor on his appointment and on fulfilling his role honourably. Victorian Governors have generally been well chosen, and they have served our state well. I suspect Sir James would have written a different speech from the one the government wrote for him. However, that is the tradition, which I respect.

The Governor's speech reflects laudable aims. I am pleased the government is finally talking about taking a new direction. It is not before time. I celebrate the government's wish to start focusing on creating a more cohesive and confident society. There is no doubt in my mind that people's confidence has been shaken over the past few years and that there is a need for more social cohesion. I also welcome the government's move towards testing policies against the creation of social advantage.

As I said in a question to the Minister for Education the other day, I celebrate his aim to achieve 100 per cent literacy in schools by 2005. However, I suspect that that may go the way of another government's promise that by 1990 no child need live in poverty, but we can be ambitious.

The honourable member for Bellarine spoke about the opposition's negativity. I agree that too much negativity is counterproductive. However, there is something exaggerated about the almost Prozac-induced, vacant

chirpiness of some government members, who refuse to accept that there is anything wrong — perhaps as a reaction to what they see as an overdose of negativity. I should like to see more balance. The reality lies somewhere in between, and members on both sides of the house could benefit from noticing that.

An article in today's *Age* reports that Victoria is still spending below the national average on its social programs but continues to levy taxes above the national average. Although Victorians have recently had a few tax cuts, they only make up for the tax hikes imposed in the past. Perhaps the government still has some room for improvement in which it can manoeuvre.

I applaud the government's move in a new direction and hope the new direction eventuates. In changing its direction the government could benefit from a most important issue — that is, if it genuinely believes it is doing the right thing by Victorians, it has no need to continue to stifle dissent. The government does not need to restrict the access of anybody to public servants nor does it need to restrict the right of public servants in a democracy to express an opinion.

If the government is doing the right thing, if its programs are working as well as it says they are, Victorians involved in those programs must surely recognise the benefits of the government's actions. If the government genuinely wishes to change direction, it should allow the state to become a more open democracy. It should allow freedom of speech, and not stifle dissent as has happened over the past few years.

The Minister for Education wants to be the next Premier. He will change the direction of the government when Victorians realise the Premier is incapable of making change. The minister is responsible for setting the tone of that new direction. He should not fall back into the old habits of treating dissent and those who wish to express concerns with contempt. Recently the minister was scathing of teachers. I hope he shortly drops his bad habit of being sarcastic.

On the subject of education, the figures I am more inclined to feel secure with are those contained in the *Report on Government Services 1998*. The report says that Victoria was the only jurisdiction to record a fall in real expenditure on education in the period 1992 to 1995-96; Victoria recorded the largest annual average increase in student-teacher ratios across jurisdictions, for both primary and secondary schools; and Victoria had the highest primary student-staff ratio in the country.

The government cannot be proud of those figures. I agree we need a new direction and focus on education. Last week I reminded the minister of his literacy aims, as outlined in the Governor's speech. I asked him about the reading recovery program, but his response contained comments about the Keys to Life program into which the government has put \$52 million — and I applaud that initiative. However, that has nothing to do with the number of reading recovery teachers in Victoria.

The Keys to Life funding has been taken over by the regions and is being used by teachers for personal development, the extent of which is three rather long meetings a year. It may be an attempt to improve classroom management, which I applaud, but the Keys to Life program which is an adjunct to the reading recovery program will not pay for the training of reading recovery teachers nor for the actual placement of reading recovery teaching programs into schools.

Reading recovery has been shown to be a successful program. The program is regarded as intensive because it takes 12 months to train a reading recovery teacher. A present teacher who may be studying the program is required to spend 0.5 of his or her time out of the classroom. A school that has a teacher studying how to become a reading recovery teacher must pay for that 0.5 salary from its own budget, which can be an enormous sacrifice. Few schools can afford it.

The Minister for Education repeatedly says it is the responsibility of schools, not his responsibility, to have teachers trained as reading recovery teachers. I refute that. On their current staffing levels it is extremely difficult for schools to afford such commitments.

Melbourne University has demonstrated through its early literacy research project that reading recovery is one of the most successful programs to improve literacy levels. The other day I asked the minister whether he was serious about achieving his 100 per cent literacy goal. If so, he should make a further commitment to funding the training of reading recovery teachers in addition to any Keys to Life program commitment already made. I remind the house that \$52 million does not go far in the overall school budget.

For the benefit of honourable members who may not know about the program, the reading recovery teacher is specially trained to work one-to-one with students at risk of falling behind with their reading. The intensive training program is spread over three or four sessions a week for about 20 weeks.

Also, I have asked the minister to provide details of how many schools are providing reading recovery programs. My electorate does not have a large number of those special teachers. I would have liked the reading recovery program to have been available for my child, but that was not possible.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Ms DAVIES — I agree that parents play an important role. I have been reading to my children every night for the past 17 years — I regard myself as a dedicated parent.

The other important aspect about schools concerns the teacher-student ratios. The Minister for Education is happy to report that the current teacher-student ratio is 1 to 15. The Minister for Education forgets that that includes people such as principals — whom the government has lumbered with so many extra duties that they cannot put up their hands to have a cup of tea — specialist teachers, deputy head teachers and so on. I will quote an example. Currently the student-teacher ratio is about 11.4 teachers in a school of roughly 240 kids — and the school might get another 0.5 or 0.8 teachers with current additional programs. However, once people such as principals, who cannot teach, are taken out —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Ms DAVIES — Principals are so busy working 80 to 90 hours per week that they do not have time to take part in the classroom. Some schools might have a 0.5 reading recovery program teacher, the occasional coordinator might be another 0.8, there might be the occasional fraction of a library teacher, the occasional fraction of a PE teacher and perhaps a science or technology teacher. Once those specialist programs are taken out — and I have quoted a particular example — a school will end up with only enough teachers to have a ratio of one teacher to 29 students.

The recommendation — most schools do this — is to keep the prep and grade 1 classes slightly smaller than that, and that means that many schools have class sizes of approaching or more than 30 students. Such large classes are detrimental to the students involved, particularly in schools in which there are many students with behavioural problems, because large classes exacerbate behavioural problems.

Most classrooms today, including the module 5 classrooms in which many children are taught, are too small to comfortably fit a class of approximately 30 students. It is very difficult to have a productive classroom with too many students. Western Australia,

which has a Liberal government, has now recognised that large classes are not good for students and has undertaken to reduce class sizes.

I ask the government, as part of its new direction, to make more than a token effort to increase education funding so that there is a genuine chance of increasing the right of children to learn to read, work together and have a flexible and enjoyable classroom experience, rather than the crowded environment that most of us had to put up with in our childhoods.

The Governor mentioned the electricity industry. His speech states:

... the competitive Victorian electricity market has produced substantial gains in industry efficiency and benefits to customers.

You could have fooled us! The correctness of that statement depends on the definition of efficiency. The privatisation of the electricity industry, which was done under the theoretical aegis of national competition policy, has not resulted in competition. I now have a privatised monopoly operating in my area. It might be making nice profits by having reduced its work force but there are also fewer local depots. Electricity maintenance workers travel from my area up to Melbourne, which is their central base, and are sent from there to Woop Woop in order to do their day's work. That is not a very efficient way of working. Although it might be a cheaper way of running our electricity companies, I do not think the system is working more efficiently.

The government needs to accept some responsibility for governing the quality of supply. Prior to privatisation I had never heard of a power surge. In particular, I had never had any experience of people losing their equipment through power surges — and certainly not with the frequency with which it is happening at the moment.

In the early days, when I was living in the hills, the power went off every time the wind blew because power poles fell down. The SEC became quite efficient at replacing the poles in the dark and during storms. One does not see pole replacement like that these days. In my area we have a positive glut of little metal pieces on wonky wooden poles that the power company sticks on to hold them up for a few more years. I am told they are now using wooden poles, rather than concrete poles, which tend to last longer.

I will refer to some problems that have arisen in my electorate concerning the efficiency of the privatised power industry. An Inverloch shop owner has told me

the situation is becoming absolutely ridiculous. In January he stated that he had had five power outages since last October. One of the more severe power outages in Inverloch occurred on New Year's Eve when the restaurants were full of customers. Firstly, there was a loss in power, followed by an almighty zap that seriously damaged equipment. Many business owners have complained that after waiting all year for a bit of good trade in January they had suffered power failures under the new privatised system.

Private operators seem a little chary about spending money on maintenance. The explanation for the failures given by the privatised company was that they appeared to have been caused by 'a gradual increase in load in the area and the extreme hot weather on each of the days in question'. I have news for that electricity company — we often have hot weather in January. It is not an extraordinary event. It is about time the operators were able to provide a proper, reliable service and deal properly with complaints. They do not like to answer telephone calls.

Some of the complaints received at my office have involved the problem that even when the company finally accepts it is at fault it is months before damaged equipment is replaced. Often the company is a little chary about accepting responsibility and very strange excuses have been made for the damage; for example, that dead possums caused the damage and that the company would not pay up anyway because the damaged stove or other appliance was worth only \$20.

If the government intends to continue with privatisation it will need to improve its regulation of privatised industries to make sure people have a reliable supply. The most recent problem with the electricity supply in my electorate occurred at Rhyll and involved another temporary power failure followed by a massive power surge, causing damage to 250 houses and local businesses.

One resident said he had never seen anything like it. He likened it to the war years. These problems are not being dealt with adequately. It is the government's responsibility to ensure that they are addressed. The government should look to New Zealand's experience as an example of why more care should be taken with the provision of power. Auckland has now been without power for an entire week. I quote from today's *Age*:

In the aftermath of the 1992 corporatisation of the old Auckland Electricity Board, Mercury has cut its staff in half and has increased its profit handsomely. Many former workers have jobs with contractors but in the competitive

tender process the cable joining team was disbanded and the skill lost to New Zealand.

Perhaps Victoria should take note of lessons learnt. That has a terribly familiar sound to it!

Another issue mentioned during the address-in-reply debate was the 'great white hope' of the new Latrobe Hospital in Gippsland. The honourable member for Gippsland East — the hidden Treasure — was quoted as saying that the hospital will be great for all Gippslanders. The Minister for Health has also talked about the hospital. I ask them to note that this hospital will not be good for south and west Gippslanders. People will not use that hospital rather than go to Melbourne. Although it might look close to us on a map, there is a massive hill range between which is treated as a major alpine way. There are very bad roads and no public transport going in that direction. Residents of south and west Gippsland do not see that as a viable alternative to either their own local hospitals or the Helimed service.

The honourable member for Gippsland South talked about the extra \$16 million being put into the South Gippsland water allocation as part of the government's larger initiative on water. I applaud that initiative. I can assure honourable members that we need it. Gippsland has just had another blue-green algae scare. I will not make any claims about neglect by previous governments. No government has paid enough attention to water supply in our area. Before the government goes overboard discussing theoretical cuts in water bills, I ask it to note that I do not like being told not to drink my water because it may be toxic. It is possible that there is a need to speed up a further water treatment plant so we do not have any more toxic blue-green algae in our water. Before getting too enthusiastic about pre-election water bill reductions, perhaps the government should stop the water tax Victorians pay in every water bill. Perhaps the government should invest some money in a water-testing facility so that when blue-green algae scares occur the water does not have to go to Adelaide to be tested as it currently does, with resultant delays.

In conclusion, I believe there is still a chance for this government to change direction. I hope its proposal is genuine rather than just based on propaganda. There is a definite need for the government to put its money where its mouth is.

Mrs Peulich — Your money!

Ms DAVIES — My money. The government should stop the expensive propaganda and glossies. It should stop attempting to discredit anyone who has a

criticism — which just might be genuine rather than fake! The government has been achieving some good things. There is no doubt that Victoria is now in a better financial position than it was five years ago. I do not want to hear any more nonsense about blaming the past. Members opposite have had five years in office. They need to accept responsibility.

I look forward to hearing and participating in the development of the government's new rural policy. There is still considerable room for improvement in the government's attitude to rural areas.

Mr Reynolds interjected.

Ms DAVIES — I will talk about that later. I only have 2 minutes left. I genuinely believe this is the government's last chance. There is no longer a willingness by Victorians and the media to be taken in by bluff and abuse. The people of this state do not like it when the government is nasty. Government members can make a choice now. I hope they make good choices. The bottom line is that this government is still losing support in the bush and in the suburbs. That is your stick. You choose. Start listening and, as I said, start putting your money where your mouth is — or our money where your mouth is — otherwise I do not think this government is going to last very much longer.

Mr DOLLIS (Richmond) — It is with considerable pleasure that I participate in the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. I congratulate His Excellency, the Honourable Sir James Gobbo, AC, Governor of Victoria. I have known His Excellency for quite some time. He brings considerable intellect to the office of Governor, as did many of his predecessors. He will exercise his duties with dignity. More importantly, he is the first governor truly representative of a multicultural society. It is a credit to this state that it has appointed to the Office of Governor a person like Sir James Gobbo, who I am certain after his tenure as Governor will be an example of excellence for many years to come. In his speech His Excellency stated:

The government's approach will lead Victorians as they strive in their own lives and local communities, admittedly at times with great difficulty, to improve their position and the general environs of their lifestyle, and so to balance their own interests with those of an increasingly demanding world. We need therefore to examine what we need to do as a partnership of Victorians to strengthen the freedom and independence we enjoy, create a more vibrant sense of community, and mould a cohesive, caring society.

To achieve that His Excellency said we must work together. That, supposedly, represents the government's way forward: by defining the way in which Victoria will be governed and making certain

that a society that has been divided over the past five years will be brought together. My experience as shadow minister for planning and major projects has been entirely different. A large body of opinion thinks this government has got it wrong. That is evidenced by the number of large meetings taking place, including last night's Save Our Suburbs meeting, which attracted more than 1000 people into the City of Hawthorn on a Tuesday night. The reality is that the Kennett government's approach towards planning is having a detrimental impact on residents across Melbourne. As I have said many times, this government is in danger of allowing the attractiveness and livability of many parts of Melbourne to be destroyed.

The government should listen to this message carefully.

On many occasions the planning minister has blamed councils for the problems that have been created and for his bad planning decisions. Two days ago in his usual Maclellanesque way he said, 'It's not my decision; it is the decision of the councils. Of course, I don't intervene a great deal'. The minister has forgotten his own rhetoric, which is returning to haunt him at this stage of his career. As soon as the coalition was elected to government and he was appointed minister he said, 'I am the planning system and my door is open for business'. He created and instituted policies which have created division and are beginning to destroy one of the most livable cities in the world.

The Victorian community is beginning to experience the full effects of his approach, especially in relation to medium-density housing. We cannot blame municipal councils if on the one hand they are told, 'Here is my plan. If you deviate from it you shall be punished', and on the other hand they are told, 'You are responsible for every decision based on the orders I have made'.

The minister refuses to acknowledge that the current problems with medium-density housing are the result of the way the government has pursued a market approach to urban consolidation. The minister has not only dismissed local councils in the past but continues to threaten to remove their planning powers. This is hardly the way for the minister to foster a productive relationship with local government. His ability to intervene in local planning issues has added to the malaise, as councils are never certain what this idiosyncratic minister will do next. That is why his approach totally contradicts what His Excellency the Governor said in his speech. If we are going to care about our lives and for our local communities, even though we are having great difficulty, and if we are going to ensure our lifestyle is protected as we live in a demanding world, to strengthen the freedoms and

independence we enjoy we must work collectively because a cohesive society can only come out of a collective approach and not out of the idiosyncratic method employed by the minister since the day he was elected.

The minister has said he is a pro-development minister. Over the past few days developers and residents have been complaining bitterly that his approach to planning is producing disastrous consequences.

The minister instituted the *Good Design Guide*, but its main faults are that its language is often open to interpretation, it applies to any residential land in any suburb, and it provides for intensive development. No differentiation is made between one area and another. The so-called blueprint for the guide has been said to be the *Greedy Developers Guide*, because greed and profit have replaced good design.

The *Good Design Guide* aims to have more houses in established areas, particularly in the inner and middle suburbs. The policy, which allows medium-density housing to be situated anywhere in any street in any suburb, must be changed. This is the clear message the minister is being sent by the community and the developers. The minister cannot blame councils for the problems because councils are relatively powerless. They can refuse an application.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — It is time for a few lessons in planning policy! A council can refuse an application, but if it conforms to the *Good Design Guide* the Administrative Appeals Tribunal will overturn the council's decision. All the council can do at that stage is delay the inevitable. It cannot really stop developments that comply with the government's guide.

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — If you do not understand that you will not understand why more than 1000 people congregated last night to put the blame squarely where it belongs: at the door of the minister and the government. Government members must understand that unless we address this problem we will continue to destroy the most livable city in the world.

During the previous decade a bipartisan approach was taken to planning, yet this minister and the government have politicised planning to a point where the minister has said, 'I'm the supremo. I make the decisions, and the rest of you can like it or hate it'. We understand that the minister is a colourful personality. His idiosyncrasies are well known to all those who have

known him for a long time. However, they are being used not in a performance in the house but in the lives of many people.

I shall make some suggestions because it is important that we reach solutions. As I have said during the past few days, the opposition will be releasing a discussion paper on this area with a detailed analysis of the Victorian planning provisions. The analysis will show that the government has not told the truth and that the real story is something else. As far as the *Good Design Guide* is concerned, we need to allow councils to identify where medium-density development is appropriate and where it is not, such as close to activity centres, public transport and old industrial sites. Councils should be allowed to protect existing neighbourhood character. Unless we do this we cannot move forward, particularly in areas of heritage and amenity values. We should vary the *Good Design Guide* density controls otherwise it will not operate effectively. It will need to be revised to require high-quality developments to relate to the character of surrounding areas, to give communities an opportunity for consultation and to provide councils with certainty and the power to protect community interests.

Four years ago I warned the house that the so-called McDonalds amendment, which allowed huge McDonalds restaurants to be established in residential areas, would come back to bite us hard. I warned the house that the matters of concern would be, first, McDonalds, next petrol stations and then housing density. Four to five years later we are dealing with these problems and there is a revolt in government-held seats. All members know that the biggest issue confronting them is that people are uncertain about what they can do. Local government cannot provide the answers. Developers do not know how long matters will take to decide; residents do not know whether their houses will be placed in shadow when high structures are built next to them or whether their neighbourhood will remain the way it was.

As I said this morning, the other change the Premier made — I presume with the approval of the minister — was to change the parliamentary secretary. I welcome the new parliamentary secretary who I hope will endeavour to bring some decency into the decision-making process of the government and will represent the wishes and aspirations of many people in the community.

Unless we develop some high standards in the way the state is governed we will create even bigger problems for ourselves. The minister is beginning to get the government into diabolical trouble. You cannot declare

that you are pro-development and then have the gall to blame councils for the current urban rage. Over the past four years the government designed and implemented a pro-development approach in planning. However, there is a lack of strategic direction.

For a long time the Labor Party has stated that development is needed and must be supported in this state. But developers and residents must be clear about the rules. We are returning to the bad days where there was uncertainty both for those wishing to develop and those wishing to protect their residential amenity.

As a system and a portfolio, planning gives the minister the ability to enhance people's lives — not destroy them. Those who went to the meeting last night will understand the cries from people right across Victoria who said, 'Our neighbourhood has been destroyed'. The blame is with the minister and the government. People are telling the minister that the planning system should ensure prosperity for all, not just for some; it is a fundamental lesson in good government.

This government has sought to increase population densities in Melbourne. That is nothing new. Previous governments have tried it. The difference now is that the government has done very little to ensure that Melbourne retains its reputation as one of the most livable cities in the world. That is being lost in the process of urban consolidation.

Planning policies have a huge impact not only on people's day-to-day lives but also on the long-term prosperity and livability of a state. It is crucial that planning, particularly in large cities, is not left entirely to market forces, as is the case with this government. As I have stated repeatedly, the Labor Party believes the urban consolidation policy should proceed, but only within a strategic and carefully planned framework. Without those elements you destroy the very area that should be protected — the neighbourhood street.

There is a role for state government to ensure that developers and councils are encouraged to achieve best practice. We must ensure that happens when we introduce reforms to the urban landscape. Minimal regulations are doing little to assist developers achieve good planning outcomes. There are continual complaints that developers adhere to the bare minimum of the *Good Design Guide*. Given that profit is the motive, greed exists and people believe they can get rich quickly by abusing the guide, every council you talk to says that in most cases developers are adhering to the bare minimum. Often developers' chief concerns relate to density — that is, how many units can be fitted onto a single site. The government has failed to ensure

that truly good design is encouraged to become the norm.

Councils must be given appropriate powers so that local government has and can control development. I hope the new parliamentary secretary, who has experience in that area, will be able to at least address some of the eccentricities evident in the planning portfolio, because bad design, as a result of ministerial intervention, can create huge problems for many generations to come.

There are many examples of councils that have been inundated with planning applications. In the City of Boroondara applications for medium-density housing increased by approximately 65 per cent between 1996 and 1997. That has made it very difficult for planning departments to continue to produce an efficient planning process. It has also placed a huge amount of pressure on the resources of planning departments. That kind of pressure has had a detrimental impact on issues such as quality and control.

An increasing number of applications are going to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal simply because they are not processed within 60 days by local councils. An important point to understand is that most applications cannot be processed in accordance with the rules. When that happens applicants have an automatic right to take the matter to the AAT, creating a backlog of cases for the tribunal, more delays and uncertainty for developers.

In 1995, 1716 planning appeals went to the AAT. In 1997 the number of planning appeals before the tribunal had blown out to 2132. Is it any wonder councils are allowing developers to proceed with their plans rather than having to defend even more decisions in the AAT? When applicants appeal to the AAT they must wait for more than three months for their appeals to be heard. The government promised a more efficient planning process, but it also promised a pro-development policy. Developers realise that this bad system is beginning to cost them money.

Two groups in the community are complaining and forming their own action groups — the developers and residents. The issues raised by the developers are of the same sort as those raised by the residents. The person who is not listening to either group is the Minister for Planning and Local Government. He is incapable of admitting he has got it wrong. He likes intervening; he likes being the planning authority and making decisions that please him. He does not understand that by continuously intervening in the way he has he has destroyed the very system he tried to create. And that is the huge problem.

I am sure developers in the building industry are extremely frustrated with the current delays in the system and the level of antagonism that is beginning to emerge in the community. Planning has become a battleground in middle suburbia between residents, developers and councils — everybody has a complaint. Never in living memory have we had a situation where planning has created the type of furore we see at present with communities being divided. I ask honourable members opposite to give an example under any previous government —

Mrs Peulich interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — Dual occupancy created concern. But we never had the type of division that you have at the moment. I shall refer to some of the comments made at the meeting last night, which was attended by more than 1000 participants from all over the place. One of them talked about urban conservation zones. Another talked about developers moving in and cutting down trees without a permit, with the result that a block of land that had had a considerable growth of trees was left with cut off sticks that look like matches poking out across the landscape. The result was ugliness. People will tell you that an incredibly ugly picture is emerging that must be dealt with before too long.

This is the first time in living memory that the same person has held the two portfolios of planning and local government, which means it is impossible for councils to complain to the minister responsible for local government when they wish to complain about decisions of the minister responsible for planning. For the first time we have a minister who has concentrated an immense amount of power into his own hands. As a result councils are uncertain about their powers and how to deal with these matters.

The minister must take note of all these concerns. I am referring to some of the comments His Excellency the Governor made in his address to indicate to the government that the practical application of its policies does not match its rhetoric.

Unless the government begins to encourage proper development that ensures quality and provides a strategic resource approach for councils, we will continue to witness disaster after disaster. The people who suffer most are the residents, who believe poor government planning will result in a fall in the value of their properties. The family home is the major investment of the majority of people. When the government begins to play around with that investment it threatens the livelihood of every family in this state. Four years ago the government said that was an

exaggeration, and it repeated that three years ago, but now people are mobilising and saying to the government, 'What you are doing is wrong and therefore you must change your tack'.

Over the next few weeks we will deal with the issue of Victoria's planning provisions, which will have an extraordinary impact on public participation in the planning process. It will also affect the ability of local councils to have control over planning. The message is that the Kennett government has already significantly altered the urban landscape.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr DOLLIS — I will take up the interjection. Communities are feeling powerless, and that is why they came out in huge numbers to protest last night. If the government had listened to the voices of the people yesterday it would know that the huge majority of people at Hawthorn had never before been to a public meeting, a demonstration or a protest. They were there because they are feeling frustrated and powerless and believe they are not valued by the government. There is an incredible contradiction between the rhetoric of the government and government practice in planning.

His Excellency said that a partnership needs to be established in order to strengthen the freedom and independence Victorians enjoy, create a more vibrant sense of community and mould a cohesive, caring society. He said also that we need to work at finding ways to ameliorate the uncertainty that some of us feel in an era of runaway change. That is the rhetoric. The reality is that in the area of planning the opposite is true. The government has already broken one of its promises; one cannot talk about providing certainty when the state's planning system produces uncertainty day in and day out.

I conclude by pointing out that it is not too late for the minister or the government to listen to the thousands of residents out there who are hurting and to the developers, who are beginning to lose money. Before the government makes another ill-conceived change that is not well thought out it would be good for the minister to listen, for the first time in his life, to the opinions of others, instead of once more, in his theatrical, idiosyncratic way, telling us what we must do with our lives.

Mr WELLS (Wantirna) — I join other honourable members in congratulating Sir James Gobbo on his appointment. We have appointed an excellent man, who with changing multicultural attitudes in the

community has worked his way up through the ranks to become Governor of Victoria.

I have a strong affiliation with sons of migrants, especially Italian migrants. Since we were in grade 1, Dan Quagliani and Mike Guiliani have been my closest friends. Through good times and hard times they have stuck with me, regardless.

Sir James delivered an excellent speech that put Victoria on course and showed us the direction we will follow over the next couple of years. He put strong emphasis on education and health. I refer in particular to a very important part of his speech when he said:

My government will not waver from the fundamental principles that have brought us to this point — to provide strong, but fair, leadership, to plan for the long term, to maintain a consistent policy approach, to work as a partnership with Victorians, and to open Victoria to a global environment.

That comment is very apt when one considers what is happening on the wharves. I shall spend some time talking about the wharves. I do so from a lot of personal experience, having been in contact with the wharves as a customer for 12 years before I entered politics. Many would claim that over the past five years there have been significant improvements in industrial relations. The Victorian government took the bold move of giving up its constitutional rights in this area by handing it over to the commonwealth in order to gain greater efficiencies.

Many enterprises have adopted a flexible attitude and have maintained industrial democracy by which people on the floor of the workplace play some role in the decision-making process, so that the days of 'them' and 'us' are slowly but surely disappearing. Anyone who visits local workplaces in the electorate of Wantirna will find that the last thing workers and managers want is the government and the unions trying to tell them how to run their workplaces. It is clear that workers and managers want to work out their own industrial problems without the interference of the government and the unions.

One last bastion of the workplace simply has not been able come to terms with maintaining efficiencies in industrial relations. That is, of course, the waterfront. It is also interesting that in the early 1990s the federal Labor Party spent more than \$300 million trying to get greater efficiencies in the workplace such as trying to get rid of excess labour and inefficient work practices so that the wharves would be internationally competitive.

Productivity and container handling in Australia is pathetic, all because the maritime union will not embrace any sort of change. It is an example of how federal and state Labor governments lack backbone or sheer will when it comes to taking on the unions; they simply will not do it.

The current Webb Dock waterfront dispute between the MUA, Patrick stevedores and the National Farmers Federation is more about a new competitor in a controlled environment and more about a closed workshop. It will be the last stand by the union movement, and it has no relevance to today's society when it comes to borderless global economies.

There are many examples of the overpayments and roting that occurs on the wharves. I refer to an article in the *Sunday Age* of 1 February that was sent to me by a constituent. Written by John Elder, the article is entitled 'Wharfies won't give up (a dollar) and the hayseeds struggle too'. What wharfies are paid is quite amazing when compared with payments to the rest of the work force. Wharfies have an annual leave loading of 27.5 per cent. In the old days the normal leave loading was 17.5 per cent but if you worked on the wharf you were given an additional 10 per cent. They receive laundry allowance, a telephone allowance — although I do not understand why they receive that — and a banking fees allowance. While the rest of us pay a banking fee when we receive our income or salary the wharfies are reimbursed that amount. The bit that highlights the cosy deals that are taking place on the waterfront is that they have a maximum working week of 31 hours when most people in the workplace work 38 to 40 hours. On top of that they have guaranteed overtime whether it is there or not. The wharfies are earning between \$74 000 and \$87 000 a year, yet a labourer doing similar work on a construction site receives around \$25 000 to \$35 000 a year.

It is interesting to listen to the comments of the wharfies who say that productivity has increased by 40 per cent. It is amazing where they find these figures. One fellow quoted in the article says that their stoop allowance has been done away with; they were given an allowance for the amount of time they had to stoop to pick things up. He says that scrapping the stoop allowance has resulted in an enormous gain in efficiency. I challenge him and ask if that allowance has been rolled into the rest of the pay.

They have done away with the dirt allowance. How terrible! He states:

The dirt allowance has gone. Some of these ships are rust buckets. They get dirt all over you.

My goodness! I wonder what John Cleese in *Fawlty Towers* would say.

In an article in the *Herald Sun* of 5 February Paul Gray describes the MUA as a union of silvertails and refers to the legitimate right of the workers to defend their hard-earned rights. He would have a point if there were a certain amount of consistency; but why, if the union members are defending workers' rights, are they picketing Webb Dock where there is a group of workers who turn up, want to learn a new trade, get onto the site and be able to work as wharfies without having to join the union? I would describe the right not to join a union as a worker's right also. What hypocrisy from the Australian Labor Party and the maritime union — 'We will defend workers' rights as long as you're part of the union. If you don't want to be part of the union, we have no time for you'! You see the signs on the TV every night: the non-union workers are regarded as scum. On the one hand it is okay to defend your rights if you belong to the union. If you want to be a non-union member, you no longer have that worker's right. It is hypocritical and pathetic.

Peter Reith has called on the wharf workplace areas to aim for a work rate of 25 containers per hour, which is not as high as that of some of our trading partners but is getting into the ballpark. The highest container work rate overseas is about 30. Currently Patrick stevedores is sitting on 19 movements per hour, but a look at the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures reveals that has fallen to 18.3 containers an hour, so it is getting worse.

I shall quote an example of some of the blatant roting that takes place on the wharf that was given by Chris Corrigan, the CEO of Patrick stevedores. The wharfies were off-loading imported vehicles. On a day in August last year the afternoon shift off-loaded 7.7 cars per man per hour as compared to 18.4 cars per man per hour for the midnight shift, but the midnight workers knocked off after just 3 hours work because they were told that once the job was finished they could go.

Let me recap on that very small point: 7.7 cars during the afternoon shift and a sudden jump to 18.4 on the midnight shift because the workers could go home as soon as the job was finished. What can you say? Of course on the midnight shift they are paid the full 7.5 hours at double time and a half and they can go home after 3 hours.

A look at the ABS figures regarding the reliability of the men turning up to work reveals, once again, that when it comes to disputation on the wharf there are 1250 days per 1000 employees, or 10 times the national average. It is a set pitch for inefficiencies.

If Australia is going to succeed as a trading partner it needs to be competitive on its wharves. Low productivity and unreliability in Australian ports is another levy or tax put on to the country's exporters. Australia has what are undoubtedly the most unreliable and expensive ports in the world.

The wharf is important to me because, as I mentioned earlier, I was a customer. I worked for Mayne Nickless for four or five years as an operations manager and also for P and O Cold Storage Ltd as an operations manager. The way the wharfies work so rigidly to the union rules has me absolutely mystified because it is sheer blackmail.

Australia is an island. Except for planes there is no other way to get the goods on and off this island. In Europe goods can be trained and trucked from country to country but Australia does not have that luxury, which makes it even more important that Australian wharves work correctly.

When I was running the transport companies I referred to earlier there was one hot day of 35 degrees. We received a phone call saying that the wharfies had gone on strike because it was too hot. We had margarine, chocolates and ice cream in the containers and had to fly down there, fill the containers up with dry ice to keep them going and make sure they were plugged in. The next day the temperature was 36 degrees. Again the wharfies would not work. On the third day the temperature went back to 35 degrees and the wharfies still would not work. On the fourth day it rained and the temperature dropped to 25 degrees. We received another phone call from the wharf saying the wharfies had pulled out again because now it was too wet. We lost four days of productivity simply because of three hot days — while the wharfies were in their forklifts with nice plush, air-conditioned cabins, may I remind you — and because on the fourth day it was too wet. We had no right of appeal; we had nothing. We were sunk until the next day when we had a reasonable temperature of 30 degrees and were able to work to get it going.

The fifth day was Friday. On Saturday and Sunday the men had to work to remove the backlog; of course that was on double time and double time and a half, so they easily made up the money they lost in the first four days. But someone has to pay for it and it was our job to pass on the cost to our customers, which makes it terribly expensive.

I shall talk a little about the queues at the wharf. We would send a truck, which may cost \$100 000 to purchase, into the queue at the wharf at 4.00 a.m. or

5.00 a.m. The gates do not open until 7.00 a.m. but you have to get there early to get into the queue. Sometimes I would get a telephone call at 9.00 p.m. or 10.00 p.m. from the truck driver, saying, 'The wharves have just closed the gates. We have sat there for the entire day and have not received one container'. That meant we had to charge someone again 15, 16 or 17 hours of demurrage at \$40 or \$45 an hour — someone had to pick up the tab. It is not very good for customer relations to have to telephone customers and tell them they have to pay more because of the inefficiencies on the wharves.

The other annoying thing about the wharves was that the wharfies had a tea break at 9.30 a.m. until 10.00 a.m. Everyone was lined up outside the wharf but the drivers were unable to drive through until the paperwork was processed. In any industry that maintains a certain amount of commonsense there would be shift splitting so that half the workers went to tea at 9.30 a.m. and the other half at 10.00 a.m. to keep the trucks rolling through. That is not the way it operated at the wharves. If one person went to morning tea, everyone went to morning tea and everything came to a standstill. In the morning they had a minimum half-hour break, then a 40-minute break during the day and another half-hour break in the afternoon. We would lose 2 to 2.5 hours when nothing would happen because of the gross inefficiencies.

On the wharf they have what is called a linesman. When the ship pulled into the wharf the man on the ship would throw over the line. The linesman's job was to grab that dirty great big rope and put it on the hub. That was the only job he had. He would then go to another ship. If there was no other ship there that day, that is the only thing he would have done for the whole day. If that was not a cosy, featherbedding, inefficient deal I cannot think of another example. There was no reason why the wharfie, who was also waiting for the ship to come in, could not grab the great big rope and put it onto the hub. No special skill or training was needed; it was a simple job. As I said, sometimes linesmen would be called in on a Sunday to do one job, which would take 10, 15 or 30 minutes; that is all they did, and they were paid for a full 8 hours on a Sunday at double time and a half. That was a blatant rort.

The other rort my company had trouble with was that there would be cut-off times on ships at 4.00 o'clock. Sometimes, through no fault of our own or perhaps through a customer's fault we would be running 15 or 20 minutes late. We would ring up the shipping company and say, 'We need to get this stuff on because it is fresh apples' — or margarine or butter — 'that we want to send to Tasmania'. The problem was who

would pay the bill. We would say, 'We are happy to pay two men for 2 hours to load the container on'. That simply did not occur. We had to pay 12 wharfies another full shift in order to get one truck or one container on the ship, which would take 30 minutes. It was all in or none at all. How could we justify paying another gang of 12 men overtime — the afternoon shift — by another full 8 hours? It simply cannot be justified. That was just another pathetic example of what occurred.

The amazing thing is that it was accepted — we just kept on rolling it over. However, because the Asian economies are becoming far more efficient there is a greater need for us to be able to compete. When farmers have wheat or fruit they want to send overseas the wharves need to be efficient so that whatever is taken down there gets on the ship and out and is not held up because of a demarcation dispute between the wharfies, the linesmen or other maritime workers.

I gave the example of the wharfies not working because of the hot days and the rainy day, their loss of four days pay because of that and their working on the weekend and making up that amount and more. Recently the Patrick wharfies went on strike at East Swanson Dock. They lost 48 hours work during the week and were paid \$640 each to come back on the weekend to catch up on the work that was not done during the week. It is all very cosy, and it is to be expected. The shipping company has to move the goods. There are perishable items. Things have to be moved, and once again the wharfies hold the companies to ransom. There is no disincentive for wharfies going on strike because they know they can make up the money they lose at the weekend.

It is crucial to reform the practices at the waterfront, and it is in this state's and country's interests to do so. The public needs to be informed of the rorts that the wharfies are engaging in. I would be interested to know just where the Labor Party stands on this issue. I know there is some support for the Maritime Union of Australia, but I wonder how other labourers and workers in the general community feel about the wharfies working only 31 hours a week and receiving 27.5 per cent annual leave loading and additional benefits. When they compare their working situation to that of the wharfies I am sure they simply cannot justify it. I cannot see how they could be supported. We will wait to see what develops over the next few weeks.

I am certainly supportive of what the National Farmers Federation is doing and I hope the federal Minister for Industrial Relations, Mr Peter Reith, will consider very closely what work the government can give to the NFF,

on a competitive basis of course, to kick-start the new Webb Dock. For example, there is no reason why ANL cannot unload its ships using non-union labour. That is something the federal government can do quite easily: it could make a big impression and start de-unionising the wharf for the benefit of this country.

I shall now touch on some of the matters with which I am involved. In 1996 the Premier made a commitment that drug and alcohol-free entertainment would be provided for young people on Friday or Saturday nights. I was very honoured to be given the job of coordinator of the Freeza program. It was given a budget of \$4 million over four years — \$1 million a year. The program has been a great success to date and is expected to be an even greater success in the near future.

The Freeza program targets young people between the ages of 14 and 18 years and enables them to enjoy live music or dance parties in a safe and secure environment. The events have very good security. One of the highlights of the program is that the responsibility is given to the youth to bring the events together. There are youth committees all over the state whose role and responsibility it is to put together the event, select the band and the venue, organise other goodies and freebies, and seek sponsorship to get the event up and running.

The first event was held in December 1996 and 76 others have been held across the state since that time. Some 45 000 young people have attended the events. In some of the smaller country areas there have been groups of 100 or so. At Eltham, for example, we have had 1800 young people in one venue with another 400 standing outside the door trying to get in — 2200 young people is quite an extraordinary attendance for one Freeza venue. There is no doubt that Freeza will continue to encourage young people to attend its events, so that there is no need for them to try to get into hotels as under-age drinkers. We need to encourage young people to attend these events and show them they can have a good time without the pressure of alcohol and drugs being forced on them.

Over the past couple of weeks I attended the Freeza event at Numurkah. It was a sell-out; 220 people attended — no more could fit in the hall. The community involvement in small country towns is overwhelming. Last Friday I was at the Portland Freeza, which 350 young people attended. They had local bands and local youth committees, the local council is involved and they are all doing an excellent job.

One of the councillors mentioned that the local police are convinced that crime in the surrounding areas drops when a Freeza program is on. I would love to investigate that further to see whether the same thing is happening in other areas. The Freeza program is an important part of the Premier's Youth Life Force initiatives, and it complements other programs such as the school corps program, which is headed by the honourable member for Ripon, the youth job training scheme and, of course, the Turning the Tide drug education program. Turning the Tide is teaching young people that they can have a good time without being involved with drugs.

When it came to power in 1992 the Kennett government faced a spiralling public sector debt of \$33 billion, and the current account deficit was running at about \$3 billion. That horrifying problem resulted from 10 years of irresponsible Labor government. The Kennett government needed to start somewhere by making some tough, hard and unpopular decisions. The results have been amazing. As the Governor mentioned in his speech, after five and a half years state debt has dropped to around about \$10 billion. That has been helped by programs such as the privatisation of the SEC.

Yesterday I received a call from a constituent who lives in a retirement village. Residents of retirement villages have only positive things to say about the privatisation of the SEC because it gives them the ability to shop around for their electricity. They are now calling their local electricity suppliers to sit down with them and discuss what they can offer over the next few years. There is no need for the gas industry to be in government hands. Many efficiencies can be gained by putting the industry into private ownership, but the government has a responsibility to ensure that people on pensions and low incomes are well and truly looked after.

The reduction in debt has saved tens of millions of dollars in interest payments, which has been poured back into education and health. The people of Wantirna are fortunate in that the government has set up a site for the new Knox public hospital. It will be built, owned and operated by the private sector. Wantirna residents now have to drive 25 to 30 kilometres into the city to get specialist attention. There will no longer be any need for that, because times have changed. Hospitals are now being built based on population needs. The specialist medical facilities in the city need to be untangled and moved out to the outer suburbs. A survey would show that most surgeons live in the suburbs, anyway.

The government has done very well with roads. The duplication of Wellington Road is complete, and the duplication of Boronia Road, which was a 1996 election promise, is almost complete. This year will see work start on the duplication of High Street Road. The former Labor government forgot about the outer eastern suburbs when it came to infrastructure projects. It believed that Melbourne stopped at the end of the tram tracks. People in the outer east have very long memories.

Members of the Labor Party need to take on the Brumby-Hulls leadership and move away from the politics of personal smear campaigns. It is a pity that the backbench does not have the guts to stand up to Brumby and Hulls and say, 'Enough is enough. Let's move away from personal smear campaigns and get into policies'. If it does not, it will have nothing to show Victorians when the 2000 election comes around. Instead, it will bring out the personal smear file — but Victorians will not buy it. The Labor Party needs to have policies that can be compared with ours; otherwise, it will not stand a chance.

The government's biggest problem for the future is drugs. It is sad to see 13 and 14-year-old girls hooked on heroin. As I said in the Penington debate, I am totally against the legalisation of heroin, but if a registered heroin addict has been through the methadone program and every other program without success and nothing else can be done, he or she should be licensed and be able to go to a safe place and have a doctor administer clean, pure heroin. That course should be taken only as an absolutely last resort. If steps are not taken we will find more kids in toilets and on railway platforms dead from overdoses, and it is the parents who have to cope with that.

Mr CAMERON (Bendigo West) — I join with other honourable members in congratulating Sir James and Lady Gobbo on the way in which they have settled into their roles at Government House. At the end of last year Sir James and Lady Gobbo visited Castlemaine, which is in my electorate, and His Excellency took part in a number of openings. He brought a personal touch to the places he visited. Everywhere he went he had a little anecdote to relate, such as speaking of his life as a migrant child in North Melbourne. At the Castlemaine library he spoke about how he had an arrangement with a bookseller to swap a book every week. In speaking in that way he brought his office down to a level people could relate to. I think that means he will be a very good Governor.

Last week a number of honourable members referred to the republican debate. That was inevitable because

His Excellency is a vice-regal representative and the Constitutional Convention was fresh in honourable members' minds. I had a week at the beach while the convention was on, and in the afternoons when the kids were asleep I lay on the couch and watched it on the television.

Mr Robinson interjected.

Mr CAMERON — The honourable member for Mitcham suggests there were edited highlights, but I can assure honourable members that at 3 o'clock in the afternoon there were very few highlights. I also took the opportunity to have a nap!

The convention debate was a turning point for Australia. As a nation we have to decide next year whether to become a republic or not. Equally, the states will have to decide what constitutional arrangements they make for the future. Queen Elizabeth II is the Queen of each of the states as well as the Queen of the Commonwealth of Australia. In that sense she is seven times the Queen in Australia, because the Crown is divisible.

Victorians have to ask themselves about the constitutional arrangements they want to make for the future. That can probably be done under two broad categories. As part of the proposed changes that the Prime Minister will ultimately put to the people, arrangements could be made for each of the state constitutions to change with the federal constitution, although no doubt constitutional lawyers will quibble about whether that can be done. The other option is for the states to do their own thing.

If we were to opt for each state doing its own thing, we could have a situation in which, while the Commonwealth of Australia had an Australian as head of state, each state had Queen Elizabeth II as its head. The house would then have to confront the issues that would arise. I would imagine the Queen would not want a half-baked arrangement by which she was Queen at the state level but not Queen of the Commonwealth of Australia. The debate is interesting from an academic point of view, but we may have to confront that situation in the near future.

As a result of the by-election at the end of the spring sittings, we are fortunate to have a new honourable member for Mitcham. He brings to the house a dynamic personality, and I am sure he will represent Mitcham and the eastern suburbs with vigour. His victory represents a sea change in Victorians' opinion of the government.

Mrs Henderson interjected.

Mr CAMERON — Fear not, Madam, fear not! The Mitcham by-election was a referendum on two fundamental issues — the government's changes to the role of the Auditor-General and its anti-worker changes to Workcover. Members of the public voted with their feet. They want a stronger and more accountable government which is not scared to let an independent Auditor-General look over the books and which sticks up for working people.

In the past whenever the government made changes to Workcover it always told us nothing more would need to be done and that, although it had attacked working people, it would go no further. But at the end of last year the government yet again attacked workers unrelentingly.

The Victorian public is sick of it. Victorians hear the government's rhetoric about a new society, a new caring-and-sharing approach, and the social dividend; but they want to see a change in its entire modus operandi. The starting point must be giving the Auditor-General back his powers in full and repealing the changes it has made to Workcover so that at the very least the common-law rights of seriously injured workers are restored.

Mr Hamilton — The honourable member for Shepparton supports that.

Mr CAMERON — Exactly. But unfortunately, when it came to voting day it was a different kettle of fish. The government's rhetoric is not new. In March 1996 the Premier told us he would help the less fortunate and look after all Victorians in a caring way, but that has not happened. Despite his promise, the government passed the two pieces of legislation I referred to affecting the Auditor-General and Workcover. It also passed the victims of crime legislation, which is one of the most malicious pieces of legislation the house has ever seen.

Mr Hamilton — And cruel.

Mr CAMERON — The honourable member for Morwell is spot on, and I will give a practical example. The legislation means that a teenage girl who is raped on the way home from school by a bunch of thugs will not get a single cent in compensation for pain and suffering. Even though her life may be in total disarray as a result, she will not get a cracker. That represents a degree of cruelty we had not seen until now. If the government were serious about social issues, social dividends and looking after people in a caring way, it would introduce repealing legislation and the Attorney-General would say, 'I was wrong'.

Those things were not mentioned in the Governor's speech — or, more correctly, the government's speech that the Governor read. That clearly shows Victorians that the government is not serious about its commitment to looking after people.

Undoubtedly education is one of the issues that is foremost in the minds of Victorians. The government has gone into panic mode and appears to be inventing statistics about education. When 9000 teachers lose their jobs and hundreds of schools are wiped out, community disquiet is inevitable. In country Victoria nearly 180 schools have been closed and nearly 2500 teachers have lost their jobs. In the Loddon-Campaspe-Mallee area alone, where I am from, 500 teachers were lost to the system. Obviously, when those sorts of change occur, people will be concerned.

Another significant problem in education is that many schools must overwhelmingly rely on their fundraising abilities to see much needed school activities through. That may be fine for those schools with many students whose parents are high-to-middle-income earners, but that is certainly not the case for most country and many suburban schools.

As an example I point out that more than half the students in many schools in my electorate are entitled to the EMA. However, last year the government robbed those EMA recipients. Half the funds designed to clothe the students were stolen from them and given to the schools because they needed the money to survive. Now there are compulsory levies, particularly for the most disadvantaged. That is why it is inevitable that the changes in education are on the lips of many people.

Much has been said about computers. Undoubtedly, they are a significant part of education, although they are only one part of the broader picture. The government would have us believe it is responsible for the great surge in computers in schools. In actual fact it has put in only a fifth or a quarter of the cost, and the rest has had to be made up by the schools. That demonstrates that the government's claim is not true.

Computers in schools are an essential component of education. If young people end up IT poor they will be the new educationally poor, and they may find themselves substantially disadvantaged later in life. The posh schools now arm each student with a computer, yet other schools have only one in each classroom. The government must be prepared to match its rhetoric with action.

It must also look after students who have problems, because too many kids are slipping through the gaps in the system. The reading recovery program has taken off in central Victoria. Important though it is for very young students, similar schemes must be made available for students in the higher primary years so that every kid who needs help can get it and not slip through the gaps.

Health will always be a big issue. The government's attempts to reduce the number of nurses and other positions in hospitals has undoubtedly worsened the situation. The government would have us believe it has had to hack into essential services to get its budget in order. However, the Auditor-General says departmental outlays are the same or more in real terms now than when the government came into office, which would be the case because this is the highest taxing government in Victoria's history. Despite enormous departmental outlays you will not notice it in the operations of hospitals or schools, yet at the top end of town there will be social dividends at lunchtime for advertising agencies, PR firms and privatisation consultants.

The Bendigo Health Care Group faces enormous problems. It is comprised of many nursing home and acute beds and it is also responsible for psychiatric services in the Bendigo region. Last year the nursing home accommodation in Bamard Street failed the commonwealth outcomes standard and the chief psychiatrist gave a damning report on psychiatric services in the area. In addition, as a result of the government's budget policies the Bendigo Health Care Group lost \$2 million on public health activities. After taking into account all its other activities the group had an underlying budget loss of \$700 000, which puts pressure on the rest of the system.

The proposed new nursing home at Eaglehawk will not go ahead; the government wants to wipe out 20 jobs. Despite the government not wanting to provide funds for essential services in Bendigo and across the state, a week or so ago it found the funds to deliver glossy brochures to the letterboxes of Bendigo residents. Although the brochure reports on the Bendigo Health Care Group it concentrates on capital development. The government has lots of money for glossy brochures but none when it comes to preventing job losses or providing essential services.

Mr Hamilton — If someone is bleeding there is no money for the tourniquet!

Mr CAMERON — The honourable member for Morwell is right, the tourniquet is on and the bleeding has to be stopped.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perton) — Order! I ask the honourable member for Morwell to be a little quieter in his assistance.

Mr CAMERON — The approach of this new caring government is to distribute brochures telling everyone they are sharing, but it does not tell them about the enormous problems facing hospitals. It does not tell them that the enormous cost of the brochures could have gone towards helping improve the situation.

Recently I heard a rumour that disability services were to be reduced in the Loddon-Mallee region. I contacted the regional director, who said there may be a productivity saving. The care of the most vulnerable people in our community may be subject to a productivity saving! The government talks about a social dividend but money is being taken away from those most in need. Some of those funds are being directed to the Premier's retirement fund; other amounts may have to be used if the government lets off Crown Casino from the \$50 000 a day fine for delays in construction, or, to put another way, the \$18 million a year fine for breach of agreement.

It is important to consider how Victoria will fund the Premier's retirement plan. The government has found a solution. It will take away the top-up funding for nursing home beds in state institutions where those institutions do not come up to scratch. On 1 July the Anne Caudle Centre in Bendigo will lose \$350 000; Mount Alexander Hospital in Castlemaine, \$162 000; Maryborough hospital, which has 40 beds, \$116 000; Dunolly hospital, which the government tried to close and failed, \$26 000; and the Maldon Hospital, \$35 000.

How does that help the elderly? How does it help those hospitals at all? It does not. That several hundred thousand dollars lets Crown off for a few days. Crown is right for a week thanks to the elderly people of central Victoria. I have no doubt the government will sniff around to try to knock off further funds elsewhere, as I mentioned earlier when speaking about disability services.

Later this year the government wants to privatise 700 nursing home beds in state institutions in metropolitan and country Victoria. That will have an enormous impact on country hospitals because often they depend on those nursing homes being big enough to remain viable. The 40 nursing home beds at Maryborough District Health Service fit into that category. It is proposed that 60 beds will be privatised, although at the end of the Dunolly hospital debacle — the hospital is part of that group — the government said it was prepared to come to the party. The government

has not made that commitment. I urge the government to provide that assurance to the Maryborough hospital. In his speech the Governor said the government will have a new rural policy. At last, after five and a half years, the government has recognised that its policies of closures, cutbacks and winding down town services must stop.

The opposition wants to hear the words expressly said that the government will stop because, as I have indicated, another 20 jobs are earmarked to go at the Bendigo Health Care Group. The rural community wants balance between the country and the city. At the moment the Melbourne, Melbourne, Melbourne policies of the government are causing country people to be extremely angry. One would think that after the honourable member for Gippsland West was elected to the house the government would have taken rural Victoria a lot more seriously. Despite experiencing a good deal of panic at the time, the government did not get out there; it did not consult with country people. Only now, after another massive loss in Mitcham, is the government prepared to acknowledge the problem. I hope it is for real.

The Governor's speech mentioned the privatisation of transport services. The issue of V/Line freight privatisation has already been raised in Bendigo. In the middle of last year the government would have had us believe that was the best thing that could happen.

Mr Hamilton — The best thing since sliced bread!

Mr CAMERON — That is right. Yet, the government knocked off 14 jobs, and another 8 jobs at the maintenance freight depot are swinging in the wind. Country people are sick of being told one thing; they are sick of this government saying it will consult with them. I just wish the government would act. I wish it would listen. I wish it would put its rhetoric behind it and get on with the job.

Sitting suspended 6.30 p.m. until 8.04 p.m.

Mr CAMERON — From the Governor's speech it is clear the government recognises that a new rural policy is needed. It is well aware that its policies of rural neglect have caused enormous problems. I start by urging the government to meet its promises to people in country Victoria. During the election campaign the government promised a new library in my area of Castlemaine, but that promise has not been kept. The government must acknowledge that it has deceived the people of Castlemaine and get on with the business of building a new library.

The people of Castlemaine remember only too well the government's promises when the Castlemaine woollen mill burned down 18 months ago. The Minister for Rural Development acted like a knight in shining armour and promised big things, but nothing was done to help the town. As soon as the national media representatives were not around the government went cold and refused to assist Castlemaine.

Teenage unemployment is a significant issue across Victoria, particularly in country areas. Government members will be aware from ABS statistics that in January this year teenage unemployment had reached 52 000, 10 000 more than at the same time the previous year. Clearly the government must recognise that youth unemployment is a significant problem and start listening to the opposition. The government should follow the opposition's lead and take up its policy proposal of providing 40 000 new jobs through the Jobs Now initiative. If the government did that many people in country Victoria would view it in a better light.

I urge the government to also take up the opposition's policy development of taking a regional perspective on major events. The Easter fair is a major event and has been funded for several years. However, the government's neglect of country Victoria is so great that this year funding has not been granted for the event.

Country Victorians are concerned about what will happen in the year 2000 when the uniform electricity tariff is abandoned. Electricity companies will want to compete in the big Melbourne market and country people will be treated as second-class citizens. Government members should consult their constituents.

The honourable member for Swan Hill should tell his constituents how much more expensive he believes their electricity will be compared to what will be paid by Melburnians. The honourable member for Ripon should tell the people of Maryborough and Ararat how much more expensive he believes electricity will be in those areas than in Melbourne.

The Regulator-General has already admitted there will be price differentials. It is incumbent on government members in country seats to look their constituents in the eye and tell them how much the government intends to slug them.

Mr Steggall interjected.

Mr CAMERON — The honourable member for Swan Hill interjects that that is garbage, yet National Party members are the champions of ripping apart the

uniform tariff policy. No-one has let down country people more than the National Party.

The government has removed 2000 jobs from the conservation area. Catchment management authorities are now taking over many of the responsibilities of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, but they are being funded by people being slugged on their rates. For example, in the West Gippsland area people are being slugged an extra \$25 on their rates — \$25 extra from a household to replace what the government should have been doing. It is sleight of hand.

The government has refused to face up to the Teletrak issue or tell the people of Maryborough what it has against that community. If there is a good reason for not going ahead with the proposal the government should send the responsible minister to Maryborough to tell the community, but it has not done that. The government must recognise that as long as it continues to govern in this way the people of country Victoria, and of Maryborough in particular, will see through it. It may talk of the social dividend and looking after people, but the people of Maryborough and central Victoria know only too well that is nothing but fiction.

Mrs ELLIOTT (Mooroolbark) — In joining the address-in-reply debate I pay tribute to the Governor, Sir James Gobbo and Lady Gobbo for the grace and good humour they bring to the office of Governor of this state. Sir James Gobbo was an eminent jurist, a judge of great distinction and a son of migrants from Italy. It is pleasing to know that people of that calibre and background can aspire to the highest office of an Australian state. I also pay tribute to Mr and Mrs Richard McGarvie, who made an enormous effort to travel around Victoria to listen to what people were saying. During Richard McGarvie's years as Governor they took a real interest in what people were saying. Mrs McGarvie had an interest in the arts, particularly singing and the piano, and allowed Government House to be used for many artistic evenings of great distinction to which she invited people from all walks of life to hear music in those beautiful surroundings. This state has been fortunate to have as Governors Sir James Gobbo and Richard McGarvie.

Those opening comments lead me to the coalition government's record in the arts. Robyn Archer, the director of the Adelaide Festival of the Arts, which began this week, said that the arts provide a different way of believing, imagining and living. Robyn is an example of that herself as an actor and as the festival director. The arts allow us different ways of expanding our imagination, of seeing the reality of life differently.

They teach lessons of tolerance, impartiality and the nature of love. They can get us away from the mundane and everyday nature of our lives, if only for a few hours. Many people may feel indifferent to that, but the arts have many other aspects.

They are a significant employer of Victorians, with 63 594 people or 3.4 per cent of the total work force working in cultural and entertainment industries as their major jobs. Those figures underestimate the number of people who work part time in the cultural industry, estimated at 118 000. A significant proportion of the work force in Victoria draws all or part of its income from working in the arts. Art productions are worth approximately \$5 billion to the Victorian economy, so in terms of economic value and employment the arts have a major role to play. For many people the arts give great pleasure and economic viability through the jobs they provide, and therefore are worthy of support.

It is a challenge for governments of whatever persuasion to work out a way to support the most creative, the most imaginative, the most talented of people in the community — the ones who, through an accident of birth, have enormous and real talent. On Friday evening at the premiere of *La Bayadère*, the Australian Ballet spectacular choreographed by the former ballerina, Natalia Makarova, who danced in England, I saw Li Cunxin, the young Chinese ballet dancer, performing the role of Solor. To the casual observer in a packed house he seemed truly to take wings and fly. He was an emigré from Russia who lived briefly in the United States but has made his life with his family in Victoria, and he shows great grace in his dancing with the Australian Ballet.

How does government support the arts? During the Cain-Kirner years of Labor government from 1988 to 1992 arts funding was marked by little vision, few policies, low commitment and little interest. A succession of ministers was unwilling or unable to convince Treasury to move the major arts organisations to annual or triennial funding, and without the assurance of a guaranteed income artistic companies were unable to thrive. The one major capital works project completed during that time was Scienceworks. Other initiatives were stillborn or barely completed during those rust bucket years. I do not entirely blame the ministers because the state of the economy was such that to start building and supporting arts was well nigh impossible. Several initiatives, such as providing permanent storage for the Public Records Office — the history of our state — were mooted but never got off the ground. Construction of the Museum of Victoria on

the Southbank site had begun, but only barely, when the 1992 election arrived.

Between 1988 and 1992 spending on the arts increased little, from approximately \$67 million to \$87 million. A \$20 million increase over six years is not enough to keep the arts buoyant, alive or thriving. Compare that with what has happened under the coalition government since 1992. The coalition government has had two ministers during its period of government, the Honourable Haddon Storey, a former member for East Yarra Province, and the Premier. Haddon Storey was an extremely well thought of, committed and vigorous minister. Even now I see him almost every time I go to the theatre, the ballet or a play. He still supports the arts as he did during his time as Minister for the Arts, even though he is not required to do so.

The last time a minister for the arts was Premier of the state was during Rupert Hamer's days as Premier. When I first became parliamentary secretary to the Premier in his role as Minister for the Arts many people said that they hoped a period like the period when Premier Hamer was Minister for the Arts might come again. Many people looked back to that time as the golden era of the arts. That time has come again now that the Premier is Minister for the Arts. Whenever a head of state, whether it be a prime minister or a premier, is also the Minister for the Arts, the arts undergoes a renaissance that contrasts starkly with what went before.

Governments also need a blueprint or framework for the arts. One of the problems with the former Labor government is that its inability to provide any sort of framework. It never saw the big picture, only individual wants and needs. There was no comprehensive policy with which to deliver funding. In 1994, when Haddon Storey was the arts minister, the Arts 21 policy was developed.

That visionary blueprint to take the arts into the 21st century was drafted around six major strategies. It has stood this state in very good stead — so good that emissaries from New South Wales have come to see how it is done in Victoria. Since 1994 spending on the arts has risen from \$87 million to approximately \$306 million in the 1997-98 financial year. It is all fully funded; none of it involves one cent of debt. That vision, combined pragmatism, has produced outstanding results for the arts and for the buildings in which they are housed.

Under the Housing the Arts policy the Kennett government looked at the amazing heritage we have of 19th and 20th century buildings such as the National

Gallery of Victoria, the State Library with its wonderful domed reading room, the museum, which was also housed within that building, the potential of Federation Square and the possibility for a museum of immigration to celebrate the contribution and the richness that migrants have brought to our lives and to our aspirations.

Under the Housing the Arts policy there will be a comprehensive redevelopment of the National Gallery, to which the government is contributing \$94 million. The gallery as it stands is a wonderful building. Designed by Sir Roy Grounds, it is a Melbourne icon to which every Melburnian would have probably been at least once, but the requirements for museums have changed. The size of paintings has changed, and the National Gallery is no longer adequate for the arts of the 20th and 21st centuries. It is too cramped and there is not enough room for the curators to undertake their work; there are simply not the right facilities to undertake the educational activities of the gallery. Education and the arts are becoming so intertwined that they are almost inseparable.

The gallery is undergoing a major renovation that will take two or three years to complete, but when completed, for all intents and purposes it will look similar from the front but inside it will be a different story. There will be far more exhibition space, a better flow for visitors to the gallery and a much better experience for both Melburnians and visitors from other parts of the state, interstate and internationally. In addition, \$250 million has been allocated to build a new Museum of Victoria on the site of the Carlton Gardens. Those of us who as children recall the pterodactyls hanging from the ceiling and the static displays in the old museum will feel some nostalgia for the museum as it was. The dioramas of Aboriginal people in their camp sites, the stuffed animals and Phar Lap in his glass case will be missed, but again time has moved on and the Museum of Victoria was not adequately housed in that building.

A new, state-of-the-art museum is being built at Carlton Gardens. If honourable members drive past that area they will see how advanced that massive project is. It will enable visitors, particularly young people, to understand how we interact and relate with our environment and how important it is to preserve biological diversity. It will provide a range of virtual reality experiences that we could only have dreamed of when we looked at those static dioramas when we were young.

The controversial blade above the building will house a gallery of life in which people will be able to walk

through the various climate zones of the world and see the bird and butterfly life and the vegetation of those areas. A substantial part of the museum will be devoted to indigenous Aboriginal culture so that visitors will better understand how the Aboriginal inhabitants of the land lived, worked and interacted with each other. It is one of the most exciting projects under the Agenda 21 program that is being delivered through Arts Victoria. It will add significantly to the cultural life of this state and be a major tourist attraction.

Those who oppose the development of the new museum at the Carlton Gardens do not know what they are doing. We cannot build for the 21st century in a 19th century mode. The old Exhibition Building with its wonderful Brunelleschi dome is stunning; it is superb. It was the place where the first federal Parliament was held. But it is no use building in that idiom. The new museum is on the same axis as the old Exhibition Building, but it is in the contemporary idiom and complementary to the older building.

If we were to continue building as we did in the past, a move towards more imaginative buildings would not occur. Buildings such as the Eiffel Tower would not have been constructed if the French had thought that way. It was revolutionary when it was built, as was the I. M. Pei pyramid at the Louvre in Paris, which caused a controversy at the time but is now an accepted part of the landscape of the Louvre — that wonderful 17th and 18th century building with the contemporary pyramid placed in the middle of the courtyard. We must think in a contemporary and forward-looking way to serve future generations.

The other exciting development is the move of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art to the Malthouse Plaza. An exciting copper-sheeted angular building will help to complete the Malthouse Plaza, where the Playbox is also based, and make an off-Broadway contemporary art-contemporary drama precinct for people who are drawn to that expression of the creativity of this state. It will be a significant asset to the cultural life of Victoria.

Buildings are just that — buildings; they are places that house, as does this amazing 19th century building. However, in the arts it is the people who matter, it is they who have the imagination and creativity to provide us with the experiences I was describing earlier.

The government recognised that to support creativity and make the arts industry viable it required good managers. A significant amount of money — \$1 million — has been devoted to the arts leadership fund to send talented managers overseas for study

courses under exchange and travel arrangements to develop their managing skills so they can demonstrate leadership in the organisations with which they are involved. It is an ideology taken from private industry and private enterprise that that works equally well with the arts companies and the arts industry as it does with private enterprise.

I only have to think of Steven Porter, the manager of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, who travelled to Japan recently. Mr Porter knows how to manage the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra: he is aware of his orchestra players, keeps an eye on the bottom line of the orchestra budget, knows the repertoire of the company and organises the orchestra playing overseas, interstate and intrastate. He is a prudent and experienced manager. Other managers hoping to reach that level often benefit from professional development, which is now being provided for them.

Another initiative is the \$2.2 million Victoria Commissions program, which enables the government to accept commissions for particular structural works. Last year, with the Minister for Conservation and Land Management, I had the honour of opening the migration tower at the Cheetham wetlands. The facility is really a bird watch in the middle of the wetlands to which many birds migrate from the Northern Hemisphere for the southern summer. It was designed by William Kelly and is architecturally quite beautiful. It is really a sculpture. It traces the history of migration of not only birds but also immigrants to this country with a series of plaques and notices on the way up to the summit of the winding sculpture, from which one can get a good view of the wetlands.

For 2 hours every night a light at the top of the sculpture flashes on and off in the same way that lighthouses to signal ships. It is a place and a work of exquisite beauty. That development would never have taken place without the Victoria Commissions program. It is one of the many works that have been developed out of the government's vision in developing that program.

An arts marketing task force was given \$750 000 over three years to discover the composition of arts audiences: who likes to go to dance or to the theatre; who likes to hear music; and who prefers productions such as *The Phantom of the Opera*? Do people who like AFL football also go to plays, dance or music? That project enables companies and individuals to get a fix on who their audiences are, to segment them and to pitch their publicity towards that audience to gain a greater segment of the market.

Lest anyone charge that the government does not properly consider rural and regional areas, I should say that the Touring Victoria arts program has been the recipient of more than \$2.7 million to ensure an equity of access for residents of those areas. As examples I refer to a number of projects funded in 1997.

The Bendigo Art Gallery received \$40 000 to stage a regional tour of *Furnish*, an exhibition of contemporary furniture design created by Natalie King. Dance Compass Melbourne, which used to be Big Fish Dance Company, was granted \$30 000 to undertake a regional tour. Musica Viva Australia, which would be well known to many honourable members, received \$25 000 to stage the 1998 Musica Viva in Schools program, which delivered 190 concerts through the school network and an additional six family concerts in regional venues across Victoria. The Victorian Arts Centre Trust used its \$35 000 grant for a regional tour of the children's production *Princess Smartypants* — a production I missed!

Further grants included \$60 000 to the Dancers' Company — the young dancers from the Australian Ballet School dancing with some of the principals from the Australian Ballet — for it to conduct a tour this year of *Don Quixote* throughout regional Victoria. The Victorian Concert Orchestra received \$35 000 for a regional tour. The Geelong Performing Arts Centre was allocated \$30 000 for its *Made to Move* dance program in regional Victoria. They are but a few examples of what the government has done for rural and regional areas.

In addition, Victoria has the Victorian Rural and Regional Arts Access program, known as the VRAP9 program, and the Scienceworks Regional and Rural Access program, known as the STAR6 program, which enable all years 6 and 9 school children to visit Melbourne's arts features. The programs are fully funded by the government. Year 9 children visit the museum or the arts centre, or whatever combination they choose. The year 6 children visit Scienceworks. No child attending government schools does so without having two days in his or her school life in the city experiencing the cultural delights of Melbourne.

The government allocates \$100 000 to *ContemporA5*, a contemporary art prize. That award had the arts featured on the front pages of both Melbourne daily newspapers for three days last year when discussion raged loud and strong about Fiona Hall's winning work of cardboard boxes and carvings from Velvet soap. But it got people talking about the arts. A man in my electorate said, 'If I build my kids a cubbyhouse from cardboard, will I win an arts prize?'.

Mr Hamilton interjected.

Mrs ELLIOTT — Indeed, the Serrano exhibition got more publicity! Women artists receive \$30 000 in grants annually, through the women's affairs portfolio. Included in those awards last year was one to Deirdre Rubinstein, whose wonderful solo performance in *Confidentially Yours* at the Malthouse Theatre received both critical and popular acclaim; the season has been extended. I can assure honourable members of an absolutely wonderful night's entertainment at that production; Deirdre switches from one persona to the next by simply turning around in a way that I found totally unbelievable. Most people probably would never have heard of Deirdre Rubinstein and would never have been able to witness her incredible talent had she not won a women's arts grant to develop her work. I was delighted to be there when she received the award and at the conclusion of her performance to see what had been achieved.

I pay tribute to the director of Arts Victoria, Lesley Alway. She, the Premier and I form a rather good team. She is an example of what I have been describing. She has an MBA and is good at administration, and she has an overwhelming love for and understanding of the arts. The former director of Arts Victoria, Tim Jacobs, a distinguished administrator, will be taking over as chief executive officer of the Victorian Arts Centre. Tim said he missed Melbourne so much after a year in Sydney that he had to come back. We always like it when people return from Sydney! I am sure he will have a positive influence on the Arts Centre.

I am not sure who the shadow minister for the arts is — perhaps the Leader of the Opposition with the honourable member for Essendon as his deputy — but I find it extremely disappointing that both are conspicuous by their absence at Melbourne's cultural events. I rarely see either. There seems to be little commitment or interest on the part of the opposition — there is certainly a lack of policy. Apart from some ill-considered criticisms about the supposed removal of the water wall at the Arts Centre and the dislocation of the Leonard French ceiling there, I have seen no evidence of any arts policy from the ALP.

One would think if they were genuinely interested in the arts they would at least make an effort to attend the big and the small arts performances and exhibitions. They could make an effort. Perhaps they could visit the Footscray Performing Arts Centre in the western suburbs and take in a production of the Women's Circus. They are certainly notable by their absence, which is regrettable.

In the unlikely event of the ALP being elected to government again, the arts in Victoria would suffer. Victoria would move from a period of great arts renaissance to another period of what could be called the dark ages. Betty Churcher, the former director of the National Gallery of Australia in Canberra — who is no supporter of conservative governments — said what we are doing in Victoria is the envy of the other states; she said that genuinely and with great feeling.

Recently I was in Tokyo with the curator of the National Gallery, the curator from the RMIT gallery, Steven Porter from the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, and Ian Roberts, manager of the Melbourne Festival of the Arts. Steven and I each delivered a paper at a symposium about the involvement in the arts of the state government and the City of Melbourne. The Australian Embassy was surprised that between 150 and 200 people turned up to hear what we had to say. The question-and-answer session at the end of the symposium lasted about 90 minutes; it could have gone for 3 hours, so interested were they in the way the government funds and supports the arts in Victoria and in the city of Melbourne. Some of the young contemporary artists in Tokyo expressed disappointment about the lack of venues in which to show their works and the fact that their government appeared to be more willing to support traditional rather than contemporary art. There was a real sense that they were hungry to learn what we were doing here.

The commitment of the government to the arts is obvious but it is never easy. It is hard to convince the private sector of what it can get out of supporting the arts. Competition for the leisure dollar is fierce, and the competition from sport is enormous. Those involved in the arts find it difficult to make profits or keep themselves viable, particularly smaller companies and individual artists. Private enterprise commits only 0.5 per cent of the total spent by governments on the arts.

Australia does not have the culture of corporate support and sponsorship that exists in the United States. However, Telstra has decided to support the Australian Ballet, and its support was obvious the other night at the performance of *La Bayadère*. The theatre was well badged, and Telstra would have been well satisfied with the commitment it has made to the ballet.

In concluding I make this plea: that the corporate sector and the opposition recognise the value to the community and to individuals of investing in the arts.

Mr HAMILTON (Morwell) — I was becoming a little concerned during the discourse of the honourable

member for Mooroolbark that it was all sweetness and light and that it would be a bit hard to respond with something a little more controversial. However, the honourable member redeemed herself in the end by having a whack, and that has allowed me the privilege of returning the compliment.

The arts are important in our culture for providing a forum for social comment. Criticism of royalty and governments has often been made via the arts — poetry, novels, dance and ballet. We should not forget the major contribution of the arts in stirring people's social consciences.

I am pleased to contribute to the debate on the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. Rather than go on with the usual diatribe, I express sympathy for the Governor. Sir James Gobbo was a well credentialled and well qualified judge who would have delivered many judgments, each of which he would have written himself. I therefore respect the good grace with which he read extremely well a judgment of the government's performance which was written by someone else and to which he had not contributed. He may not have believed a word of it, yet he had to defer to the government and read it.

I will begin by saying what I would have written for Sir James to read. I would have started with the following quote from *The Government of Routines* by G. Davis, which was published by Macmillan in 1995:

Everywhere Australia can be seen going through an extraordinary transformation. Our governments have lost so much confidence about their place in the world they will no longer borrow money and are shutting down or selling essential public services — and stealing from the future income tax base — to liquidate their remaining debt.

That thrust of that quotation applies to the Kennett government. It is a great shame to see a government so obsessed with getting out of governing that it has turned government into a bread-and-circuses routine. It is no wonder given that the Premier is an ex-advertising agent — it is probably the only thing he learnt. 'Free-market theologians' is probably the best way of describing the current Victorian conservatives. They are the direct antithesis of the small-l liberal governments for which Victoria has been noted almost from its foundation.

Alfred Deakin, George Higinbotham, David Syme and Henry Higgins were noted for what they said about government. They believed and governed in line with the philosophy that government is not the freedom to accumulate unlimited economic purchasing power. Their commitment was to the freedom of the individual to pursue self-development and aspire to personal

fulfilment. They did not deride the very idea of society in favour of unfettered egoism. That philosophy was also characteristic of small-l liberal governments.

In Victoria today we have an illiberal government in two senses — 'ill' meaning being sick and 'illiberal' meaning 'not liberal'. We have an illiberal government of the highest order. Instead of governing, the government goes on with the buffoonery, hyperbole and robust philistinism of the contemporary advertising executive. It is the sort of government we have; and these are the sorts of things that will be the downfall of the government.

Victoria has a Treasurer who has set up the State Owned Enterprises Act to enable the government to restructure, deregulate, split, asset strip, sack or sell the state's public enterprises without reference to the Parliament that created them and with immunity from review by the Ombudsman or access under the Freedom of Information Act. Similarly, the embracing of the private provision of public infrastructure and competitive tendering has hidden much of the public's money behind the doctrine of commercial confidentiality.

After having liquidated the checks and balances of the Westminster system and marginalised or thoroughly intimidated those involved in them, the Premier has substituted new, much louder and more Victorian forms of public discourse and participation. Instead of Victorians actively participating in public affairs, the benefits of joining in a production line of publicly sponsored but privately owned events, such as car races, aeroplane displays, dog and fashion shows, novelty sports and visiting overseas singers, are trumpeted to them. It is the promotion of a bread-and-circuses syndrome — feed them bread and take them to a circus — rather than a policy of asking citizens to participate in good government.

Another quote from *The Government of Routines* is relevant here. Davis states:

This authoritarianism has dovetailed with Kennett's public high jinks to reinforce the popular perception that he is not like other politicians —

that's for sure! —

and to draw the compensating Victorian refrain that 'at least he is doing things'. 'I think Reagan is probably the nearest that comes to mind', says the federal Liberal Treasurer admiringly. 'I think you can describe this as a do-it government', argues businessman and Opera Australia chairman, Graeme Samuel. 'He actually went out there and closed the schools ... He closed the hospitals ... And everything's been put out to tender in Victoria', said John Elliott proudly in a speech in March 1997, where he

argued the case for an Australian Margaret Thatcher. 'Sometimes I disagree with what he says', opines Victorian RSL President, Bruce Ruxton, 'but ... he is one of the few real leaders in Australia.' 'There is a touch of Joh [Bjelke-Petersen]', says Hugh Mackay, 'when people said, "There's something murky happening"', but look at what he has done for Queensland.'

We should have a look at what the Premier has done to Victoria. The government has not been about social justice and participation at all.

Alfred Deakin, a great Liberal leader, talked about permanent prosperity. He told the Commonwealth Parliament in 1903 that:

Permanent prosperity can only be based on institutions which are cemented by social justice. Under the influence of a sense of injustice, of inequality, of unfairness and helplessness the working population cannot be expected to submit to their lot.

Indeed, that is what has happened in the five and a half years of the Kennett government. People have been frozen out. The Governor's speech talks of the government's intention to go:

... on a major wave of investment in food production and value adding in country centres.

I applaud that. The government has stepped up activity under its Food Victoria initiative. The state is expected to exceed its objective to treble food exports to \$6 billion by 2001. That is a very important initiative. However, it has created an almighty fuss in the Macalister irrigation district. Of the 800 irrigators in the area, this week 500 are without water on their farms.

The Macalister district is one of the most efficient and productive dairy producing areas in Victoria. Farmers have increased production and made their farms more efficient at producing dairy products that are by and large sold into the Murray-Goulburn factory at Maffra. That factory is bigger than the new factory currently being built in Morwell. Because of the uncertainty and lack of security with irrigation water, especially in a dry season — at least to this stage this year has been a 1-in-15-year drought that has not ended — the farmers face the dilemma of two impossible choices.

Firstly, if they live south of the Thomson River they can buy additional water from Melbourne Water at commercial rates of approximately \$108 a megalitre when the normal cost of water to their farms is \$30-odd per megalitre. At those prices it is not a choice because the cost of maintaining production is not viable. The other choice is to sell off their herds and shut down their farms.

Even those who planned ahead anticipating the likelihood of a drought because of the El Niño effect

are still in an impossible position because the Glenmaggie Weir is almost dry. The weir is designed never to run completely dry. The government — rightly, I believe — encouraged those irrigators to invest large amounts of money modernising their farms, but it did not guarantee farmers any security.

Mrs Tehan interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — You cannot run an irrigation farm without water, Minister. There is a five-year supply of water in the Thomson Dam. The Minister for Agriculture and Resources said, 'Melbourne will never have to worry about having a drought'. That is because of the Thomson Dam — which, by the way, is in the Gippsland catchment — yet that water is not being made available to guarantee the security of the irrigators on the Macalister. That is the problem. Melbourne has a five-year supply of water before it even has to think about having water restrictions, yet the government will let the farmers go broke. Is that a government that is guaranteeing security?

It is all right for the people at the top end of Collins Street who don't have to worry about the water restrictions and for the yuppies out in Toorak to continue watering their English lawns. The bowling clubs in Malvern can continue having nice fresh lawns while farmers get no guarantee! That is the inequity and hypocrisy of the government's saying to farmers 'Go ahead and create a good farm' while not being prepared to guarantee security.

Even worse is the fact that the Honourable Peter Hall in the other place blamed the whole problem on the previous Labor government. That accusation is often made by members of the government. The history of irrigation water from the Thomson Dam commenced with an agreement made by a former Liberal Premier, Dick Hamer, that adequate irrigation water would be provided.

It is true that in 1985 the Cain government reduced the amount of irrigation water available from the Thomson Dam, but Mr Hall failed to tell his constituents — they already know because they told me — that the present government further restricted the amount of water available from the Thomson Dam. At least the honourable member for Gippsland South was honest enough not to run the same line in his speech. He knew it would not carry any weight and he could not visit the sins of his government upon the former government.

The constituents, the irrigators on the Macalister River, are not stupid. In a recent letter to the member for Gippsland South one said:

A National party voter for 40 years and most of that time a financial member of the National party today I am neither. Indeed the role of your party in the whole sorry saga of the Thomson Dam is to say the least very very poor.

In a letter to the *Gippsland Times* the author — who I suspect to be a member or former member of the National Party — states:

Farmers who believe the water shortage is due to drought are wrong. Never again will the Macalister irrigation area be able to deliver more than 120 per cent of water right and that only in a good year. Irrigators believed with the advent of the huge Thomson Dam our water problems were over. Today, we are worse off than before the dam was built.

That is a comment by an irrigator who understands these things. He is directly involved. Farmers are worse off because the government has put the priorities and commercialisation of Melbourne Water in front of the needs of the people in the irrigation area. I have not made up the problem. I have been told about it by the 800 families who are currently in crisis.

I asked the farmers, 'What is wrong with the National Party?'. I and honourable members who have been here as long as I have will never forget Bruce Evans's representation of the seat of Gippsland East. On some issues he sat on this side of the house on his very lonesome while the other 86 members sat on the opposite side. To his credit Bruce stood up for the National Party members in his constituency. He was prepared to sit there on his own and do that. When I him asked that question, the reply I got was, 'The problem with the National Party is that it took the 'country' out of its name and forgot that it represented country people. Have a look at who it has in Parliament. There is a lawyer, a racecourse caller, a used car salesman and an auctioneer. Where are the farmers in the National Party?'

That comment has also been made to me by constituents who I assure the house are not traditional Labor voters. They have been very loyal but they feel let down. It is no wonder that on page 8 of his speech the Governor made reference to a National Party slush fund that is to be set up.

Having lived in country Victoria all my life, I was absolutely amazed by the absence of screams from the National Party when the councils were amalgamated. In every area of country Victoria the National Party branches were funded by the ratepayers because all the members of the country councils were National Party members. I have visited the councils and been told that they did not have problems with politics in their councils because they were all members of the National Party — I kid you not!

Why were there no screams from the National Party when they chopped out their branch structures? No wonder they are going bad! They were so silly they did not see it coming and did not fight council amalgamations, which removed the National Party branches that were set up all over the state.

Mr A. F. Plowman interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — The honourable member for Benambra will share in this because he will be part of the slush fund. The government has recognised that it has a large problem in country Victoria — you would have to be blind not to see it — and it wants to cultivate some favour in the bush for a change. It has taken five and a half years to realise that the bush communities are being destroyed as schools and hospitals are closed down.

Mr A. F. Plowman — Rubbish!

Mr HAMILTON — The honourable member for Benambra should look at the map to see where schools have been closed and think about what has happened to the communities as a result. Following the lead from the government the banks closed their branches and other businesses have done the same. This government has overseen the greatest demise of country Victoria under any Victorian government. However, the government is not absolutely stupid. I have to say that, even though it hurts, because His Excellency the Governor said the government will set up a slush fund to win back the bush. He did not say that in so many words; in an eloquent manner he said:

In order to build on the work of these programs and redefine its longer term vision for country Victoria —

in other words to hang on to a few country seats, because the coalition keeps keep losing them —

the government will develop a new rural policy in consultation with country communities ...

It has taken five and a half years for the government to develop a rural policy. Shame on you! What a disgrace! The country Liberal and National Party members have become almost irrelevant in the Kennett government. They do not count. The Premier sacked the Deputy Leader of the National Party without his knowing about it — that is how much relevance the National Party has! It is time that members of the National Party woke up because they are being set aside by the government.

I cannot let an opportunity pass without making some reference to the privatisation of the electricity industry. Indeed, this is the week to talk about the privatisation of

the electricity industry because this week in New Zealand the case model that we were following — we got their experts in here to tell us how to do it — closed down Auckland!

Dr Napthine — They are not privatised!

Mr HAMILTON — The minister does not understand the difference between the way the NZ model works and the way this one works. This one has just been a bit more ruthless.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr HAMILTON — It is the fault of privatisation. I think it was the Honourable Bill Landeryou who described what happened in the most accurate terms when he talked about corporatisation and privatisation. He described corporatisation as a little Greek cafe you call at on the way to privatisation. There is no difference; the government has undertaken a sack and burn process in our electricity industry and its actions will come back to haunt it. Although, thank goodness, the government will not be in power when it happens, whole areas of Victoria, including Melbourne, will be blacked out because the government got rid of the very people who were loyal to the organisation and knew how the system worked and made sure it did. You do not have to go too far in the Latrobe Valley to talk to the people who know — that is, the workers on the floor with coaldust on their hands. They will tell you what is happening under the new overseas ownership.

It was a disgrace to hear the Premier say that it would be terrible if Crown Casino were sold off to overseas competitors. I intended describing Crown as a bloody gambling joint on the hill, but that would be unparliamentary so I will leave out the descriptive adjective! Who cares whether someone from overseas owns Crown Casino — you have the same level of corruption no matter who owns it. It is rife with corruption; that is what it is all about.

The government considers that it is all right to sell off our power stations, our gas and fuel and our water industries to overseas interests. Country members will not be able to hold up their heads when water is privatised because that is when the bush will bite them hard!

The establishment of university campuses is one of the most important aspects of the future of regional Victoria. The government has put an emphasis on education and training and research and development. One of the keys to the health and strength of country communities has been the establishment of university campuses in Gippsland, Bendigo, Ballarat, Geelong,

Warmambool and Dookie. I made it my business to see what was happening on university campuses in country Victoria. To his credit the Minister for Tertiary Education and Training has been highly critical of the person in Canberra he calls the Nutty Professor. I shall refer to Dr David Kemp as the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Although the Minister for Tertiary Education and Training has been critical of what the federal minister has done to overall university training, he has made no comment about what is happening on campuses in country Victoria. You cannot study English at the Gippsland campus of Monash, which is the biggest university in Australia and the second oldest in Victoria. What does that say about the university's priorities? Staff, courses and options for country students have been cut, while they have protected the campus at Clayton where the bodies are.

In this wonderful new era, the economic fundamentalist vice-chancellors who have found their way to the top of the university tree have said that if staff complain to the politicians about what is happening they should start looking for a job at another university because they do not want staff to become political. It is a disgrace that a vice-chancellor should have said that. It is also a disgrace that the staff did not lynch him straight away. One of the signs of a healthy university is the ability to take part in politics.

Bendigo campus has lost 100 staff and courses. Ballarat campus has lost three or four courses, more than 50 staff and many of its postgraduate courses. Deakin University was planning to shut down the Warmambool campus, but thank goodness it did not! However, it has reduced its emphasis on the Warmambool campus.

It is critical to regional Victoria that those icons in a healthy community that provide the opportunity for country students to study in their own domain are protected at all costs. Any government, state or federal, that lets the health of its educational facilities — from kindergartens to postgraduate education — suffer or denies the opportunity for country students to participate has no idea of the value of the really important things in this world. I refer to the real living, breathing people — not the customers, clients or consumers. That is what counts. If we do not look after their health, including their psychological health, we have lost and there is no point in being in government at all.

Mrs PEULICH (Bentleigh) — I was looking forward to following the honourable member for Morwell and praising his comments. Usually his

contributions are spirited and intelligent. But that speech sounded like the last hooray of a much diminished Pledge faction. How the honourable member for Morwell can still be so steeped in the left-wing ideology that has been ditched by everybody else, I do not know. The rhetoric sounds great, but what did the former Labor government do? It bankrupted the state. It looked after only its own people — not the Victorian people. Yet the honourable member for Morwell has the audacity to talk about this government not looking after Victorians.

Although I could spend the rest of my half hour taking apart the arguments of the honourable member for Morwell I will resist the temptation. I will deliver the speech I planned to deliver because I hope it will contain some constructive and positive suggestions for the future agenda of this government which, I am sure, will be long.

On behalf of the Bentleigh electorate, I congratulate His Excellency, Sir James Gobbo, and Lady Gobbo on their elevation to that high office. I was bemused by the fact that nearly every speaker said Sir James Gobbo's achievements are all the more notable because he came from a migrant family. As I am also a migrant, I do not believe his achievements are any more notable or any more significant because of that. His achievements are so because he is an Australian. I would like to correct those members and give the man credit for his achievements. At the opening of Parliament Sir James spent most of his time in the garden. He shook hands with a lot of ordinary people who came to visit and spend the day viewing a lovely Victorian asset. The Governor's address to Parliament is a commendable effort. It outlines the government's agenda for the remainder of the term and beyond.

The coalition was elected to office in 1992 on the platform of restoring Victoria's financial integrity. Its policies would not have been so stringent and disciplined if the Labor Party had not bankrupted the state and hocked our children's future. It was also committed to delivering efficient and effective services to Victorians. Despite all the criticising and harping, when we look at the future that is precisely what the government has done. It has turned the state debt around. It is now \$11.3 billion, which is approximately the same level as in 1982.

The government has made a concerted effort to deal with unemployment. The Labor Party fails to acknowledge that that is the greatest cause of poverty in the community. In the Bentleigh electorate unemployment has been reduced from 12.5 per cent under the Labor government to 6.3 per cent. That is a

50 per cent reduction in the five and a half years the coalition has been in office. It is a significant achievement. Just think of the number of families affected. They have benefited from the fact that an additional 50 per cent of that original 12.5 per cent unemployed are now working.

It is much easier to throw money around. The more you throw, the more you spend and the more you tend to ignore the problems. Throwing money around does not resolve anything. The government has done a commendable job balancing the priorities.

Members of the Labor Party take heart from their two by-election wins. However, they are sufficiently politically wise to know that swings of the magnitude achieved in those by-elections can be attributed to the fact that people feel confident enough to give the current government a kick in the backside without undermining all that it has achieved. It does not mean that the government will not be listening. It has listened. The honourable member for Mitcham has shown himself to be a person who does not treat the electorate with respect. He did not concede that the government did listen and that the initial proposals concerning the Auditor-General reforms were not proceeded with. They were significantly changed.

Mr Baker interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — People do believe it! I did not joke when I spoke about the Auditor-General and the Workcover reforms being bedded down. The honourable member for Sunshine knows only too well because of the excellent publication he put together when he was working as chief executive officer of a parliamentary committee that reviewed Workcover legislation and found that common law does not deliver — —

Mr Baker interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I have always said he was probably the most talented member on the Labor benches. It is unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition has not found it within himself to accommodate him in a productive role. The community at large knows that if a Labor government were elected it would not be electing honourable members opposite. It would be electing the union warlords and power brokers who represent 30 per cent of the labour force. The Labor Party membership form requires that to join the party you have to be a union member. That means 70 per cent of the population is precluded from joining the Labor Party, especially our young people. How can they vote for honourable members opposite with any

confidence when they would be voting in a de facto union. Labor members would be making decisions and looking after their rank and file rather than ordinary Victorians.

In his address the Governor said there is no doubt that Victorians and Australians, along with the rest of the Western world, are experiencing a fast pace of change as they enter the 21st century. Social changes are taking place. Values are changing and changes are also being brought about by technological advances. The baby boomers are ageing, the economy is becoming globalised and the state and country as a whole are facing increasing pressures to improve competitiveness. Change is never easy and there is no turning back.

Every member on this side of the house would believe that in responding to the pace of change Victorians expect social dividends. The honourable member for Morwell called it a 'slush fund'. He degraded the expectations Victorians have of sharing in the dividends from the hard-earned gains they are entitled to receive for supporting the government they elected to office! It is an absolute insult. The coalition government has the capacity to make Victorians feel relaxed and comfortable about who they are and where they are going without turning the clock back or undermining our hard-won gains.

I do not need to go into the detail of the government's economic achievements, because I am sure that subject has already been covered; suffice it to say that the government intends to keep the budget in surplus, to which I do not believe members opposite have any commitment. We will continue with debt reduction and we look forward to the return of the AAA rating for this state.

The government has made a commitment to continuing to lower unemployment, increasing business investment, putting in place industry policies to improve our competitive advantage, and delivering the best and highest quality efficient services to meet community and individual needs. That is increasingly done through the application of leading edge technology and wherever possible we are allowing the private sector to take part in its delivery. Wherever I go people in small business tell me that the greatest boost to business has been this government's privatisation program.

The government has made a commitment through the Governor's address to goals for 2001, including educational outcomes, an increase in jobs, promoting safe and healthy lifestyles, developing confident and

cohesive communities and continuing to manage the economy prudently. It is well on track.

Local government reform in my area has been very effective and some 8000 ratepayers have received reductions of up to 30 per cent in their rates.

Recently the Glen Eira council established a service centre in the Bentleigh library which has won a national award. The service logs complaints, inquiries or actions required by the ratepayer, enacts it and reports to the ratepayer. The government has been responsible for that level of desire to improve.

The Kingston council has had a few hitches with the planning of the *Good Design Guide*, which the honourable member for Richmond said was the responsibility of the Minister for Planning and Local Government. The problem with the *Good Design Guide* was caused by the delegation by councillors to council officers of most of the decision-making on planning proposals without having any triggers that force contentious or controversial planning applications to be taken to full council for its consideration. The honourable member for Richmond knows very well that element 1 of the medium design height guide provides that:

Densities may be increased where it can be demonstrated that the objectives and criteria of the guide as a whole will be met.

It says also that densities may be reduced, and that:

Local variations may replace or add to the techniques in this element.

The solutions exist. It is dishonest of the honourable member for Richmond to suggest that concern has been created by the guide or this minister.

Some time ago I raised with the minister the idea of the development of a document, perhaps an annual report, to consider the benchmarks of cost of service performance of local councils and their core business. The one such document that was produced before the amalgamation of the councils made it possible to compare their efficiencies and effectiveness. I suggested it was desirable to have such documents prepared on a regular basis so that all of us could see how local councils were performing according to set indicators.

I am happy the minister has taken up this suggestion which is currently being developed so that ratepayers as well as policy makers can compare the efficiency and effectiveness of our local councils, many of which are doing a marvellous job.

As a former teacher and person who has devoted much of her time to the education of young people, I commend the government on being a leader in educational reform. There is no better concept than the Schools of the Future project which basically allows schools to set their own individual goals in response to the needs of their community, deliver programs and consider indicators and measures that judge their performance and the achievement of those goals. There is no turning back on that valuable process as the educational community will not accept it. I am told by principals, teachers and parents that the annual review undertaken by each school is the most valuable process in which they can engage.

The first term of this government was designed to revamp, restructure and upgrade education, to make administrative changes, and this term — I must commend the Minister for Education — has been designed to beef up the curriculum to make sure our teachers and children are the best equipped to meet the challenges of their educational experience. There have of course been problems, as there have always been problems. We hear of class sizes being in excess 30. I believe many of those instances are based on genuine teachers' decisions. I have investigated them, not only in my electorate but in others, and some are legitimate. They have been consciously and deliberately decided upon by the schools and the teachers concerned. They are offended when the statistics are bandied about and they and their performance and decisions are slighted. Significant research indicates that class sizes above 15 are any less effective in delivering learning outcomes. I am sure most parents would be comforted by the fact that their children are in manageable class sizes. Most schools are staffed to be able to do that except when they make the conscious decision to be creative and to deliver a curriculum in a different way. We should not stop them from being creative. If they believe they can do it any better they should be free to make those decisions.

We have seen a review of the VCE; the introduction of the physical resources management system, or PRMS, which ranks management programs by priority; concerted efforts being made to expose children to information technology as a learning tool; the support of reading recovery; and the Keys to Life early learning literacy program. What more does anyone want?

This minister and the government have made a concerted effort to address the curriculum problems which have long existed and probably will continue to exist.

Given that Victoria has taken a leading role in educational reform in Australia, perhaps the minister might consider the introduction of an Australian certificate of education. It could be a year 12 certificate called the ACE certificate. The minister could lead with the introduction of Vic-ACE and other ministers might embrace the idea. We could take the best of what we have and without undermining it consider establishing uniform standards of assessment and look at curriculum frameworks. We could engage professionals, industry organisations, academics, students, families and communities. It is a great opportunity to build something in Australia that could be of world renown.

I commend the minister for deciding to raise the profile of science in schools. I have been long concerned about it. Science has not been given enough emphasis, and children are missing out. I have recently become aware that many science graduates are not able to find positions, and if they do they are very lowly paid. I commend the minister on being part of a government that has restructured teachers' salaries and given teachers a career path. The starting salary of \$31 000 is very good in comparison with salaries in many other jurisdictions and education departments. I ask the minister to look at ways of encouraging science graduates to consider being teachers. I spoke to one honours graduate in biochemistry who was mixing milkshakes in Myers — teaching is certainly a better paid career with a better career path than that. We would need to allow students to undertake part-time study for a diploma of education through the universities, which I am sure is possible.

I was glad that a review was undertaken of the TAFE sector. Barton TAFE in my electorate will benefit from the amalgamation of the Peninsula and Casey campuses. It will be extremely well equipped with two new specialised centres of industry training in the electrical and electronics, metals and engineering industry.

Moorabbin is one of the hubs of industry, with more than 5500 businesses in the area and they will be well supported by the changes. Perhaps our education system will have evolved so that in the schools of the 21st century we will be able to integrate the different streams of education. The minister is well on the way to achieving such integration with the various vocational courses that are delivered through our schools and in conjunction with local TAFE centres. Perhaps our schools could become hubs of a lifelong learning network involving industry, community agencies and institutions. That is probably the proper concept for schools in the 21st century.

The Bentleigh electorate is well served by those who are delivering health services, such as the Monash Medical Centre and its Moorabbin campus which is a specialist in cancer treatment, breast screening and so forth. The East Bentleigh Community Health Centre is also developing outstanding services for the local community.

Aged care is obviously a big challenge. I was involved in the inquiry by the Family and Community Development Committee into properly planning for ageing. As 1999, only a year away, will be the International Year of Older Persons, I commend that report to honourable members. Certainly none of the outstanding recommendations will turn the world upside down, but I hope some of the initiatives suggested will be taken to raise the profile of older people and the respect the community should have for them. It will provide a window of opportunity for government departments and local communities by which they can identify programs, activities and goals that can be implemented next year.

I will make two particular points about that inquiry. Firstly, what came out strongly is that in our communities there is a unique spirit of volunteerism, which I commend. Recommendations were made on this issue and I urge the government to do whatever it can to foster and support that spirit.

Secondly, there is a challenge to reach out to people who are isolated and alienated from the community — those who perhaps do not make use of existing services but stay alone locked away in their homes. Perhaps the churches could reaffirm their traditional roles and reach out to some of these isolated people rather than conveniently forgetting their existence, as we all probably do.

His Excellency the Governor talked about our striving to become a confident and cohesive community. In many of the inquiries I have been involved in through committee work one common theme emerges that people find very troubling and difficult — relationships. Whether they are relationships with spouses, parents, children or blended families, relationships cause by far the biggest problems that perplex and burden us in our daily lives.

As policy makers members of this Parliament should also consider not just the clear-cut programs that come from the major portfolios but the more complex problems I have just referred to. For example, I commend the government on dedicating itself to helping to reduce the impact of the problems of drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness and youth suicide.

Perhaps we should add the problems of relationships, including family breakdowns. Providing a high level of care, supporting volunteers and providing increased consideration for others are all notable roles I look forward to being involved in over the next few years of government to help resolve some of the problems families face.

The Governor talked also about strengthening the freedom and independence Australians enjoy and creating a vibrant sense of community to mould a cohesive and coherent society. He referred to the need to work at ways of ameliorating the uncertainties that some feel in this era of runaway change. I guess that is pertinent because as soon as people's economic wellbeing is covered we turn to their social, personal and individual needs in the broader community.

There is certainly extensive evidence of a need to reassess values and clashes of values that are brought about by intergenerational differences, cultural differences, geographical differences and even political and racial differences. I do not believe Pauline Hanson is evil, because her views are commonly held by many people. The beauty of this society is that it is tolerant and allows freedom of speech. For people to be tolerant does not mean they have to accept or understand the views of others; it means they tolerate the fact that other people hold different views from theirs. Perhaps Pauline Hanson has generated a debate that we as Australians needed to have. It is not unhealthy for Australians to unite, acknowledge and reaffirm the fact that they are tolerant, believe in a fair go and do not believe in discriminating against others. Again, let me stress that I do not believe Pauline Hanson is evil. I think history will show she has generated a useful and valid debate.

What I do regard as harmful are the views expressed by people such as Joseph O'Reilly, ALP candidate for Prahran, the civil libertarian who is not tolerant of Christian pageants. He believes banning Christian pageants will contribute to a more tolerant and understanding society.

A Government Member — And they want to make him a member of Parliament!

Mrs PEULICH — In fact the Leader of the Opposition says that this is the calibre of candidate we want in the Victorian Parliament. Tolerance, the fair-go principle and respect for honest hard work are the planks of Australian community values. These bridge the differences, and those differences should be celebrated. My family celebrates two Christmases and

two Easters. I have been to synagogues, Anglican churches, Uniting churches — I have been everywhere.

An honourable member interjected.

Mrs PEULICH — I do not remember them. I am a product of a mixed marriage and I am in a mixed marriage, and this is why my husband and I are so grateful that we were able to raise our children in a tolerant, peaceful and stable society.

This integrated community which is diverse and democratic and which respects and celebrates its differences while embracing the shared values that unite — this is Australia. To achieve an integrated community it is sometimes necessary to deal with ugly issues openly and honestly: not sweep them under the carpet but deal with them up front. President Clinton's 1998 initiative on race is called One America on the Move. I emphasise the words 'on the move'. It is a slogan that obviously he adopted from Victoria. What is sad is that the President of the United States recognises the merit of a slogan that has the capacity to unite a state or a country, but the opposition derides it. Its members take no pride whatsoever in the community and that sense of oneness. To achieve an integrated community is an important social goal. Mr Clinton said that money can't buy it, technology can't create it; it can come only from the human spirit.

We as members of Parliament should seriously consider, particularly through work on parliamentary committees, the difficult non-political issues of how to advance the human spirit. Respect, which is being peddled by the honourable member for Mitcham, starts with awareness and truth and then action. The honourable member did not tell the truth. He showed no respect. This government is aware, is committed to telling the truth and will deliver the action. The government respects the Victorian community, despite the loud squeals of the minority.

We should not lose sight of the big picture. The government has delivered on its undertakings and will continue to do so. I have great pleasure in being part of a government that has not squealed, has not shunned the difficult decisions, and will continue to deliver social dividends to Victoria.

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — It is with pleasure that I add my contribution to the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. However, I suspect there are more people in the bar than in this house on this hot and stuffy February evening. No doubt they are enjoying themselves a bit more than we are.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I hope they are in their offices.

Mr LANGDON — Of course. I congratulate the Governor on his first speech to Parliament on behalf of the government. I also extend a warm welcome to the newest member of this house, the honourable member for Mitcham, and congratulate him on his fabulous by-election win on 13 December, when a 15.8 per cent swing against the government was achieved. The result reflects the great job done by all in the opposition caucus and particularly the honourable member for Mitcham, whom I again welcome.

The issues highlighted in the Mitcham by-election reflect issues that are of concern in other electorates, and Ivanhoe is no exception. For example, many people have been concerned about the government's position on the Auditor-General. The former honourable member for Mitcham made the Mitcham by-election a referendum on the Auditor-General issue, and I am sure the people of Mitcham welcomed the opportunity to vote on it. The constituents of Ivanhoe have not had the opportunity first hand, but I am sure I would be returned with a resounding victory if there were such an election. The honourable member for Williamstown last year tabled a petition on the Auditor-General, and 1700 of the signatories were from Ivanhoe.

Ivanhoe residents are extremely concerned about what the government has done to the Auditor-General. As was said earlier today, the government has not been prepared to address those problems and has learnt nothing from the 13 December by-election loss.

The other issue raised in the Mitcham by-election campaign was Workcover, which is also hitting hard in my electorate, particularly since the passage of the government's atrocious legislation last year. Time and again people came to my office with their concerns about Workcover while the debate was taking place in this house. Unfortunately, I was unable to get the time to speak during the debate on that legislation, but if I had had the opportunity I would have raised quite a few concerns.

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr LANGDON — The honourable member for Doncaster says I had not issued anything on Workcover, but certainly the concern about the lack of action by the government was raised through the press. As I said, the government's actions in this area are hurting people quite severely.

I take the opportunity this evening not to dwell on the past, particularly on Workcover and the Auditor-General, because the government has been given the message — although it is not listening — but to talk about the things happening in my electorate and the things the government is about to do which I know my constituents do not want. The biggest issue is the Austin and Repatriation hospitals. Before the last election the former member for Ivanhoe guaranteed that the Austin hospital would not close. We know that was a ruse to avoid saying it would not be sold, whereas the government now has a clear intention to sell the hospital.

I shall place on the record a few items that the house should know about. The first is a copy of a certificate of land grant for the property commonly known as the Austin hospital site. This is not a modern copy of a land title but a handwritten version. The date in the certificate reads:

This seventh day of November in the forty-fifth year of Our Reign and in the year of Our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eighty-one.

The 45th reign was the reign of Queen Victoria. Many royalists on the other side would no doubt want to honour such a document. The grant document states:

... intent that the said Crown lands may be and remain the site of and for the hospital of the said corporation. We of our own special grace have granted and for us our heirs and successors do hereby grant unto the Austin Hospital for Incurables and to their successors ...

This land was given by Mrs Austin to the Crown for a hospital for incurables. It was given to the government's predecessors and has been kept by every government since 1881. However, in 1997 announcements were made in the press that the government had plans to sell the Austin hospital site. But the government has a bit of work to do because this certificate of grant quotes acts of Parliament nos 360 and 220, which were in existence in the 1880s. I have investigated those acts and found the successor acts are the Health Services Act 1988, the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 and the Land Act 1958.

If it wishes to sell the Austin hospital site the government will have to do a bit of homework; no doubt it will, and it will introduce the appropriate legislation to sell the hospital. It will be a prime opportunity for my electorate and for neighbouring electorates — I am pleased the honourable member for Bundoora, who is equally concerned about the Austin hospital, is in the chamber right now — which are very concerned about the hospital and wish to have their opposition to the sale recorded.

Let us get the hospital into perspective. It has been in existence since 1881 when the grant was made and fundraising by the local community has continued since that time. I cannot tell the house how much money has been raised in the past 100 years or so by the people of Heidelberg, Greensborough and the remainder of the electorate for a hospital that the government now wants to sell. Worst of all, the reports say the government wants to sell it to an American company. I know that in his speech on 3AW the Premier said he did not want to see Crown Casino sold to American interests. So sacred is the title of Crown Casino, which has been there no more than five years, yet the Premier is not worried about selling the Austin hospital, which has been there for more than 100 years, to the Americans. That is typical of the government's disrespect for its constituents.

The Austin hospital is so financially strapped — because the government has tightened the screws — that every time a patient goes into hospital for day surgery a letter from the Austin hospital board follows. It is basically a begging letter. It is very nice. It says, 'Happy New Year. We hope you have had a pleasant festive season'. It then tries to extract money from people. It says, 'We need money'. At the bottom the suggested donations begin at \$500 and go down to \$10.

The hospital is in such a financial crisis that it needs to send out letters to everyone who has attended on a regular basis — the lady who gave me this copy says she received two letters from the hospital. When patients get home from recovery they receive a letter from the board within a week or so seeking donations. I can understand the need for donations to a public hospital, but this is a public hospital the government wants to sell.

No doubt a fair proportion of people who are receiving the letters contribute to the hospital because they think it is fantastic. Its history spans more than 100 years following the donation of the land to the Crown by Mrs Austin. I agree that it is a fine and worthwhile charity, but it should remain a government hospital and not be sold off to the Americans. At the same time as the government is selling off the hospital, the board is begging for or borrowing money any way it can. It is a deplorable act.

One of the first things I did when I was elected the member for Ivanhoe was to write — —

Mr Pertion — You pinched yourself because you didn't believe it!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster, who is interjecting and out of his place, is being extremely provocative. I ask him to contain his enthusiasm.

Mr LANGDON — I think the former minister, the Honourable Vin Heffernan, pinched himself! I remember that on election night he said the only reason I won was that I ran a scare campaign about the government's sale of the Austin hospital. I have been proved correct. When the former member was asked whether the Austin hospital would be sold, his answer was very definite: he said it would not close. It was an example of the smokescreens the government likes to use.

After I had been given a fully furnished office, which took until 7 May because of the government's carry on, I wrote to the minister about the future of the Austin hospital and received one of those vague bureaucratic letters that do not contain an answer.

In the two years since my election I have turned up to the hospital for opening after opening of centres that have been relocated from the old Repatriation hospital. I no longer do it because every time I turn up I find the minister there talking about the great work the government has done — and there is always money to spend on afternoon or morning teas!

However, the government has missed the point in moving those centres from the old Repatriation hospital to the Austin, because they will be moved back to the repatriation hospital further down the track and sold off. The Bowen centre, which caters for patients in iron lungs, was one of those transferred from the Fairfield hospital. I asked one of the bureaucrats what would happen to the Bowen centre in five years when it was moved back to the Repatriation hospital. He did not want to say, especially when the minister had just opened a fine facility that had had millions of dollars spent on it.

I have a copy of an advertisement placed by the former member for Ivanhoe about the government spending \$3 million on upgrading the Austin hospital. Now the government plans to close it, sell it, take it down to the old Repatriation hospital site and sell the site to the Americans. This is about a litany of lies — and every other form of deceit you can think of! The people of Ivanhoe passed judgment on the government in 1996, and they will do so again in 2000. I am sure the honourable member for Bundoorra and I will enjoy our increased majorities.

I turn now to education. All the speeches of members opposite have praised the government's commitment to education. I hear laughter in the background, and I can understand why. The government is always saying it wants to improve education, but as the member for Ivanhoe I have come across a litany of the government's dishonest statements.

I have raised the situation of Bellfield Primary School on several occasions. The former member gave the school a commitment that it would receive a second grant to continue its rebuilding process, but the money seems to have been frozen since the electors chose me in 1996 — and the government says it is not one for punishment.

I would like to read some excerpts from the letter I have written to the minister.

Mr Perton — Is that your second letter?

Mr LANGDON — The honourable member again interjects out of his place. I will be more than happy to compare the number of letters to ministers sent from my office with the number of letters sent to ministers from the office of the honourable member any time he wants. I would win hands down, and he knows it.

My letter to the minister outlines the history of events, including his visit to the school and his praise of it. My letter also notes a reply I received from the Minister for Planning and Local Government during the adjournment debate, saying I should put my proposals in a more positive light to improve my chances of getting a positive response. Representatives from the school met the former member, who was then a minister and who gave them certain guarantees. Since then the minister has visited the school together with the two government upper house members. What has happened to date? Absolutely nothing. The letter states:

The issue I raise is about the commitments made on behalf of your government. I acknowledge that you were not the Minister for Education at the time yet you now carry the commitment. The commitment was not made by a candidate, not by a backbencher, but by a minister of the Crown and a member of the cabinet.

I emphasise that the commitment to the school was given prior to the 1996 election by a government minister, and it has been reneged on.

The Banyule City Council wants to spend \$300 000 to build a kindergarten on the Bellfield Primary School site. I commend the plan to the government and hope it keeps its commitment. I would be horrified if the government again reneged or failed to see the benefits

of the proposal, but we will wait and see. I believe things are still at the negotiation stage.

Last night I attended a meeting on traffic management in my electorate concerning Rosanna Road, Lower Plenty Road and Greensborough Road. I was joined by the honourable member for Bundoora. The meeting, which was attended by more than 450 people, was conducted by Vicroads and chaired by an independent person — although I do not know how independent she was because she seemed to cut short anybody who wanted to make negative comments about Vicroads or the government.

In a nutshell, the government has announced that it wishes to carry out some work on Lower Plenty Road. Some \$5.3 million has been allocated for the purpose, but it is a bandaid solution. A north-south corridor strategy is desperately needed and should be worked out as soon as possible. The government might ask what the previous Labor government did. Labor built the Banksia-Bell Street link and widened Lower Plenty Road. That is far more than the government has done in nearly six years in office. Although it has taken six years, the work is about to be undertaken; but in that time lots of things have changed and people want more appropriate action and more thorough planning.

Although most members probably do not know the area, I point out that the two major roads, Lower Plenty Road and Greensborough Road, have two lanes going in each direction, which converge into one lane in each direction at the Lower Heidelberg Road cutting — and people wonder why there is a backlog of traffic. Drivers cannot get onto the Eastern Freeway via Burke Road North and the Lower Heidelberg Road cutting because of the backlog caused by the convergence into single lanes. However, the government is not doing anything to address that problem.

Vicroads has been obstructionist in not allowing greater consultation and in not considering any work on Rosanna Road beyond Burgundy Street. At last night's meeting Vicroads officers talked about all the work that was being done to Rosanna Road to Burgundy Street, but they forgot the traffic flows beyond that point. The basic problem is access to the Eastern Freeway, which people now use to get to Springvale Road to visit Mitcham. Because there is no direct road link between the Outer Ring Road and the Eastern Freeway, people are using our local streets to drive through the area. However, the streets are inadequate and cannot cope with the traffic.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! Under sessional orders the time for the adjournment of the house has now arrived.

Northern Pacific seastar

Ms GARBUTT (Bundoora) — The matter I raise for the attention of the Minister for Conservation and Land Management concerns —

Mr Perton interjected.

Mr Bracks — Get back in your box!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I advise the honourable member for Williamstown that the Chair can take care of the honourable member for Doncaster. I do not need his assistance.

Ms GARBUTT — The matter concerns the finding in January of the exotic marine pest, the Northern Pacific seastar, in mussel ropes off Dromana in Port Phillip Bay. A sample was sent to the Museum of Victoria, which identified it. Some time later 10 divers who were put into the water for the purpose found some more. Since then another dive has found more seastars, and I believe five more were found yesterday around the mussel farm.

I am concerned about the response by the fisheries division. An article in today's *Herald Sun* quotes the director of Fisheries Victoria, Richard McLoughlin, as saying:

'It's not a plague ... it is a worrying sign, but it's not given us enough to swing anything into gear in a big way ...

I ask the minister to take immediate action to eradicate the pest, which can spawn 20 million eggs. The seastars that have been found are young juveniles. Although the spawning season in Tasmania is not until winter, the change in the temperature of the water coming into the bay means there is no guarantee that they will not spawn immediately.

The reaction of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment to the discovery of another exotic marine pest — Japanese kelp — was hopeless. It was allowed to get out of control because of the confusion between two ministers. The Minister for Agriculture did not know whether he wanted to eat it or eradicate it, and so it was allowed to spread too far. The Minister for Conservation and Land Management should accept the recommendation of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee that there be an immediate response to eradicate the seastar.

This is an environmental issue; it is not within the province of the fisheries department. The minister should act in line with recommendation 13 of the committee, which highlights the need for a rapid response plan and says that the department with responsibility for the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act should be the coordinating body for the identification and eradication of new species.

The pest has the capacity to take over the bay and to turn the —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

CSR Timber Products

Mr TRAYNOR (Ballarat East) — I ask the Attorney-General to raise with the Minister for Conservation and Land Management this week's announcement that CSR Timber Products at Bacchus Marsh will close in April. Given that CSR's wood allocation from the Central Highlands region will still be available, I ask the minister to give early consideration to allocating some of that timber to those with existing licences.

The Daylesford area, which is in my electorate, is a strong timber region, and the Wombat Forest and Midland regions have supplied timber to Bacchus Marsh for a number of years. The CSR factory has been open for 36 years.

I have been approached by logging contractors, sawmillers and employees who have expressed concern about the possibility of job losses at the Daylesford timber mill. I ask the minister to examine the quotas and give some assistance to the logging industry in Ballarat East, and particularly in Daylesford.

Housing: Nelson Heights, Williamstown

Mr BRACKS (Williamstown) — I raise with the Minister for Housing the future of the Nelson Heights housing complex in Williamstown. The minister, as part of the government's 1996 election platform, proposed that one high-rise public housing facility is to be pulled down in the Melbourne metropolitan area. The likelihood is that Nelson Heights in Williamstown will be that complex.

I seek from the minister an assurance that the complex is not Nelson Heights. If it is contemplated that Nelson Heights will be pulled down, I ask that a proper study be done of alternative equivalent accommodation in which to locate those residents — not just in the municipality, but in the locality.

As I said, the threat goes back to the government's 1996 election policy. Instead of a public housing policy, the government had a developers policy. It said, 'We will not decide how we will renew, replenish or maintain the public housing and high-rise stock in this state. We will simply look at property developers' dreams and sell the housing off'. That was a simple policy, but not one designed to accommodate residents. It was designed to accommodate developers.

The result is uncertainty across the state, including my electorate. Many people have been residents of Nelson Heights for 40 years. They need the assurance of alternative accommodation with a preference for staying where they are. I wrote to every resident in Nelson Heights — and I can make the document available to the minister if she so wishes. The clear indication from the residents is that the facility should not be demolished. More than 90 per cent of residents were of that view. Overwhelmingly, almost 100 per cent said it should not be sold. More than 50 per cent of the residents of Nelson Heights have lived there for 10 years. All except two want to stay.

The minister needs to ascertain the needs of the residents to ensure they can be accommodated. She must not simply look at it from the top down and ask, 'What can we flog off? What is the best real estate to sell?'. Residents' needs should be the crucial issue. The minister should examine housing needs across the state and how the high-rise developments fit into those arrangements.

Gunnamatta Surf Lifesaving Club

Mr DIXON (Dromana) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Sport a matter concerning Gunnamatta Beach, which is probably one of the most popular but treacherous surf beaches on the coastline. Unfortunately, four young children drowned at that beach during the recent school holidays. These were not the first drownings at the beach; there have been a number over the past 20 years.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the lifesavers and the way they conducted themselves in the initial search; they saved many lives within the one incident. Things could have been worse. The way the lifesavers conducted the search over the ensuing four days and worked with the families and other services was tremendous; their dedication is exemplary.

Gunnamatta is a tremendous club; it has been busy fundraising and helping itself for years. The club has well-equipped clubrooms, radio equipment, rescue boats and motors and other equipment. It is part of the

community; it gives to the community and integrates well. The surf lifesavers need better access to their clubrooms, which are located at the bottom of a steep sand dune at the other side of the beach some distance from the car park. The lifesavers have significant difficulty getting their personnel and equipment to and from the beach. If there is an emergency it is difficult for the ambulances to get access to the clubrooms. In many cases ambulances have been bogged, which can be horrific for an injured person in the ambulance.

Because of the steep sand dunes the main storage is underneath the clubrooms. However, nothing can be stored on the ground because the water run-off from the sand dunes often causes flooding. The club was very pleased to hear the Premier's announcement of a \$2 million grant, and it appreciates the government's concern for the work lifesaving clubs do. I ask the minister to favourably consider Gunnamatta's application for funding under the Lifesaving into the 21st Century program. The club deserves its share, and it will be used well for the good of club members and people visiting that busy beach.

Health: late-term abortions

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health in another place. In June 1997 I wrote to the minister with regard to a Dr David Grundmann reportedly moving from Queensland to Victoria to conduct late-term abortions, also known as partial-birth abortions. It appears that Dr Grundmann was encouraged to move to Victoria because of a reluctance by Victorian medicos to conduct partial-birth abortions in the mid-term trimester.

For those members who are unfamiliar with the procedure, I point out that these terminations are performed late in pregnancy. The baby is turned in the womb so that it will be delivered feet first, and all that remains in the mother is the head. The aborting physician inserts scissors into the back of the baby's head, opens the blade, and the brains of the baby are vacuumed out. The skull collapses and the newly made corpse is then removed. If the child were alive during this procedure it could possibly be infanticide. The US Congress banned partial-birth abortions and the ban remained current until vetoed by President Clinton.

According to a letter I received in September 1997, the issue was referred to the Medical Practitioners Board. Five months have now elapsed, and I ask the minister what has been done to prevent partial-birth abortions taking place. This matter is of some urgency. I am advised that Dr Grundmann is now practising at

411 Dorset Road, Croydon, listed in the *Yellow Pages* as the Abortion Advice and Counselling Centre of Melbourne.

Section 10 of the Crimes Act is the relevant law in Victoria, and I am told the ruling of Justice Menhennitt in the 1969 case of *R v. Davidson* is possibly not applicable. I imagine many of these abortions are in breach of the law. Obviously, this is a politically incorrect issue to raise, but I have received a letter from a vascular surgeon — I am sure every member of this house has received the same letter — highlighting some very contentious issues that can affect women who undergo this type of termination. Briefly, the letter states that maternal mortality and morbidity is affected. It continues:

Secondly, instrumentation within a very vascular ... uterus without direct visualisation to grasp the child's leg risks uterine perforation with the instrument.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Ballarat: Begonia Festival

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I direct to the attention of the Premier in his capacity as Minister for the Arts the government's promotion and support for tourism and cultural events in country Victoria. The government places great stock in its strategy of bringing major events to Melbourne. However, I have concerns at the way existing events in country Victoria are promoted and supported. I particularly mention the Ballarat Begonia Festival. I have attended this festival on several occasions and believe it is a great event for the city. Tourists come from across Victoria and from interstate and overseas to share in the cultural experiences offered by that festival — and, of course, to look at the magnificent flowers on display.

The Begonia Festival brings approximately 100 000 visitors to Ballarat and injects about \$5 million into the city's economy. The Premier is well aware of the background to the funding of the festival, which was cut significantly. Following sustained pressure from the Ballarat community the Premier, also the Minister for the Arts, reinstated some funding.

I raise specifically a supplement I saw this week that appears in *Leader* newspapers throughout Victoria. The *Brimbank Messenger* contains 14 pages of advertisements for events throughout Victoria in March that are partly sponsored by the government. The supplement has a foreword by the Premier and references to the Mansfield harvest festival, the

Hanging Rock racing and jazz festival, the Kyneton horticultural flower show, the super bikes world championship at Phillip Island and many other events, but there is no reference to the Begonia Festival at Ballarat. I ask the Premier to investigate this issue and to ensure that the Begonia Festival is included in future publications. It is a great event and I am glad it is supported by local members. Visitors come to it from interstate and overseas, and I hope the government contributes to the festival in future years.

Rail: Box Forest Road crossing, Glenroy

Mr FINN (Tullamarine) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Transport an issue I have raised both in and out of this place on a number of occasions — that is, the future of the Upfield railway line, and in particular the boom gates at the Box Forest Road level crossing in Glenroy.

The minister will be aware of the recent tragic accident at the level crossing when a council worker lost his life. I am sure members would join me in extending sympathy to his family. Sadly, since that time one individual has sought great publicity and the opportunity for personal promotion in what can only be described as a disgraceful manner. That individual has scant regard for the truth.

The Cain-Kirner governments spent most of the 1980s trying to close the railway line. I am sure honourable members opposite remember that only too well because some of them were involved. A question mark hung over the future of the railway line until this government announced that the Upfield railway line was being upgraded to a first-class service.

The question of rail crossing safety on the line is nothing new. Prior to the 1979 election when Peter Gavin was running for the Legislative Assembly seat of Coburg, I recall the Labor Party promising to upgrade the safety of the level crossing. I ask the minister to act as soon as possible to clarify in particular the safety of the level crossing and in doing so put down a man who is self-seeking and his campaign of self-promotion. The great tragedy is that the individual to whom I refer is the Honourable Kelvin Thomson, the federal member for Wills. He has carried on in a most disgraceful and unjustified manner. I ask the minister to take the appropriate action to ensure this disreputable individual cannot continue in the way he has over recent weeks.

Werribee: toxic waste dump

Ms GILLETT (Werribee) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning and Local

Government, and in his absence refer it to the Attorney-General. The minister will be aware that the most pressing issue concerning the constituents of Werribee is the proposal by CSR and Brambles to create a toxic waste dump in the area. My constituents became aware of the proposal the week before the 1996 election. Since then the community has come together to oppose the proposal. The process by which it has done that would qualify as both a triathlon and a marathon effort.

As a community we have gone through the process of formulating a proposal for an environment effects statement, which has been issued, and numerous reports have been received by community members, who formed an organisation called the Werribee Residents against the Toxic Dump. They have digested the proposal and put forward submissions and responses.

As a community we have fought for public hearings, which were conducted during the last few months of 1997. As the local member for only the past couple of years I was pleased to participate with the community in forming an organisation that has no structure or budget. Many families and working people have contributed time, effort, intellect and energy to fight the proposal.

When the minister visited the area recently he made it clear that he would make available the findings of the public panel, which were supposed to be released on 23 February. Where is the result of those public hearings? Why have they not been released to the Werribee residents who have fought long and hard in opposing this dreadful blight on their suburban living space in one of the most important growth corridors in Victoria?

Police: reputation

Mr E. R. SMITH (Glen Waverley) — I raise with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services a number of erroneous, misleading and patronising statements made by the honourable member for Yan Yean on Tuesday that sullied the excellent reputation of the Victoria Police. I call on the minister to uphold the fine reputation of Australia's most trustworthy police force.

Some of the allegations in the speech of the honourable member for Yan Yean related to police numbers. The honourable member threw great doubt on whether the government had upheld its 1992 election promise to increase the operational strength of the Victoria Police Force. He poured scorn on the crime rate and the

clear-up rate, but all honourable members will know that Victoria is at least 19 per cent safer than any other state in Australia.

He also took great delight in referring to cleaners at the Greensborough police station, deliberately misrepresenting the fact that the police themselves had to clean the police station. Anybody who bothered to check would know that the contract cleaners operate six days a week. Any police cleaning to be done would be only when the local inspector visited the station and told officers that they must keep the place tidy. But the honourable member for Yan Yean alleged that the police were doing the physical cleaning. The honourable member also misrepresented aspects of the vehicle maintenance of the police force. In effect, he said the Victoria Police was underresourced to the degree that it was running on a shoestring.

Everybody knows that economic steps have been taken since 1992, but many members of the force are most indignant about the comments of the honourable member and have contacted government offices and members. The honourable member for Yan Yean also referred to restrictions on the use of mobile telephones and interstate telephone and computer facilities. I call on the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to refute the allegations made by the honourable member for Yan Yean and at the same time uphold the reputation of the Victoria Police.

Tabcorp: Albion agency

Mr BAKER (Sunshine) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Sport the recent untimely closure of the Albion TAB in my electorate and the significant lack of any consultation with the local people who have lost that amenity. I ask the minister to use whatever offices he has — he does not have many these days because of the consequences of privatisation — to take up with the chief executive officer of Tabcorp the subject of appropriate consultation with local communities when an amenity of the kind at Albion is about to be closed in the way it has.

I notice the Premier and some of his acolytes have been braying about the social dividend, which is another knee-jerk advertising expression. Here is a classic example of the consequences of privatisation. The fact that there has been a fire sale is easily evidenced by the value that the share market now places on what was a publicly owned facility. Tabcorp's shares are now worth something like two and a half to three times what the hoons opposite sold it for. Was it a snap? Yes! What about the loss of amenity to people in small communities such as Albion? Several hundred people

have petitioned my office about it. They have been told they can go to a nearby hotel, but that happens to be distant from any available public transport. Many, believe it or not, are elderly people, particularly elderly ladies, who like a bit of a flutter but who are not happy about going to hotels to place their bets.

Mr Kennett interjected.

Mr BAKER — You may laugh, but it is the ugly social-dividend face of the policy of privatisation pursued by your government!

Roads: Shelley–Walwa

Mr A. F. PLOWMAN (Benambra) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Transport, as the representative in this house of the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place, my concern about the road between Shelley and Walwa. It was a forest road but was converted to a local road, and it is now the responsibility of local government. The road has enormous tourist potential. However, in the next eight years it will potentially carry about 2000 tonnes of softwood timber, the equivalent of more than 5000 B-double truckloads. The road is short. It has about 8 kilometres of good seal, then there is 7.5 kilometres of unsealed road, which is untenable for B-doubles or any timber trucks. The final 14 to 15 kilometres needs to be upgraded for the transport of timber.

I ask the Minister for Roads and Ports to review an agreement being struck between VPC, local government and his own department to see whether the road can be upgraded to take the timber. If it is not upgraded the timber will have to be transported an extra 50 to 100 kilometres over country roads — the equivalent of 250 000 to 500 000 kilometres of travel by B-doubles.

Responses

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Conservation and Land Management) — The honourable member for Ballarat East raised with me a matter that is a spin-off from the closure of the CSR mill at Bacchus Marsh. It concerns workers in and around his area, including Daylesford, who will be affected by the closure. CSR currently takes approximately 50 000 tonnes of timber under licence from the Midland forest management area, and that harvesting is supported by approximately 14 contractors — loggers and people who transport the timber.

Not only is the government conscious that it must find other outlets for the timber, the department is keen to

ensure there is continuity of employment for the workers at the end of the process. The department has already started negotiations with other timber operators in the area in an effort to have them take approximately 25 per cent of the timber coming out of that forest management area.

The department is hopeful that Midway, one of the big wood-chipping companies, will be able to take a substantial amount of the timber, but at the moment that is limited because of restrictions on the export licences that still prevail in areas where there have not been regional forest agreements. It will be some time before there is such an agreement in that area.

My officers have contacted the commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy and are seeking some adjustment to the export licence held by Midway so that the timber can continue to flow and the providers of the supporting roles in harvesting can maintain their activities with a minimum of interference.

I understand where the honourable member for Ballarat East is coming from. He is obviously concerned about the closure of the mill in Bacchus Marsh, and has similar concerns about the people and the operators at Daylesford. I can assure him that those involved with the forest program of the Department of Natural Resources and Environment are working as effectively and as quickly as possible in conjunction with the commonwealth Department of Primary Industries and Energy to find someone to take up the timber and maintain jobs in that part of the timber industry.

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — Earlier today I met with the workers from the Bacchus Marsh mill. We had a very amicable meeting. I have undertaken to make representations on their behalf, which I will do tomorrow. I do not want to raise false hopes, but the government is working closely with the workers to see whether it can do something constructive to extend the life of their employment.

The Leader of the Opposition raised with me an issue concerning the *Brimbank Messenger*, which looks like a supplement distributed in and around Melbourne. I have not seen the publication previously. It is an interesting document but it is certainly not easy to read. On the front page is the heading 'Baldness treatment ahead of its time', and inside is an advertisement for Gutbusters and a range of other highly exciting articles.

The Leader of the Opposition asked why the Ballarat Begonia Festival, which is held early in March, is not included in the publication. I have looked at the

schedule at the back and can only assume that the fax has been reduced proportionally in size, because it is almost unreadable. The vast majority of activities advertised are in and around Melbourne, although one or two are just beyond it. I imagine that would be the answer given by those who have collated the information. That nevertheless does not distract —

Mr Baker interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Sunshine should remain silent.

Mr KENNETT — There is absolutely no doubt why the honourable member for Sunshine has lost support for preselection. It is obvious when the time to move on has arrived, and the honourable member is a typical case. Mr Deputy Speaker, the Begonia Festival is a good festival. As the Leader of the Opposition said, it has been through some difficult times in recent years. It now has a new management team led by council officers and several councillors. The government has decided to fund it this year to encourage those who are working to re-establish it. I have told the organisers that the government will be monitoring its performance very carefully. If it proves to be successful, I would like to fund it on a three-year basis so the council can plan with some certainty and not have to come back to government every year.

The Leader of the Opposition indicated that the government has paid \$25 000 for this publication.

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr KENNETT — Whatever it is, I am glad he has brought it to my attention, because in terms of layout and readability it has failed. It is very, very hard to read and to derive any real message from. I will take it back to the department.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr KENNETT — I believe it was funded and supported by the tourism department as opposed to the arts department. Nevertheless, if the Leader of the Opposition is right and the government has been involved with it, particularly in terms of cost, I would want to see a better result for expenditure in future.

Finally, being an avid reader of all publications in Victoria, no doubt the Leader of the Opposition will have noticed that on page 49 of this month's *Royal Auto*, which has a readership of well over 1 million, there is a —

Mr Brumby interjected.

Mr KENNETT — You remember seeing that? And what was the headline? The Leader of the Opposition said the headline was 'A big boost for the Begonia Festival'. That is fairly close. It is 'Flowers will come with a \$4 million bang'. You are not far off — you could have been a lot further away! I will take up the issue and get back to the Leader of the Opposition once our extensive investigations are completed.

Mr COOPER (Minister for Transport) — The honourable member for Benambra raised for the attention of my colleague the Minister for Roads and Ports in another place an agreement by the VPC to contribute funds for the upgrade of a road between Shelley and Walwa. As I understand it that agreement was struck between the VPC and local and state government. The honourable member for Benambra says that VPC now wants to back away from the agreement, and he is seeking the intervention of the minister in this matter. I am happy to draw this matter to the attention of my colleague and ask him to address the issues and concerns raised by the honourable member.

The honourable member for Tullamarine brought to the attention of the house his concerns about the future of the Upfield railway line and some of the recent publicity given to the safety of level crossings along that line. The honourable member for Tullamarine has been required to take a significant interest in the future of the Upfield line because the local Labor MPs in whose electorates the line is located have never shown any interest in its future, let alone its enhancement.

The Labor Party has a policy of closing the Upfield line. It is absolute hypocrisy for any Labor member to try to portray himself or herself as being concerned about or interested in the line. While the Labor Party was in government and after, from 1988 to 1996, Mr Kelvin Thomson, who is now a member of the federal Parliament, was a Labor member of this place. The Upfield line ran through his electorate. Mr Thomson was one of the members who supported the closure of the line, and he along with all other members of the Labor government starved the line of funds for maintenance and enhancement.

When the coalition government came to power in 1992 the Upfield line was in a disgraceful condition with a substandard service. To the credit of this government, it recognised the need for a heavy rail link to Upfield. It pledged its support for the Upfield railway line to the tune of \$24.9 million, which is currently being expended.

I know the honourable member for Tullamarine will be interested to know that the upgrade will bring the line to the same level of service as all the other train lines in the metropolitan area. There will be a general track upgrade including continuous welded rail, some re-railing, the removal of redundant assets, drainage improvements, track duplication of 1.7 kilometres between Fawkner and Gowrie, a new Melbourne-bound platform at Fawkner station, the replacement of the mainly manual life-expired signalling system — which I shall get back to in a moment — the rehabilitation of overhead wiring and high-voltage transmission lines, electrical traction substation upgrade works, the removal of three redundant level crossings at Barkly Street, Tinning Street and Shorts Road and the installation of boom barriers at level crossings right down the line.

Honourable members may be aware that there are 14 crossings on the Upfield line; 11 of them are currently protected by manually operated crossing gates and three by flashing lights only. One of those is the Box Forest Road crossing, which recently was the scene of a tragic accident. An employee of the Moreland City Council was sent to that crossing to clean up following a non-fatal accident the previous day. I understand the employee was sent in a sweeper, which is a noisy vehicle. He was working close to the railway line when he failed to see the flashing lights or hear the warning bells. His vehicle was hit by a train and he was killed. Although this is a matter for a future inquest I am concerned about the fact that the Moreland City Council sent one of its employees out without someone to support him by way of warning.

The honourable member for Tullamarine also referred to the political point scoring that has followed the death of this unfortunate individual, particularly by Mr Thomson. In an article in the *Hume Moreland Community News* on 17 February there is a response by Mr Thomson to a resident's question to him as to why the Labor Party had not installed gates while it was in office. The paper quotes Mr Thomson as saying:

... he had only become aware of the problem 2¼ years ago.

I work in response to requests from residents for action ... the first time this matter was brought to my attention was in mid-1995.

Mr Thomson has either a short memory about this issue or he was deliberately lying. I have documents that show he was well aware of the issue prior to mid-1995 when he said it was the first time it had been drawn to his attention. The minutes of 3 March 1993 of the Northern Municipalities Transport Group record

Mr Thomson as an observer. The minutes state under the heading 'Observers':

Mr K. Thomson, MLA for Pascoe Vale.

The meeting discussed a number of matters including the Upfield railway line. The minutes state:

Mr Kelvin Thomson advised that his electorate includes the Upfield railway line.

It is extraordinary that he said he had no knowledge at all of the Box Forest Road crossing. In 1993 he advised that the Upfield railway line ran through his electorate. The minutes go on to say:

Mr Thomson invited the NMTG to put matters to him in relation to the Upfield railway line or related transport concerns so that he may take them up in Parliament.

I suggest a reading of *Hansard* will show that Mr Thomson probably did not do the job he said he would. Going back even further, on 7 May 1991, in a speech on the Supply (1991-92, No. 1) Bill, *Hansard* reports Mr Thomson as having said:

Those measures included the inquiry that produced the Lonie report, which included a recommendation to close the Upfield railway line — and it was that and other proposals that propelled me into local government.

Mr Thomson has been shown to have a detailed and intimate knowledge of the Upfield railway line. For him to now say he knew nothing to people who have expressed concerns about the failure of the Labor Party to do anything about the Box Forest Road crossing or to do anything about enhancing, protecting and continuing the service on the Upfield line, demonstrates that he has either deliberately set out to mislead the inquiry he received from one of his constituents or suffered a very bad memory loss. I do not believe it is memory loss. I believe Mr Thomson deliberately set out to lie to his constituents and he has been caught out in that lie.

Ms Gillett interjected.

Mr COOPER — The honourable member for Werribee asks what we are going to do. She must have been sitting there with her ears closed; certainly her brain was out of gear! I have just told the house about the \$25 million this government is currently spending on the Upfield railway line. That is \$25 million it would not have had to spend if the Labor Party had had the same commitment as this government to the railway line. There is probably not a vote in it for the government because the Upfield railway line runs through dead-red seats held by the Labor Party. Labor members are content, safe and happy in those seats

believing they do not have to do anything for the constituents who are served by the Upfield railway line.

Members of the Labor Party went into government in 1982 with a clear policy to deprive the people of the Upfield railway line. Now they have their hands on their hearts saying this government should be doing more. You cannot do more than spend \$25 million on it. You cannot do more than provide the same level of service on the Upfield railway line as is provided to all other railway lines in metropolitan Melbourne. You cannot do any more than say to the people of Upfield that this government cares about them when the Labor Party clearly does not.

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Conservation and Land Management) — The honourable member for Bundoora raised the matter of the Northern Pacific seastar and the fact that seven specimens have been found to date. If the numbers of this introduced marine pest grow to large proportions, they will constitute a very serious infestation of Port Phillip Bay.

On 19 January the Department of Natural Resources and Environment was alerted to the fact that two juvenile specimens had been found off the coast of Dromana, and it immediately set about looking for further specimens. A further three juvenile specimens were found within four days. At this stage no further infestations have been found. Two more specimens have been reported but have not yet been properly identified. The department acted immediately to bring forward its annual review of the bay, which normally takes place in April. An intensive search of the sea floor has now been conducted in an effort to find additional marine pests. That monitoring will continue, especially for the introduced Northern Pacific seastar.

Some three years ago the department introduced an education program to alert both recreational and commercial fishermen to the problems of the seastar. It was as a result of that education program that some time ago three specimens were discovered on mussel ropes, and the last two were identified. The department is asking the community, especially the communities that use the bay, to be vigilant in looking for marine species that pose a significant threat to Victoria's marine ecosystems and the sustainable use of the bay for activities such as commercial and recreational fishing, aquaculture, coastal tourism and other recreational pursuits.

It is vital that the general public continue to bring to the attention of our marine officers any suspected introduced species. They will then be identified and we

can keep a serious watch for any incursion into the state of what would be a serious environmental risk.

As honourable members would know, it is suspected, and in fact likely, that these species arrive here in ballast water, and that is why the government gave a reference to the all-party Environment and Natural Resources Committee to inquire into ballast water. The committee reported in October last year, and the government will provide its response to the report in the next few weeks. The reference was certainly in response to the government recognising the potentially serious impact of introduced exotic species into the bay.

As I said, to date there have been five confirmed cases of the seastar and two more suspected cases, but ongoing monitoring is occurring. Departmental officers are searching on a regular basis, and an effective campaign has educated people to report any suspect species, which can then be trapped and removed. It is a serious matter, and I assure all honourable members that the department is doing all that could be asked of it to watch, monitor and control this potential problem.

Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning and Local Government) — I thank the honourable member for Werribee for raising the matter regarding the CSR proposal in Werribee. Firstly, I do not know whether the panel report has been received. Secondly, upon receipt, I will, as part of the environment effects statement process, make an assessment in relation to the report. So it will be necessary for me to have a copy of the report, to arrange for the publication of copies so that they will be available to the parties that made representations — a wide number in this case — and to then assess the report, which will involve either the acceptance or rejection or partial acceptance or rejection of its recommendations.

That will then be regarded as binding on government departments and agencies. Being part of a whole-of-government approach, it will not be a personal response based on my view of things; it will be the minister's response on behalf of the government. It would be usual for the report and the minister's assessment to be printed and made available. I will find out whether the report has been received from the panel. If it has the honourable member can be assured that it is receiving attention and being assessed.

Mr W. D. McGRATH (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — The honourable member for Glen Waverley raised with me allegations made this week by the honourable member for Yan Yean in his contribution to the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech. Undoubtedly, after hearing those remarks, the

honourable member for Glen Waverley was very concerned, as I was, that a shadow minister should cast such a slur on the command of the Victoria Police. It is fair to say that a person in a responsible position should be ashamed of making those remarks because they were very mean-spirited and, what's worse, were without any foundation.

I will spell it out. The Victoria Police Force is provided with a budget, just as any other government department or agency is. That budget is then under the control of the Chief Commissioner of Police, Mr Neil Comrie, and the command group. It is up to that group to decide how the financial resources are allocated over the financial year. As with all other agencies, it is required to live within the bounds of that budget allocation. There is only so much money to go around and the bids from various ministers, including me, are always optimistic with regard to what we would like to achieve. There is only so much collected taxation that can be passed from government to agencies to deliver services on behalf of government.

I shall take up some of the points about personnel numbers. The honourable member correctly quoted the figure that when the coalition came to government in 1992 it made a commitment to provide an additional 1000 police, and between 1992 and June 1996 that was actually achieved — the exact figure was 993.

When that increase was achieved, the chief commissioner then asked for some flexibility in how he handled the manpower granted to him, which is only fair and right. It should be understood that during that period a number of the functions of the Victoria Police were outsourced. For instance, the operations of D24 — it was replaced by the Intergraph system — were always undertaken by sworn police officers. That is no longer the case. In the main, public service people, as well as some police officers, now operate the computerised dispatch system that sends vehicles to given destinations. The transport of prisoners from police cells to courts and from courts to gaols has also been outsourced. That task is now performed by a contractor and no longer has to be undertaken by sworn police officers.

The helicopter service has been outsourced as well, except for the pilots on the helicopters, who are still police personnel. All of that has enabled the Chief Commissioner of Police to put the largest number of police officers of all time into operational positions. Eighty-six per cent of all police are now in operational positions throughout Victoria.

Someone may point out that there has been a slight increase in the state's crime rate. Perhaps that is because there are now more police in operational positions who are apprehending more criminals committing crimes that previously may have been undetected. Victoria can still boast that its police force is achieving a crime rate that is 19 per cent lower than anywhere else in Australia. That reflects proudly on the police, the chief commissioner, Mr Comrie, and his group. Also, the government, the honourable member for Glen Waverley — the police and emergency services bills committee chairman — and I also feel proud of our contribution to the work of the Victoria Police Force.

The honourable member for Yan Yean talked about the inability to clean the police station at Greensborough. That is nonsense. All that work is contracted out and all police stations are kept clean and tidy. I do not know where he dreams up some of these things from. He also raised concerns about police vehicle maintenance. All vehicles are covered under their warranty arrangements. There is no indication that police vehicles are being underserviced. The maintenance schedules are set down by the manufacturers, and they are followed.

I thank the honourable member for Glen Waverley for raising the matter with me tonight. I hope that in all fairness, as the shadow Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the honourable member for Yan Yean will be responsible about the remarks he makes and will ensure that his facts are right and based on commonsense information rather than dreaming up some story that is totally inaccurate and gives an impression that he is a mean-spirited man who seems to be carrying out a vendetta against the police command and its achievements in maintaining law and order.

Mrs WADE (Attorney-General) — The honourable member for Williamstown raised for the attention of the Minister for Housing a high-rise housing ministry complex in his electorate known as Nelson Heights and sought an assurance that the residents of the complex would not be relocated unless equivalent accommodation was found for them in the same locality.

I believe the honourable member for Williamstown was unduly concerned. I have had numerous conversations with the Minister for Housing about housing policy, and I have heard her speak on many occasions. I know she acts in the best interests of those members of the community who need access to public housing. She is concerned to ensure that public housing, which was run down by the former Labor government, is upgraded and that people with the

appropriate priority get access to it. Nevertheless, I will pass on the honourable member's comments to the minister. I am sure she will be able to reassure the residents of Nelson Heights that any action that may affect them or other residents of housing ministry complexes will be taken in their best interests.

I had some difficulty hearing the honourable member for Mildura, who raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health. I understand he referred to a medical practitioner who has recently moved to Victoria and who is said to specialise in terminations during the later stages of pregnancy. The honourable member spoke of the harmful effects on the women who undergo the procedure. He said he believed the medical practitioner has established a clinic in the state. I will pass on the name and address of that clinic to the Minister for Health.

The honourable member for Mildura suggested that the judgment of Mr Justice Menhennitt may not apply to the procedure. I cannot understand why that would be so. If that is what he said, I would be grateful if he would provide me with his reasons because I would be interested to pursue the matter in my own area of responsibility. I will also pass those comments on to the minister.

The honourable member for Dromana raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Sport. He referred to the drownings at Gunnamatta beach and to the valuable work undertaken there by the local lifesaving club members. It appears that access to the clubhouse is difficult, particularly for ambulances. The clubhouse also suffers occasional flooding caused by run-off from the sand dunes. That would obviously make it more difficult than usual for the lifesaving club to carry out its important activities. Although the club is pleased with the Premier's promise of funding for lifesaving clubs, it asks that consideration be given to its particular difficulties. I will pass that on to the minister.

The honourable member for Sunshine was concerned about the lack of consultation with the local community concerning the closure of the Albion TAB. He was concerned about the effect on elderly ladies in particular who have been customers of the Albion TAB and who might have to travel considerable distances to get to some similar service. I am pleased to see a member of Parliament taking up the case of elderly ladies who want to gamble. There has been a lot of publicity saying that elderly ladies should not be gambling, and I for one have felt rather sorry for them. Other people seem to believe that elderly ladies should not have control over their own activities and that they should not be able to choose between drinking and

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gambling or other ways of spending their money. I congratulate the honourable member for Sunshine on raising the matter, and I will pass his concerns on to the Minister for Sport.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The house stands adjourned until next day.

House adjourned 11.09 p.m.

Thursday, 26 February 1998

The SPEAKER (Hon. S. J. Plowman) took the chair at 10.04 a.m. and read the prayer.

Mr Bracks — On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I seek your advice on the continued effectiveness of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, a standing committee of Parliament under the Parliamentary Committees Act. I refer particularly to the Premier's appointment on 24 February of Mr Bill Forwood, the chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, to a new position as parliamentary secretary to the Premier.

I do not mean to reflect in any way on Mr Forwood, for whom I have enormous respect; but surprisingly the Premier has said that Mr Forwood should continue to hold both positions — that is, as parliamentary secretary to the Premier and as chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee.

Mr Speaker, I seek guidance from you on the potential for a conflict of interest to arise when the same person holds both positions. Mr Forwood's role as parliamentary secretary will involve him with the executive. Although he may not be a sworn office-holder, he will be privy to and be required to implement executive decisions. He will then be required to change hats and, on behalf of the joint parliamentary committee, scrutinise those decisions, decisions of which he has some carriage.

The SPEAKER — Order! I think I understand the point the honourable member is raising. To be a member of the executive one has to be a cabinet minister appointed by the Governor in the normal way. Being a parliamentary secretary does not involve executive privilege, although what the honourable member is raising has to be taken into account.

I understand the question of whether the chairman of a committee can receive payment both as chairman and as parliamentary secretary has been considered. Clearly he can receive only one; otherwise, he would be in breach of the salary regulations. But his being both chairman of a committee and a parliamentary secretary does not breach the need for a separation between the executive and the Parliament, in that he is not a member of the executive. A person is a member of the executive only if he or she is a minister sworn in by the Governor.

PETITION

The Clerk — I have received the following petition for presentation to Parliament:

Housing: reform package

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly in Parliament assembled:

We, the undersigned residents of Victoria, respectfully call on all members of the state Parliament to speak, write and vote against the current public housing reform package, in that it will adversely affect housing opportunities and outcomes for low-income and other disadvantaged members of our community.

We appeal to all members of the state Parliament to reverse the state government's decision to increase rents, reduce security of tenure and tighten eligibility for public housing tenants. We call on our state government not to proceed with policy changes that will cause irreversible damage to Victoria's housing system and discriminate further against people without housing options.

We are seeking the state government to:

retain security of tenure for all public housing tenants;

not increase public housing rents by 15 to 20 per cent as proposed, which will force large numbers of people to live in poverty;

retain broad eligibility for public housing to avoid marginalisation and creation of ghettos;

revisit its position on the ability of private rental as an appropriate long-term housing tenure;

initiate a process for open and ongoing consultation with the community sector around future housing policy.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

By Mr Brumby (2086 signatures)

Laid on table.

PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE PREMIER

Mr BRACKS (Williamstown) — I desire to move, by leave:

That this house requests the chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, Mr Bill Forwood, to resign as chairman given his appointment as parliamentary secretary to the Premier, which puts him in a potential conflict of interest between his role as a parliamentary secretary and therefore as a member of the executive and his role as chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in scrutinising the same executive.

Leave refused.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Adjournment

Mr GUDE (Minister for Education) — I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday, 17 March 1998.

Motion agreed to.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed from 25 February; motion of Ms McCALL (Frankston) for adoption of address-in-reply.

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — Last night before the house adjourned I was speaking about the widening of Lower Plenty Road in Rosanna, the resulting traffic confusion and the lack of appropriate action by the government. I will re-address some of those issues and give examples of the government's lack of foresight. Lower Plenty Road is now being widened to accommodate two lanes of traffic from Lower Plenty and Greensborough roads which will converge into one road, Rosanna Road. Rosanna Road has two lanes so automatically four lanes merge into two. Further down the track into Lower Heidelberg Road and Burke Road North the traffic merges into one lane. Four into two does not go very well, but four into two into one is even worse! The traffic congestion in the area is horrendous and the government is doing nothing whatsoever to address the problem beyond Rosanna Road. The work it has planned for Lower Plenty, Rosanna and Greensborough roads is only a bandaid solution.

I will use some of the public consultation processes as an example to illustrate how short-sighted the government and Vicroads are. Lower Plenty Road, where the plan is to widen the road to four lanes one way and four lanes the other, has a pedestrian overpass which was built in the 1960s. At that time no allowances were made for prams, the elderly or the disabled; the overpass has steps up to it which do not allow for adequate access. No money has been allocated to amend the problem. The overpass is situated opposite St Martin of Tours Catholic church and primary school and is close to the Rosanna Golf Links Primary School. Many people use the overpass to cross Lower Plenty Road safely. Why would anyone want to take a pram to primary school or walk children

to church! The overpass needs to be adjusted to allow for greater access.

When I raised the matter at a public meeting Vicroads said it had no money and the government had allowed no additional funds to repair or replace the overpass. Vicroads suggested people could walk across the eight lanes of traffic that will make up Lower Plenty Road! I emphasise: many of these people are elderly or disabled or have young families. It is criminal that Vicroads should suggest that in this day and age anyone should try to cross eight lanes of traffic.

The government has failed to address the matter. I have written to the minister and have yet to receive a response. I hope he does not put my letter in the too-hard basket, as he along with many other government members tend to do. Three public meetings have been convened to discuss traffic in the area — two concerning Lower Plenty Road and one concerning the north-south corridor. I am shocked and dismayed but not surprised at the action of the two upper house members for Templestowe Province, Carlo Furletti and Bill Forwood. They failed to attend the first public meeting — I had no idea where they were. They also failed to attend the second public meeting. Both houses of Parliament were sitting at the time and when I returned I discovered Mr Forwood and Mr Furletti were at the President's dinner. I later discovered them at the bar, drinking.

On Wednesday of this week, because the upper house is not sitting, I was granted leave by my side of the house to attend a public meeting of 450 people; neither upper house member was there — missing in action yet again! Parliament was not sitting and there were no functions to attend, yet both upper house members for Templestowe Province went missing. Clearly Bill Forwood has new priorities; they include being generous to the Premier's whims and looking after the Premier, not looking after his electorate. Rumour has it that today the two upper house members are touring the area for a first-hand look. One would have thought that if they were active members they would know the area and would not need a special tour. Clearly they are so behind the eight ball on this issue they are trying to play catch-up.

When the government announced the proposal there was a great deal of fanfare and the government members put a leaflet out telling everyone what a fantastic job the government was doing. However, as I explained last night, it fell short. Now they will have to make up for it. They are not game enough to attend three public meetings, yet they will work for the Premier and backstab the Auditor-General. They are

not prepared to work for their electorate. I am sure it does not surprise any opposition member that Bill Forwood, who has been promoted — —

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the honourable member that he must refer to members in this place and in the other place by their electorate titles, not by name.

Mr LANGDON — It is slightly more difficult to single out one member because when I mention Templestowe Province I am referring to both upper house members. However, I take your point, Mr Speaker.

Something has to be done about the north-south corridor. On Wednesday night I wrote to the minister asking for a strategic plan of the north-south corridor to be implemented and, more importantly — unlike what the government has done with other projects — for an environmental impact study to be carried out. The government will make decisions but not implement an environmental impact study.

City Link is a prime example. An overall plan is needed to address the problems, not just for today but for the next 20 years and beyond. The residents have copped heavy traffic and road congestion for too long, and there has been no overall plan. Worse still, since the current major road system is not coping with the traffic, the residential streets on either side of the major roads are being inundated and rat-runs are occurring throughout the city. The length motorists go to avoid traffic jams is amazing. People will go up back streets and make unlimited right and left-hand turns to avoid traffic congestion. The problem affects the whole north-south corridor between Greensborough Road and the Eastern Freeway. The matter must be addressed now. I call on the government to do so.

On the adjournment debate last year I complained that the new police headquarters in Rosanna was not the purpose-built building in the Bell Street mall in West Heidelberg it was expected to be. It is another example of a government election promise for the electorate on which it has reneged. A commitment made by a previous minister has been broken. The Ivanhoe electorate made a wise decision when it elected me in 1996. It wants to be heard on the issues of the Auditor-General, Workcover, education and broken government promises.

During my contribution yesterday I referred to Bellfield Primary School, but View Bank Primary School was also given commitments. When I visited East Ivanhoe Primary School, which is located in one of the more affluent areas of the electorate — in the government's

own heartland — and it is a fine school with a fantastic principal and school council, I was horrified at the number of portable classrooms and the general conditions at the school. Some renovations have been completed. However, the government should step up its program — not just talk about it — to ensure that education facilities in all suburbs are brought into the 21st century. The shadow minister for education and training summed that up well in his contribution in the debate. I commend his speech and condemn the government for its lack of support for schools, particularly in the Ivanhoe electorate.

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — I have pleasure in making a contribution to the address-in-reply debate. The presentation by Sir James Gobbo was very much a reflection of the man. He is still very much a man of the people, despite his high office, great achievements and the enormous accolades he has received. Victorians see Sir James as a true reflection of the multicultural nature of our community.

On the day of the opening I felt especially proud to be a Victorian. As my colleagues and I stood crowded into the entrance of the Legislative Council I realised I had waited more than a decade to hear the speech to which I was listening. The Governor's speech outlined the program for the second half of the Kennett government's second term in office. The rebuilding of the Victorian economy and the reform of the government's administration and policies have now led to a change in emphasis and the government's objective of delivering justifiable and well deserved rewards to Victorians.

I became active in the political process in 1987. I had children at school and I was leading a busy and active life. I had no burning desire to become a member of Parliament. However, I was deeply concerned at what was happening in the state and at what needed to be addressed in the community. Like many my age, particularly women, I was the first in my family to benefit from a tertiary education. A tertiary education provided us with a ticket to secure and stable employment and the ability to marry — in the cases of many women, in their early 20s — buy a home and have children — the true Australian dream.

However, it was obvious that my children would be unlikely to enjoy such a world. That might sound corny to some, but as an economics and politics teacher I was very attuned to the signs around me and had become acutely aware that all was not well in Australia. Although global economies had been changing, nothing was occurring in other parts of the world as was happening in this state and this country under Labor

during the '80s and '90s. During Labor's period of governance we saw record inflation, record interest rates, record unemployment, record home prices, record hospital waiting lists, record debt, record bureaucracy, record lack of confidence — a record not to be proud of.

In 1992 the Kennett government was faced with the task of dealing with a budget crisis and designing policies to reform the way the government and public sector operated in order to achieve long-term stability for the future of all Victorians. Remarkably the government has achieved that after a mere five years in office.

The government will now place emphasis on four areas: improved outcomes in education, job opportunities, encouragement of safe and healthy lifestyles, and the building of confident and cohesive communities. It augurs well for the future of the state that those four elements are the benchmarks by which all legislation and policies will be judged. The process of reform will continue to ensure the continuation of stable government and measurable outcomes for Victorians.

The government's programs are not short-term programs. They are not focused on a bandaid approach of just fixing current political problems with an eye to the election around the corner. They are far-sighted and visionary. They look to the future of Victoria in the context of its place in the national and global economies.

Apart from the very erudite, but somewhat truncated, contribution of the honourable member for Sunshine, which was starting to be enjoyed by many people, the speeches of opposition members have comprised litanies of burning criticisms. They contained few facts, merely a lot of rhetoric. The honourable member for Morwell said he thought the Governor's speech, which reflected on the government's achievements, was inappropriate. However, I had waited a long time to hear the Governor's speech; it gave me hope and I enjoyed it.

In all the contributions of opposition members there was not one expression of thought — possibly not even a syllable or a suggestion — about policy initiatives. Not one idea was put forward about the way the ALP would govern the state if it were given the opportunity. Should we assume that all coalition initiatives would be reversed? Would the state return to the great taxing and spending attitudes of the past — budget deficits, enormous debt, burgeoning bureaucracy, picking winners through a VEDC, transport strikes, high

unemployment and global hospital budgets instead of payment for performance?

Would we again have a state where the only measure of success is how much a government spent? The measure would not be outcomes, performance or achievements, just how much money was poured into the system. That was the way state and federal Labor governments judged their performances. The state Liberal and National Party government judges performance on actual outcomes.

Is this what the public has to look forward to under a future Labor government, a government without any policy? That is the only conclusion one can draw. I do not wish to give too many hints to the opposition, but if one reflects on the coalition prior to the 1992 election, one sees a different picture. For more than a decade the coalition played the opposition role, which is to be the watchdog of government. Members on this side remember enduring the trauma of long years in opposition, but by the time the coalition came to government in 1992 legislation, policies and strategies for the transition to government were in place. The coalition was ready for government and Victorians had the opportunity of making a real choice. They knew what they were getting rid of and were very confident about what they were getting.

The opposition would have us believe the reform agenda of the government was not necessary, that it has not delivered what Victorians want, and that the whole thing has been too painful. It is worth examining that contention in respect of one portfolio — not health, as some would wish, but education. What was the reality that the incoming Minister for Education, the Honourable Don Hayward, found in coming to government in 1992? A recently published book, *The Future of Schools*, relates Minister Hayward's first day in office:

I spent the first morning meeting people and reading the department's briefing books. From even a cursory glance at these it became abundantly clear that the Labor Party had grossly mismanaged the department and had left it with a horrendous and immediate budget crisis. I therefore demanded that the senior bureaucrats provide me with a budget review that afternoon.

The scene that confronted me after lunch will forever be in my memory. Lined up on one side of a long table in my room were the senior officers of the department. On the other side were Roskam —

that is, John Roskam —

and me. It was reminiscent of scenes from *Yes, Minister*.

One officer opened the batting with the cheery statement, 'Minister, we are sorry to have to inform you that the

previous government made commitments for the recurrent budget far in excess of the funds available. In fact, it can be said that there is a black hole in the budget of at least \$40 million, which is likely to get bigger'.

'And then there is the time bomb', chirped up another. 'Time bomb!' I repeated, in a state of alarm. 'Yes', he said. 'We have about 8000 teachers out on unpaid long-term leave, namely maternity leave. When a teacher went off on leave the previous government appointed a new permanent teacher in his or her place. We have like a phantom army of teachers out there. They have the right to come back any time they choose, and we have to give them a job. As far as the budget is concerned it is like a time bomb ticking away, and can add tens of million dollars' expenditure at any time.'

'And we must not forget the backlog', declared a third, almost joyfully. By this time I was feeling somewhat irritated. 'What the hell is the backlog?' I demanded. 'Well, Minister, for 10 years your predecessors have starved the capital and maintenance side of the budget and used the funds to pay for the extra cost of the work practices set out in the agreements with the teacher unions. We estimate there is a backlog in school maintenance of more than \$600 million —

that turned out to be \$670 million.

It is believed that the physical condition of about half the schools is such that they do not meet the standards set under the occupational health and safety legislation.'

... In addition to dealing with 'the black hole', 'the time bomb' and 'the backlog', we also had to make our contribution to eliminating the overall deficit in the total public sector budget of more than \$1 billion left by the Labor government.

The previous government had borrowed to pay recurrent operating expenses. Even worse, they borrowed to pay the interest on the borrowings. The effect of this was that nearly a third of the state's income was being used to pay the interest costs on the borrowings, and this was compounding each year. As a result, the percentage of income available to pay for government services, such as schools and hospitals, was rapidly declining.

The authors make this final point:

Over its 10-year reign, the Labor government failed to address the issue of demographic shifts in population, and the effect of these on school enrolments. As a consequence, in some of the older established areas there was an excessive number of unused places in schools. For example, in one inner city area alone there were more than 2000 unused secondary school places. At the same time the Labor government had failed to keep up with the demand in the rapidly growing outer suburbs for new schools, and for increased capacity in existing schools.

This is the comment from the Honourable Don Hayward, one of the persons who had to deal with the crisis left by the former Labor government. The problem he faced in education was compounded by the fact that it was a centralised system. It was under the control of teacher union officials, who regulated what was happening in our schools. In some cases they

vetoed the decisions of principals. The 24 departments at the Rialto had taken precedence over the needs of children, families, the bulk of teachers, who were highly committed, and the principals, who were responsible for the running of the schools. Compared with other states Victoria was spending more in the delivery of public education with no discernible advantage in outcomes for students.

The task for the incoming government was twofold: firstly, to address efficiencies and manage the crisis in the state's finances; secondly, to reform and restructure policies to provide for the real needs of students. In the case of the efficiencies and the state's budget, this was first addressed by offering teachers in excess to the system the opportunity to retire. Unused school places were transferred to areas of need where students could enjoy a broader curriculum and greater opportunity. In pursuit of that first task the bureaucracy was reduced from 2300 to 600 people.

The need to reform and restructure the education system led to the determination of the Kennett government to refocus on the needs of children, which occurred under the banner of the Schools of the Future program. The Schools of the Future program offered a number of elements. The first was the curriculum standards framework. This was to be a curriculum outline or guidelines to apply to years 1 to 12. There had not been any curriculum framework for many years in those areas. This was to give consistency across the system, while offering flexibility for individual schools and teachers to respond to the needs of individual students.

During 1993 I recall that I was doing some work in Canberra on education and at that time the federal Labor government and the then federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, the Honourable Kim Beazley, tried to impose on states a national standards framework. Rightly, state ministers refused to become part of a centralised locked-in system, but agreed between themselves to introduce curriculum standards frameworks which offered the opportunity for establishing consistency across the country while at the same time allowing flexibility to account for the needs of different states, different parts of states and different schools. That has been a great achievement.

The second important element was to move to global school budgets, which meant that almost 90 per cent of recurrent expenditure was decided by the schools themselves. Issues relating to capital and maintenance were decided by the department. Schools would make application for money for maintenance and inspectors

would visit those schools, assessing what maintenance was required. Teachers were to be selected by schools and a career path was developed through the professional recognition program — something that did not exist before. Schools were made accountable to their communities and to the department through reports and reviews. Finally, for the first time in many years, parents and teachers were able to assess the progress of their children — through the learning assessment program.

Under the former Labor government there was a period of equality of outcomes, based on the unrealistic policy that children should not be tested because that is too competitive an element to introduce into education. Parents and teachers did not have a good idea of the achievements of their children or what their needs would be.

The learning assessment program has introduced a system where children's achievements and levels are assessed so that their needs can be properly catered for. This system was implemented within the framework of a school charter that sets out the program and the priorities for individual schools. It represents an agreement between the school community and the Department of Education to deliver individual needs for individual schools. Schools, therefore, have a say in the values that are being imparted.

In the Caulfield electorate the program has offered much flexibility in the system. A variety of schools offer different things to students. One school focuses on information technology. It has a wonderful computer program for students and has made a specialty of that subject. Another school offers Japanese as a bilingual language, and is one of the new programs being offered by the department. It is an exciting program for students and I fully encourage that. I had the opportunity to help launch that program. Another school focuses on music and art. It is one that the parents who send their children to that school are looking for because they believe it fulfils the needs of their children. Other schools have wonderful pageants at the end of the year, and I regularly attend and thoroughly enjoy them.

Additional programs have been introduced to address the learning and teaching issues that have emerged since the Schools of the Future program was introduced. Firstly, there is the Keys to Life program, a literacy program which represents one of the key issues of importance to children in this state and country. Some \$50 million was set aside to ensure that all children in primary schools can read properly. Despite all the debate between federal and state governments, it

is obvious there is a great commitment to ensure that our children are literate.

Secondly, information technology is vital in schools. Since 1994 the number of computers in Victorian government schools has increased from 43 000 to 73 000. Victorian students enjoy the best student-computer ratio in Australia.

Thirdly, the VCE review that was completed last year, when implemented, will be less stressful and provide Victorian students with many options. Approximately 70 per cent of students do not go on to university and, therefore, we must address the options that are available.

Fourthly, the review of teacher training was long overdue. The recently completed report, if implemented, will radically overhaul teacher training in Victoria. It will elevate the standing of teachers in our community and will mean that the profession itself will have a feeling of self-worth and the confidence to deal with the problems that exist in educating young children. After all, we put a great deal of trust in our teachers. In a sense, we expect them to nurture the next generation.

Finally, following the Schools of the Future program, the government has introduced the Schools of the Third Millennium program, a far-sighted initiative which means that the government is not sitting on its laurels but looking to provide for the future. That program is an initiative that looks at improving on the Schools of the Future model. It offers some flexibility for the future and invites the community to participate in the process.

These five additional initiatives demonstrate the government's determination to continue the reform process, provide stability and achievement within the system and focus on the needs of our students.

But what of the opposition? For all the criticism of the measures taken by the government, many necessitated by Labor's mismanagement, what is its vision for the future in education? I took the trouble to read every press release issued by the shadow minister for education and training, of which there were not many. One thing became obvious: the honourable member for Footscray has made only one policy statement which called for the introduction of a standard form for all schools to use when seeking voluntary contributions and subject fees. I also discovered that the original thought for that great policy initiative emanated from his leader, unless we count the policy initiative of the future candidate for Prahran who tried to make a policy

statement on behalf of the opposition about the holding of pageants.

The second thing that became obvious was that the shadow minister will be calling for a review of almost every program run by the Department of Education. I examined the number of reviews he has called for. They include a review of the act in relation to school leaving ages; a review of the needs of students with disabilities; a review of boys education and issues of equality; a review of computers in schools; a broadening of the VCE review to include retention rates; a review of funding cuts; and a review of school closures. If I dug a little further, I'm sure I would have found more.

The third thing that became obvious was that the shadow minister would again increase teacher numbers, despite the fact that Victoria has an adequate student-teacher ratio. As minister, he would also seek to ban future school closures even if state school councils wanted to move their children to areas where there would be greater opportunity. We would see a return to a highly centralised system with power going back to the teacher unions. The honourable member has a problem with his ability to assess statistics — for example, he is constantly critical of retention rates in our schools as well as of student-teacher ratios. That is despite the fact that government school retention rates are now higher than they ever were under a Labor government.

Student-teacher ratios are better in Victoria than the national average; they are better than Queensland and the more populous state of New South Wales. It appears that the shadow minister is applying little intellectual rigour to research and analyses or to the task of education policy formulation. I have chosen to examine only one portfolio, but the same probably applies to all portfolio areas that the opposition is failing to address.

In conclusion, from merely examining one portfolio area it is obvious that the reforms of the government have been successful. The coalition has achieved a great deal in its term in office and is looking forward to the continuing stability of the state. Victoria now has a vibrant economy. The government is considering a change in emphasis that will contribute greatly to the lives of Victorians.

However, a number of challenges, particularly in education, are on the horizon. It is important to examine the linkages between the needs of the economy and education. Previous coalition and Liberal governments were aware of that important consideration but recently

that has almost been forgotten. We need to align the needs of and movements in the economy with our education needs.

In the future new technology will apply to all areas of economic activity, particularly in education. Information technology plays an important role in education; in some cases it means we need less hard copy in our libraries. But we must remember that computers are a tool with which to learn. They are a tool for us to learn and must be used in that context. We must not ignore the important fact that our children need to be numerate, literate and have the capacity to analyse, to research and to write. Information technology is a little like a sophisticated pen: it opens the world of knowledge to children in an amazing way, but it must be kept in its proper place.

I have been pleased to make this contribution. As the honourable member for Caulfield, I am confident of the direction in which the government is heading and in the economic returns to the citizens of Victoria and, particularly, Caulfield.

Mr BATCHELOR (Thomastown) — I am pleased to contribute to the address-in-reply debate. I join with other honourable members in wishing Sir James Gobbo all the best in his new appointment. Amidst all the parliamentary pomp and ceremony last week we had the pleasure of hearing the Governor address both houses of Parliament in a charming and pleasant way. It is ironic that he had to accord with the Westminster tradition in that he was forced to read a speech prepared for him by the government of the day. Despite the encumbrances imposed, he delivered his speech and participated in the later social events with traditional charm.

Victoria has been lucky with its appointment of Governors and their spouses. I am sure Sir James and Lady Gobbo will carry out their roles in the same way that the McGarvies and the McCaugheys did previously.

While preparing this contribution I had the opportunity to reflect on the full and impressive life Sir James Gobbo has led. He is a very scholarly and learned person. During the period prior to taking up his appointment he maintained a commitment and connection with ordinary people, and particularly with those from his Italian background. I well remember a story that adequately reflects his character. Sir James was opening a legal conference which was a little stuffy, as legal conferences can be. He commenced his speech in Italian and continued in Italian for some time until the audience began to wonder what was

happening. At the appropriate time he broke into English.

The point he made to the legal fraternity was about the importance of their understanding community languages, of understanding people from non-English-speaking backgrounds and as a constant reminder that when carrying out their legal profession tasks, there is a large section of our community for which English is not their first language. Indeed, many Victorians do not speak English. That was an expression of understanding of humanity that is well appreciated by the Victorian community, but was particularly appreciated by members of the Thomastown electorate of which the Italian community constitutes such a large proportion.

In his speech to Parliament last week His Excellency referred to the transport initiatives and objectives of the government for the next 12 months, during which time the government had intended to complete its privatisation program and set in place the automatic ticketing system.

Within the transport bureaucracy there is now significant ferment and tension about the privatisation of the public transport system. That ferment and tension is ongoing and is damaging the reputation of the public transport bureaucracy and Victoria. The government has an ideological obsession about the privatisation of public transport. It intends to do so no matter the consequences or costs. The government intends to push ahead and will not be delayed. The only delay being experienced is the result of the government's own incompetence and bungling, which has manifested in the privatisation of the ticket revenue streams through the outsourcing of the automatic ticketing system.

The public transport privatisation program was to have been completed by the end of this year but, as announced by the Governor in his speech last week, it has been delayed until next year. It is a cowardly government that uses the Governor's speech in opening Parliament to announce another bungle and delays in the administration of its policies — this time, the privatisation of public transport.

The most important and alarming aspect is the delay in the outsourcing of tendering processes for country rail maintenance services. By way of background, on 1 July last the Victorian Rail Track Corporation (Victrack) was established. We do not know much about that publicly owned body, which trades by the name of Victrack Access. When people have looked up the *White Pages* directory, telephoned the Public Transport Corporation and asked to be connected to Victrack

Access, they have been told that such a body does not exist. But we know it does: it exists in the bowels of the infrastructure area and trades as Victrack Access.

Victrack was given responsibility for the ownership of the entire non-electrified rail network in Victoria. It was charged with a number of responsibilities, primarily to provide and charge for access to that non-electrified rail network. It was also given the responsibility to direct and control the movement of rolling stock on that rail network and to establish, manage and maintain the non-electrified rail network.

Following a lengthy process Victrack Access decided it would outsource the maintenance of its rural tracks. In October it started discussions with the industry about what process should be undertaken to achieve the government's objective. Victrack called for expressions of interest. Documents were issued on 7 November 1997 and the closing date for submissions was 22 December 1997. At that time the government approached anybody who might be interested in taking up the opportunity of providing the maintenance on a five-year contract basis for the whole rural Victorian rail network.

As at the close of expressions of interest on 22 December, 12 individual companies or combinations of companies had put forward their names. They included a very broad cross-section of the companies that would be expected to be interested in carrying out that type of work: ABB; Flour Daniel, a consortium made up of John Holland and GEC; a consortium made up of Theiss and Queensland Rail; another consortium made up of Baulderstone and Siemens; a consortium made up of the New South Wales RSA and Brown and Root; Transfield; a consortium of United Construction and Barclay; Jarvis International; a consortium comprising ADI and Motorola; Motorola; and a consortium comprising ABI, Connel Wagner and Kilpatrick Green. They were the major players in that type of maintenance work.

In late January of this year, following a very strict probity process supervised by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu, four companies were chosen to comprise a short list and invited to put forward proposals. The short-listed companies were ABB, Flour Daniel, the John Holland-GEC consortium and the Theiss-Queensland Rail consortium. The list did not include the government's favoured company, Transfield.

The four short-listed companies, which at that date had already expended large amounts of money, set about the very expensive process of putting in detailed tender

proposals. However, to their shock and the shock of everyone in the industry, on 23 February this year, two weeks into that six-week tender process, the companies were advised that the process had been put on hold — it had been adjourned sine die, one might say.

An official communique from David Knox of the asset management area of Victrack Access stated that the tendering process would close 'at a date to be advised.' The government, having initiated a tender process, called a halt at 3 minutes to midnight because its secretly preferred tenderer was not on the short list.

The issues involved in this matter fall into two broad groups: probity and policy. Dealing firstly with probity, it is clear that the process of interrupting a tender process will damage the credibility of Victrack Access. This was the first big outsourcing or tendering process that Victrack Access had undertaken and it will suffer immense damage to its credibility. However, it is not the culprit in this process — it was directed to do what it did by the government. Victrack Access was the party that had to carry out the orders. The generals demanded that these people carry out their orders, and that is what they did.

A secret industry briefing held on 18 November 1997 sets out the attitude of Victrack Access to the strictest of probity processes. It placed great emphasis on probity. In spite of Victrack Access acting with the highest probity the government overrode it and halted the tendering process. The document in my possession, which was given to industry participants at an outsourcing of infrastructure maintenance industry briefing held on 18 November at the Le Meridien at Rialto, identifies the outsourcing strategy.

The document lists a number of objectives of the strategy, one of which is:

... the outsourcing process and ongoing contract management must present the best value for money in achieving the objectives of the business.

It further states:

... it must be achieved through a competitive process that satisfies all probity conditions;

... it will require transparency of all transactions in relation to the contract;

The document states that in determining the suitability of proponents the VTA would expect certain things of the successful tenderer. Two items on the list are:

... have a corporate culture compatible with that of VTA;

... are willing to work with a completely open book.

Four tenderers were prepared to accept those conditions, but that was not good enough for the government. It wanted other players and wanted other specifications brought to bear.

The process has all the hallmarks of yet another casino tendering process. At a critical stage of the tendering process the government is subjected to very severe lobbying from industry participants who are not part of the short list or who do not agree with the tender specifications and want them changed. The government then agrees and rolls over — in this case to the eternal discredit of Victrack Access. On this occasion the government was prepared to sacrifice the important credibility of the new government corporation that has responsibility for ownership and maintenance of Victoria's country rail network.

What confidence can people have in the safety and ongoing durability of the rail infrastructure if the management body, Victrack Access, is so easily crushed and stood over by a government that wants to achieve some other outcome? The reputation of the state will also suffer. This has been an issue for some time in Victoria. Victoria is the corporate state — the state of cronies, where mates get preference and with a nod and a wink the tender process is interrupted, diverted and corrupted. That is clearly what is going to happen here.

I understand from what went on behind the scenes that an immense process of lobbying the government was undertaken by companies that had not made it through to the short list — by late arrivals led by a series of overseas companies. I am told that the American company, Genesee and Wyoming, advised the government that what is known in the jargon of the transport industry as a vertically integrated set of arrangements was needed, under which one company would own all of the infrastructure and tender out the maintenance contracts.

As a consequence, as the new owner it would capture all the economic benefits from outsourcing rather than the government, which was the original proposal. It was originally proposed that Victrack Access would be set up to own and maintain the tracks and would bring about efficiencies in maintenance through competitive tendering. But when push came to shove the ear of the government was whispered in by other people who wanted to capture that economic benefit for themselves rather than see Victorians receive that benefit. They wanted to see the benefits of outsourcing going into American pockets rather than the pockets of Victorian taxpayers.

I am also told that the government was lobbied by two other American firms, Wisconsin Central and Rail America. These lobbying processes included Australian partners, or included an arrangement that the American company as the owner of the track would decide who would get the contract rather than Victrack Access being the owner and awarding the contract. The opposition understands that in that process the government's preferred bidder, Transfield, would then be able to make its late entry into the tendering process. It had been excluded by Victrack Access because of earlier considerations that it did not meet the expressions-of-interest process and was considered unsuitable. A tumultuous, sudden turnaround is taking place within the bureaucracy. It is being driven not from within the Department of Infrastructure but from within the Department of Treasury and Finance.

In fact, transport officials and the Minister for Transport have no any say in the process whatsoever. The reform process is being driven by a special unit secreted away in the Department of Treasury and Finance. They are calling the shots and dictating this process. This reform unit is the driving intellectual force. It is the one calling for tenders and determining policy issues. It is determining that our public transport assets be sold off not to achieve benefit for public transport users but to achieve the ideological objectives of the Department of Treasury and Finance. Once again under this government the needs of public transport users, whether in country Victoria or metropolitan Melbourne, and those who use freight services will be sacrificed because of the ideological underpinning and madness that is driving the reform unit deep within treasury.

There are problems for Victrack Access, problems for Victoria and problems for all the companies that, on the basis of good faith, have participated in this process thus far. It costs those companies hundreds and hundreds of thousands of dollars to participate firstly in the expressions-of-interest stage and secondly in the tendering process. To have gone through the tendering process almost to crunch time and then have the government pull the rug from under the process will cost those companies dearly. It may end up backfiring on the government. Not only will it achieve a worse outcome but it is likely to be the subject of ongoing litigation and will suffer a huge cost through a loss of trust.

Many policy implications are involved in this process, because what the government is edging towards secretly behind closed doors is adopting a vertically integrated model for privatisation. It will reject the open access model that is implicit if it were following the Hilmer reform proposals and implementing true

competition policy. Yet again this government is faced with a choice between implementing competition policy on the one hand and adopting a process that favours mates and restricts competition. What does the government do? The government opts for the process that restricts competition, that supports its mates and transfers economic wealth and benefit from the public sector into the private pockets. On this occasion it is likely to benefit large American-based companies at the expense of companies that have been operating in Australia for many years.

The process will also result in the failure of the government's rail reform program to meet its timetable. I referred earlier to the cowardly act of the government using the Governor's speech to announce that the reform program of privatisation would be delayed. The process will be further delayed because of the interference in the tendering process that has occurred and the implications that will have for the rest of the privatisation process. Even at this late stage Victorians are yet to hear from the government as to the model it will choose for the privatisation of the metropolitan network. The government has told us it will be broken up — the worst possible outcome — but it has not told us what will happen to the infrastructure, who will own it and whether the government will follow the advice of its American consultants who recommended that there be a vertically integrated break-up of the public transport system in Melbourne.

A pattern of deceit is emerging here. On the one hand the government claims it is supporting Hilmer competition reforms, but the reality is that it is trying to bring about the opposite of the Hilmer reforms by opting for restricted geographic monopolies that are vertically integrated. Once again the people of Melbourne will miss out.

The opposition wants an explanation from the government. It wants to know why it has interfered in this process, why the contract tender process for the infrastructure maintenance program for Victrack has been interrupted. What will the government do with Victrack Access? If Victrack Access is not allowed to proceed with the tendering process for this maintenance contract, what is it allowed to do? Does the government already have secret plans to sell off Victrack Access to a private owner so that the private owner can capture this reform? The government already has form on this in the electricity industry where it said it would keep ownership of the infrastructure. What did it do? As soon as the election was over it flogged off the transmission lines. The government has the same sort of deceitful plans in public transport. The government does not deserve to get away with it.

In the few remaining minutes I shall talk about the automatic ticketing process that is currently bedevilling Melbourne's public transport system. There have been numerous reports in the media recently of the problems with its introduction. Despite the government saying it would not sign off on this contract until every problem was resolved, clearly it has let the Victorian public down. It has signed off on a contract when there were still many issues to be resolved. The government stands condemned. Honourable members will have seen the reports about ticket machines eating tickets, validating machines not validating tickets, barriers not opening with valid tickets, and the list goes on and on. We have heard stories of people being left stranded at railway stations because of the long queues. I could give a speech for 2 hours highlighting the problems.

Another issue is the collapse in revenue that has occurred since ticketing machines have been introduced. This stands as an indictment of the government because it demonstrates the severe endemic problems within the system. Over a two-week period at the Glenhuntly depot the ticket revenue dropped from \$16 000 to \$3000 a day. On 8 February, because of computer problems during peak periods, tickets were not able to be sold on trams travelling to the very popular St Kilda festival, and ticket revenue was lost.

Customer service officers have been told that they must book as many fare evaders as they can because ticket revenue is only 60 per cent of what it should be. Goon squads of three are to be organised on trams, with one official standing in front of the ticketing machine not allowing people to purchase tickets while the other inspectors moved down the tram to maximise revenue by booking people without tickets.

During the first week of the Australian Open Tennis Championships ticketing machines were being used on the no. 79 tram route, which is serviced by the Camberwell depot, but revenue was down by nearly \$10 000. In the second week conductors were used to collect fares and the revenue bounced back to the normal amount. There are many examples where ticketing machines are not working.

Mrs McGILL (Oakleigh) — I am pleased, indeed honoured, to have the opportunity of responding by way of the address-in-reply debate to the speech given by His Excellency the Governor, Sir James Gobbo. In his address he talked about reviewing the progress and achievements of the coalition government since its election in 1992. In particular, the third paragraph of the Governor's speech captures my attention because of its obvious meaning. The Governor states:

My government has rebuilt Victoria's inheritance in the past five and a half years.

Many speakers responding to the Governor's speech from the opposition side have said they no longer want to be called the Guilty Party because the coalition government has been in office for five years, but that only reinforces the statement by the Governor I just quoted. His Excellency continues:

Given the state's dramatically improved performance today, the agenda for this session of the Parliament will see a marked change in emphasis.

Opposition members have scoffed and tried to decry this stance simply because it does not suit their agenda. Of course, it all becomes nonsense because they are exactly the same people who call out saying that this is a can-do government! Indeed, it is. The record shows clearly this is a strong government and a government of its word.

Earlier speakers have covered the substantive issues in the Governor's address. They have spoken about the extensive reform of the justice system, the safety of Victorians in their homes and communities, and in particular the crime victimisation survey results, which clearly extol Victoria as the safest state in Australia.

The Governor also gave a reassurance that the government will continue to provide strong leadership on decisions to shape the future and the social, economic and cultural dimensions of the state. The Governor talked about the Victorian government having quality leadership and an enviably tight team of backbenchers, which distinguishes it from all other Australian governments.

I turn now to what it means to be a team member in such a unique government and the way it helps an electorate to have a member who is prepared to listen to people and who walks to the beat of her community. We have all heard many members wax lyrical about the beauty of their electorates, and as a member of the tourism committee I can only agree with them when they talk about the mountains, valleys, fern gullies, rivers, streams, bayside areas, wineries, food bowls, history and rugged coastlines of various electorates. There is no doubt that Victoria has it all!

I want the house to know that in the Oakleigh electorate there is an amazing community spirit. We also have more than our fair share of salt-of-the-earth people. We are a diverse community, colourful and a sight to behold and envy. Dick Lydiard is a gentleman of 100 who resides at the Christian Guest Home in my electorate: he recites Australian poetry, sings Welsh songs beautifully, entertains not just the residents in the

guest home but also local young people, and has a remarkable history of helping people throughout his life — he is a real gem.

One can only be touched by meeting people in the Oakleigh electorate like Bob Halliday, OAM, who has had a long involvement with the Monash Community Health Centre. He was formerly a councillor and mayor of Oakleigh and has had other involvement in our community and is a warm and genuine person. There are leaders in our community such as Malcolm Brownlee, the former president of the Oakleigh Rotary Club and chairman of the Police Community Consultative Committee, who in 1997 won a safety award from Vicsafe. I shall come back to that and speak about the total involvement of people across a wide spectrum of the community who have been involved in this remarkable and spectacularly successful program.

I can talk about young people in my electorate such as Darren Mathews from the Oakleigh Youth Resource Centre. Darren, a young person in his late 20s, has an amazing ability not only to connect with young people but also to cross the generations and speak to and liaise with people from all sectors of the community. We are very lucky to have him in the Oakleigh area. I can tell you about a 4-foot 8-inch dynamo, Liz Guiver, who works with Trinity Youth Services. Liz works at the very heart of issues in the community. She works with very young people, often as young as 11 and 12 years, dealing with drugs, youth homelessness and all the other problems that life presents in any community. Then we have Arthur Larson, a Vietnam veteran, who is involved with the Oakleigh RSL and who works assiduously with older veterans on all their problems. He has run many successful health and information forums attended by hundreds of people right out into the broader community. He is an unsung hero. He never pushes himself forward or beats himself on the chest. My electorate office has called on him for support to assist people on a number of occasions.

Unique to Oakleigh is a senior citizens register run by June Plant, who is with the Oakleigh police. It started as a pilot program that people from all over Victoria have seen and want adopted in their communities. The program involves June visiting people's homes, looking at their safety and security issues, giving advice and referring the people on to other networks where assistance can be provided. It is a great source of comfort and security to older citizens in the electorate of Oakleigh.

Senior Sergeant Michael Jenkins is in charge of the Oakleigh police station, and what a fine team they have down there! I had a coffee with him in the past week

and we spoke about a range of issues affecting the Oakleigh electorate. How pleasing it is to hear from a senior sergeant who has been in that station for the past 12 years that in that time never has there been such a strong sense of safety, security and goodwill in Oakleigh as there is today. That comes as a result of the good work of the police force and the special local and community contact it has fostered.

In my electorate there is a man I very warmly respect, Father Julian Cavarson, whom I affectionately call the don of the Italian community. He has done wonderful work at the church with the local senior citizens and young people from the Italian community. Caring for the Greek community is Father Nicholas Moutafis from the Greek Orthodox church. I have had something like a 15-year association with the Greek people in the Oakleigh community. I have seen them go from developing their church to establishing a primary and a secondary school and acquiring properties and elderly persons units. There is also a benevolent society that works within the Greek community. I look in awe at what the Greek community has been able to achieve over the years and how well established it is.

Father Mena and Father Daniel are two very special priests from the Coptic church in our diverse community. One of the most amazing spiritual experiences of my life occurred at St Anthony's Coptic church in Oakleigh when it received a visit from Pope Shenouda III. You had to be there to experience how special the occasion was and how strongly the Coptic pope's holiness affected everybody there. I will hold the vision of that occasion in my memory for the rest of my life.

Ron Walters of the RSL in Carnegie, who is also a former councillor and mayor of Caulfield recently received a special award from what is now the Glen Eira council because in one of his mayoral years 25 years ago he initiated the Australia Day breakfast for the Caulfield community. Ron has contributed immensely to the general wellbeing of the community through the RSL and his local involvement.

Many other service clubs, from the Rotary clubs at Oakleigh and Huntingdale to the Lions club, have worked together on community projects, sharing their resources and always being on board to help meet the many needs and deal with events that arise, to pick up the ball and run with it when things happen. Members of the community feel exceptionally lucky to have such strong and vibrant service clubs in the area.

One can only surmise from that summary of some of the people that the Oakleigh electorate is blessed

with — and of course there are hundreds more who make themselves available to the community — what significant benefits for the Oakleigh electorate those people have achieved by working together.

More than \$2 million has been distributed to local schools, and Blind Freddy could see the differences that has made. Certainly the parents can, and they do not hesitate to let me know. At Murrumbeena Primary School there is a new multipurpose hall with a canteen — a facility that the school did not have before — physical education storage facilities and toilets. The complex is widely used by the school community and is also accessible to the broader community. In recent days extra funding has been provided for an on-site car park for the school, which has been a blessing for me because it has also relieved parking problems experienced by nearby residents. Murrumbeena Primary School's biggest challenge is likely to be the abundance of enrolments from parents who want their children to go to this excellent provider of education in the Murrumbeena area. It has a fantastic school council, and its members and I have worked together over many years to achieve these significant outcomes.

Approximately \$12 million has been spent on roadworks across the three municipalities that affect the Oakleigh electorate: Stonnington, Glen Eira and Monash. More than \$1.5 million has gone to libraries, which are well used and resourced and run a number of specialist programs.

Of significance was the amount of work done to raise the \$1.4 million to be spent on noise attenuation barriers along the South Eastern Arterial. The arterial and noise attenuation works have been issues of some importance to many of my constituents, and together we fought hard to achieve this outcome. Ministers have visited the homes of people who live on the edge of the South Eastern Arterial, and for all of us there was never a better lesson than that persistence pays off. The arterial is progressing now from Stanley Avenue through to Stephenson's Road as a stage 1 project and many of my constituents are excited and happy about that.

The magnificent Oakleigh police station is another project where I had to work long and hard, with the community right behind me, to secure the old Oakleigh council municipal offices for the local police. Works are under way; signs indicating what will happen on the site have been erected, and later this year the Oakleigh police will be moving into a combined police station, CIB and training facility that will be light-years ahead of their current premises. They will be moving right

into the heart of Oakleigh, the central business area, and will have a strong presence on Warrigal Road, close to the railway station — exactly where the community wants the police to be. This is a \$5.5 million project.

Another project into which a considerable amount of time and representation has gone is improvements to the intersection of Warrigal and North roads — a real bottleneck. Works on this intersection were first mooted in the late 1980s by the previous government. The shop owners and landlords in the area were put in a most difficult position over that period, not knowing what tenures they could offer, and that subsequently caused the demise of many businesses.

The design work has now been completed; I believe the acquisition of properties is nearing completion as well, and construction works are due to commence this year — another \$5 million project in the Oakleigh electorate. Certainly this is a can-do government.

The Oakleigh railway station has been upgraded to premier station status at an estimated cost of \$425 000, and all the stations in the electorate I represent have been refurbished. Last week the Minister for Transport again visited the Oakleigh station to look at the resurfacing of the platforms and finishing-off work. Stationmaster Bob Barclay does a wonderful PR job with all the people who visit the station daily. He runs sausage sizzles and has blackboards displaying community messages — it is a very social station.

An additional 300 car parking spaces have been provided at the Huntingdale railway station. There are many projects that I might have to come back to discuss, subject to time, because I want to tell the house much more about the Oakleigh electorate.

Money has been provided for the Packer Park velodrome in Carnegie, which is one of a very few velodromes in the metropolitan area. In addition \$50 000 has been provided towards the upgrade of the all-weather synthetic track at the Duncan Mackinnon reserve, Murrumbeena, which is a real jewel in the crown of sporting venues for the city of Glen Eira. The reserve is in constant use, not just by the schools in the area where regional sports are held but also by local residents on a daily basis, with walking tracks and many other facilities.

I could not imagine a better utilised athletics reserve. I was able to secure a \$20 000 grant from the Minister for Sport for the Monash junior soccer club which has a membership of more than 100 young children who use a reserve on Poath Road. That reserve had on it a huge horticultural shed which was left by Holmesglen to be

demolished when it moved out, but with a little bit of enterprise, thought and the strong commitment of the committee of the Monash junior soccer club we were able to advance money so that they could consider refurbishing that horticultural shed. It will become a venue for use as an indoor training facility for not only the junior soccer club but for the broader community. It seems a shame to call it a shed because, given its size, structure and condition, it will only require a small amount of money to provide something that would probably be worth \$400 000 or \$500 000 in another community.

As chairman of the government's multicultural affairs committee I have been deeply offended by many of the divisive remarks by the federal member for Oxley, Pauline Hanson. I read with interest Glenn Milne's column in *The Australian* earlier this week, headed 'Hanson's ugly story receives its final full stop.' I hope the headline of the article signals the death knell for the activities of a woman who is a political manipulator and an agent of division of the kind that we have rarely seen in Australia.

Mr Milne refers to a recent radio interview of John Pasquarelli, Ms Hanson's former minder, on the release of his book *The Pauline Hanson Story by The Man Who Knows*:

Pasquarelli's tale should be the political full stop and final punctuation point in the absurd and ugly phenomenon represented by Hanson. In essence, the book reveals her to be an ignorant and manipulable neophyte who, in the end, was overtaken by delusions of grandeur. To wit, her question to Pasquarelli at the height of her national media attention: 'John, can an Independent ever become prime minister?'.

Glenn Milne observes that these are Pasquarelli's personal comments and that he is obviously disappointed with Hanson. The article continues:

He still ascribes to the anti-Asian, anti-Aboriginal 'ideas' that became her political motif. The book, though, tells the story of a woman who never understood that her power derived from those dark currents in Australian political life rather than her as an incarnation of them.

She never understood she was just the messenger and not the message. The failure to make that distinction was her undoing because she couldn't grasp the next step; the need to harness the ideology and develop it into meaningful policy rather than repetitive sloganeering. If that were ever possible anyway. Hanson is now a joke, an oddity of political life, reduced to stunts. If she were not so hateful herself, it could almost be sad. The process of public self-destruction began with the airing of her laughable 'assassination' tape for the *Witness* program. The unravelling continued with her viciously opportunistic attack on Cathy Freeman's appointment as Australian of the Year.

The media coverage of Hanson is now of the 'can you believe this?' variety rather than the political fascination to which she was subject earlier in her career.

He observes that these days her new minders:

... rarely let her speak for herself. She has become the political equivalent of Shari Lewis's Lamb Chop.

Meanwhile, One Nation crumbles underneath her. The secretary and vice-president of the Ipswich branch ... recently resigned amid bitter recriminations ...

That is, against her minders. The member for Oxley has been quoted as saying that a truly multicultural society can never be strong and united. She has manipulated and contorted the comments made by President Bill Clinton when he was in Australia that the world is littered with the bodies of people killed in failed and tragic attempts at multiculturalism. This was when we were preparing for the Sydney 2000 Olympics!

If the member for Oxley had listened or understood she would have heard President Clinton speak of ethnic, racial and religious conflicts in the world and she would have noticed that the President concluded by saying about the 2000 Olympics:

There is a lot of evidence that we can all do better than that — and when the world comes to Sydney they will see that — so think about that.

Think about how every day in every way when you bring in people like those, like me, who trace their roots to England, or Ireland or Scotland, in various Asian countries or South Asia or Latin America or the Middle East, every day you do that when the world is looking at you you offer a rebuke to all those who would take away the lives and the futures and the fortunes of the children of this world, because they are different from them.

And I cannot think of a better place in the entire world, a more shining example of how people can come together as one nation and one community, than Sydney — Australia.

A splendid opportunity exists, but throughout Australia — in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Queensland — to show the world how splendidly we have achieved and become a shining example of multiculturalism throughout our nation. Honourable members should reflect on the fact that all we have to do to show this is just be ourselves.

Over my lifetime, Australia has become a nation that is home 5 million immigrants from more than 130 countries. I have grown up watching the ships full of immigrants arrive at Station Pier. My childhood and schooling revolved around playing in the streets and in the homes of many Greek, Italian, Maltese and Polish immigrants. Through that, I was learning and picking up the different cultures. In those days, at first with a

degree of uncertainty, I swapped jam or Vegemite sandwiches for chunky crusty bread dipped in home-made tomato sauce. I learnt Polish songs and dances, I tasted different foods, and I saw the establishment in Port Melbourne of what must have been one of the very early Greek Saturday schools. That was when I first heard the then strange and loud Greek music that now has me instantly on my feet joining in the Greek dancing.

I have enjoyed all these experiences. I have observed families struggling with the language during the hard years when they had just arrived. I have seen the commitment, the desire to settle and do well, the strong work ethic and the willingness to do anything, any job, and the absolute desire to see their children embrace the educational opportunities that abound here. I have seen it all come to fruition, and I still see it today.

Every time I am out in my electorate, or indeed in electorates across Melbourne representing the Premier, I experience the feeling of familiarity — 'I know you. I know the pathway you are on'. I had a similar response during my visit to Italy where you see the pride of the people in their country, their history. It gives you an understanding of the Italian love of fresh fruit and vegetables, why they paint their houses the colours they do, and why they are so deeply committed to family — warm and wonderful as they are.

I consider I have been fortunate indeed, and I trust that this involvement benefits me greatly in my electorate. I take pride in taking ministers out to my electorate to meet with the people and experience first-hand the strong community spirit, the diversity and the warmth that exists in the Oakleigh electorate. With all the highs and lows, with all the joys and sometimes despair, I am honoured to be the member for Oakleigh. I have a strong affinity with this community which I am deeply proud to serve.

In conclusion, I express warmly and clearly the feeling of the people of the Oakleigh electorate and their absolute pride that we have a migrant son as Governor of our state. I commend the government on the hallmarks of its five and a half years of office: the investments, the assets, the gifts it has given to the children of Victoria. The government has looked after their future in a way that would not have been possible under the previous Labor government.

Ms GARBUTT (Bundoora) — I join other members of this house in congratulating the new Governor, Sir James Gobbo, and Lady Gobbo and extend my best wishes to them for the term of their appointment. The appointment has been welcomed by

all of my electorate, but with particular pride by the considerable number of people of Italian descent and by others who have shared the migrant experience and have now become a vibrant part of the life of the state.

I also welcome the new member for Mitcham, who has had an outstanding win with a 16 per cent swing against the government and thereby changed the political atmosphere in this state and in this house.

The proroguing of Parliament and the Governor's speech were part of the government's response to the verdict of the people of Mitcham. Its response was to engage in a massive PR stunt in proroguing Parliament — a stunt that provided us a garden party where people were sipping champagne and eating caviar, which sits very uncomfortably —

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms GARBUTT — I wasn't there, but the members of the other side were most certainly there.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms GARBUTT — It is an outrageous response to the verdict of the people of Mitcham — holding a garden party for the well-heeled. This is the government's response to a 16 per cent swing.

The next policy initiative was to consider — and it is still being considered — providing assistance for Crown Casino, the deserving cause of Ron Walker and Lloyd Williams. During the speeches today, all of this week and last week government members maintained that everything is wonderful and nothing needs to change. What is horrifying about this is that the members opposite have learnt nothing from the result of the Mitcham by-election. They are still not listening to what people are trying to tell them.

If they will not listen to the lesson of a 16 per cent swing in the heartland of Mitcham, they will not listen at all, and it is quite clear that they will not change. The government is hell-bent on pushing along its ideological path.

My electorate is affected by a number of policies that the government needs to change, and if it were listening to people it would change them. But I suggest it will push ahead with its bulldozer mentality and we will see exactly the same policies put in place during this latest session of Parliament.

The major issue in my electorate is the privatisation of the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre. Over the past five years we have put up with headlines like

'Threat to health service', 'Long wait for treatment' and 'Jobs go at the hospital'. We have seen bed closures, jobs lost, waiting lists blowing out, huge waiting times in accident and emergency, and people waiting on trolleys for more than 24 hours.

We have seen an amalgamation with the Repatriation hospital in which veterans felt that their rights and needs were neglected. A consultants' report talked about setting up a private hotel, not a hospital. I hesitate over the word, but it is a private hotel that the consultants' report was pushing. We have seen more and more bed closures and now we are experiencing the result of the government's policy of privatisation and its active campaign overseas of looking for foreign buyers. This is our hospital; this is my community's hospital. This is the hospital that my family, my neighbours and my voters use. It is not the government's to sell.

I have major concerns, as does all of my electorate, about the idea of a private hospital replacing the only public hospital left standing in Bell Street. A 25-year contract will be signed with, perhaps, a foreign owner; and for 25 years the foreign owner will determine what health services are provided by our hospital.

It does not matter whether the needs of the community change. If something is not mentioned in the contract, it will not be addressed. That is the most serious concern about privatisation: we lose the accountability through government to the people. The people will not be able to put pressure on a private company to change what is being delivered or how it is being delivered at the hospital. People will not be able to come to the private company in the way they would come to politicians such as those sitting over there and say, 'We are dissatisfied with this service', 'We need a better service' or 'We need a different service'. That ability to 'keep the bastards honest' will be gone when the hospital is owned by a private company.

For example, the private foreign hospital could decide it will close the accident and emergency section and send ambulances on bypass for days in a row, and the government will not be able to change that decision because the contract has been signed and sealed and is in place for 25 years. Therefore the public aspect will simply disappear. The accountability will go. The community influence will be lost.

We will also see an emphasis on throughput because that is where the money and profit are made. People who cannot be pushed out quickly — patients with chronic illnesses and injuries that do not heal rapidly, enabling them to leave rapidly — will not be welcomed. Aged people whose illnesses do not

improve quickly will not be welcome, and that is not serving the public as the Austin repatriation hospital does now.

Research and teaching will not be profitable; they are a cost to a hospital. Research and teaching carried out at the Austin hospital are world famous, but they will no longer be profitable parts of a foreign-owned hospital, and the teaching aspect of the hospital will be in grave trouble.

The whole proposal to privatise the second-largest public hospital in Victoria is an outrage and a betrayal of the community that I represent. The community is well aware of the contents of Mrs Austin's will, which left the land to the public for a hospital, and it must remain that way. The proposal is a betrayal of the community that has worked for more than a hundred years on fundraising, through various auxiliaries and special campaigns, for that hospital. It is their money that has gone into the hospital; it is not the government's to sell to a foreign owner or to any private owner, and it is a betrayal of the community because the hospital is a reflection of community needs. It should not be a reflection of private profit.

A second issue of major concern in my electorate is the planning policies of the government. There are no planning rules, just guidelines. Communities are in uproar and the tapestry and fabric of communities across my electorate and the area in which I live have been torn apart. The establishment of the Save Our Suburbs group, which this week held a successful meeting attended by more than 1000 angry people, is a reflection of what has been happening in the electorate.

There are many examples in the area where government-owned land has been rezoned, sometimes in secret, then sold off to developers who construct multi-unit developments on small blocks — a type of development that is considered by residents to be overdevelopment of the site. The latest example is the Loyola site. The Banyule council wants the land to be used as a park because there is a shortage of public space there. That application was refused, and now a proposal to build 42 properties on the land is being bulldozed through.

The site of the former Macleod primary school has been important to the local community for more than a hundred years. When the primary school was relocated to the high school site, the people of Macleod wanted to keep the old school building as a community facility. They were allowed to keep it, but at their own cost. That meant they had to pay for the shifting, renovation and upkeep of the building. That is not as possible for a

community as it is for a government. The government should consider the benefit to the community of keeping the building. Otherwise, the people of Macleod will lose it.

The minister secretly rezoned the old SEC site in Greenwood Drive, Bundoora, and the Norris Bank pine plantation site from public purpose use to residential C, denying the public the opportunity to comment on the change. The process denies local communities the opportunity to use public land for the public good. The land will be sold into many private hands, and there will be no possibility of its being used for a park, a school, or anything else that assists and strengthens the community.

The second major problem is the *Good Design Guide*. Because it has no teeth, developers use it only minimally. In effect, there are no controls: provided they meet the bottom line in the guide, developers are free to do what they like. We have seen example after example in Greensborough, Briar Hill, Montmorency, Eltham and Bundoora, where developers are proposing insensitive developments.

There have been massive tree clearances, which developers have used to spite the residents. They have gone ahead and bulldozed trees, even before they have had the permits. In one case, as an act of revenge the developer cut down all the trees to pay back the residents who by objecting prevented it from getting a permit. The outrage has led to the formation of community groups such as the North-East Banyule residents group to campaign on those issues.

The Minister for Planning and Local Government is blaming the councils, but I point out that he monitors those councils. The minister has two portfolios, planning and local government, so he carefully watches what local councils are doing in planning, ensuring that pressure is put on them to allow the government's development-at-all-costs approach to proceed. We recently saw the spectacle of the mayor of Banyule being publicly reprimanded for criticising the minister.

Mr Langdon — You can't speak up in local government!

Ms GARBUTT — You cannot speak up in local government because councils are being monitored, as are the number of appeals against council planning decisions that are taken to the AAT. If the number is above average, the minister will step in and criticise and punish.

Mrs Maddigan — The greedy developer guidelines.

Ms GARBUTT — Exactly, the greedy developer guidelines have replaced good planning rules. It is open slather out there. The developers are going for it, but an outraged community is resisting fiercely.

Education is a top priority for the people of my electorate. It is one of a number of major issues that point to the need for the government to change policies. The people of Bundoora are involved in their schools, and they support their teachers, who are doing a great job. Parents are continually helping out, offering encouragement and taking part in school fundraising activities. But things fall down because the government is not playing its part.

The so-called facts sheet that we recently received with our copies of the *Herald Sun* only adds insult to injury. It is really a lie sheet. Every one of the facts is wrong or misleading and is designed to pull the wool over people's eyes. People know that class sizes are increasing, which is affecting children's capacity to learn. They know that when the government facts sheet talks about class sizes, it is wrong.

Last year the minister conceded that 600 primary school classes had more than 30 students each. That would be a common feature of schools in my electorate. The government trumpets the figures for the number of computers in schools, but more than 75 per cent of the money to purchase them was raised by parents, who had to compete on the street with a lot of other community groups that nowadays also have to fundraise for themselves. The government's claim that it alone has put computers in schools is outrageous.

The government has singled out students with disabilities for special discrimination. The latest outrageous policy involves forcing intellectually disabled people to leave school because they have turned 18. Nobody else has to leave school at that age. That is causing great concern in my community. The Concord special school in Watsonia, which produces excellent results, is feeling the full impact of that new, discriminatory government policy. Many more policies need changing. If the government has listened to the people of Mitcham, it will know that it has to change.

There is only one paragraph in the Governor's speech on environment and conservation, which is my shadow ministerial area. The paragraph is vague and contains no specific comments. Half of it boasts about the government's so-called achievements. There is no recognition that policies need to change or that the people of Mitcham and elsewhere are concerned about environmental exploitation. There is no recognition that people want conservation and not commercialism in

their national parks. The government's attitude to the environment is that you either exploit it or just ignore it. It believes that if the environment cannot make money, it is not worth anything.

The national heritage trust grant scheme has recently been revealed as a massive pork-barrelling exercise. The \$1.25 billion federal program, which the federal government established with money from the one-third sale of Telstra, is not being directed to environmental priorities but is being used as an enormous political slush fund. The evidence is overwhelming.

Coalition seats in Victoria have received 98.6 per cent of the available money, while Labor-held federal seats have received only 1.4 per cent. The average for each coalition seat is \$777 641, compared with an average for Labor seats of just \$14 425. Labor-held rural seats like Burke and Corio received \$131 098 and \$30 368 respectively. But when that is compared with the \$735 525 given to Corangamite, a neighbouring Liberal-held seat, the huge differences in the allocation of funds become apparent. It is a pork-barrelling exercise. The process has been criticised by green groups such as the Australian Conservation Foundation. The head of the foundation, Michael Krockenberger, said it had had concerns:

... since the trust's inception last year about the arrangements, such as a ministerial board and loose requirements in the legislation, which would leave the trust open to abuse and rorting.

Landcare groups have expressed similar concerns. Royce Sample of Gapstead, a Landcare coordinator for 10 years, is reported in the *Australian* of 19 February this year as saying:

... the approval processes of the Landcare scheme, administered as part of the national heritage trust funding, were a mess.

Complaints have been made not only by the groups that you would expect to be interested but by organisations such as the *Australian* newspaper, which has slammed and condemned the process:

Only the naive could believe that Australia's environmental problems would reside mainly in non-urban Liberal or National Party electorates. Indeed, some of the more intractable environmental eyesores are on the outskirts of our city ... We argue that the very shape of the heritage trust takes it out of the direct supervision of the Parliament, depriving it of the transparency needed to assure the public that deals are not being done for reasons of financial, political or environmental expediency.

Its final comment was that the federal government in this case:

... had a mandate to establish the trust. It has not got a mandate to waste the millions of dollars earmarked over the next five years on dubious, politically motivated and unaudited projects.

The tragedy is that good projects that are designed to address serious and high-priority environmental issues have been rolled over by green pork barrelling. The priority has become politics, not the environment. The federal shadow minister has referred the matter to the federal Auditor-General. It is just as well that he will investigate it, because it certainly could not be referred to the Victorian Auditor-General. Thanks to the government, his role has been changed so that he no longer has the ability to do special audits.

This is not just a federal process, it is also a state-based process, so the state government is in it up to its neck. The state government has set up the regional assessment and state assessment panels, and it is the state minister who makes the final recommendations to her federal colleague.

Despite the federal minister refusing to release the names of the panel members, they are easy to get because the members are well known around the traps. When you look to see who has been appointed and who is in control of the process — that is, the minister — you can see how the process has been bent for political aims to produce political outcomes.

A well-known National Party identity, Mr Jeremy Gaylard, heads the process at the state level. He is a failed candidate for National Party preselection, but by crickey he has done well out of the government. He has been handsomely rewarded with plum job after plum job. Now he controls millions of dollars of environmental funds.

From December 1993 he was the chairman of the Melbourne Market Authority. In 1994 he was made Chairman of Commissioners of the Shire of Moira — and I will come back to that. Later that year he was appointed chairman of the Victorian Catchment and Land Protection Council, which in turn appointed the state panel to assess and allocate the grants. In mid-1995 he was appointed chairman of the Sustainable Regional Development Board of the Shepparton irrigation region, and in 1996 he was appointed chair of the catchment management structures review working party. In October 1997 he was appointed to the newly formed Victorian Catchment Management Council.

While he was the head of the Catchment Land Protection Council he was also in charge of a review of the catchment management process. So in turn, he

reviewed old bodies of which he was a member, he was the chair and an important member of the peak body which recommended the establishment of a new structure, and was subsequently appointed as the head of that structure. Mr Gaylard oversees the management of the outrageous river management levy, which is now being applied to all properties in country Victoria. In 1997 he was appointed to the Victorian state assessment panel for the Natural Heritage Trust and is about to be reappointed — and the minister has refused to alter the decision.

I again refer to the Shire of Moira. The results of Mr Gaylard being appointed head of anything are not necessarily beneficial. The ratepayers of Moira shire found that out when an independent audit revealed a black hole of \$17.5 million in the shire's accounts. Mr Gaylard is neither a successful administrator nor a competent manager, yet as a National Party hack he is appointed to job after job by coalition ministers. Now he is in charge of a political process that will produce distorted outcomes. As I said, it is nothing more than pork barrelling.

Unfortunately, environmental priorities are not driving the process, which is essentially political. That is typical of the government's approach to the issue. The environment is missing out — it is not even on the government's list of priorities. The government diverts money to it for political purposes but simply ignores it if it does not suit.

The kerbside recycling program is also in crisis largely because prices for recycled products have been falling, and another fall is on the way. From 1 July the price of recycled glass will drop \$5 a tonne, on top of significant falls over the past 18 months. The average person is committed to recycling. However, as produce prices fall, local councils have to put in more money to keep the program alive. Unfortunately, we are reaching the situation where many will not be able to afford to keep the recycling program going. A recent research report shows that local government is picking up the cost to the tune of \$25 million a year — and the cost is rising.

In the absence of an adequate government response, local government has seized the initiative. Both the MAV and the Australian Local Government Association have established task forces. They are working with ANZEC ministers across the country on a national package for kerbside recycling that will establish best practice models and improve the efficiency of the program. They are also working on a regulatory safety net and on establishing an Australian kerbside recycling alliance.

However, there is concern that those initiatives will not deliver results before 1999 at the earliest, and kerbside recycling could collapse before then. It is becoming too expensive for local government to keep on picking up the tab. Sooner or later councils will decide to opt out, and products that were once recycled will end up in landfill sites.

Local government is committed to reaching a 50 per cent reduction in landfill by 2000. So far it has achieved a 27 per cent reduction, whereas industry has achieved only a 14 per cent reduction. However, the government has not supported the actions of local councils. It has recently legislated to increase the landfill levy on local government from \$2 to \$3 a tonne, and the EPA will be able to cream off 20 per cent. That money could be used to immediately assist local councils — —

An honourable member interjected.

Ms GARBUTT — You gave them pittance. Some were so disgusted with what you gave them that they wanted to hand the cheque back. It went nowhere!

The crisis is continuing. The program is about to fall in a hole. The minister is hiding behind a national process that is too slow. It will be a case of too little, too late. The program will be gone by the time the agreement is ratified.

The government needs to get behind local councils and encourage industry to accept its fair share of responsibility for kerbside recycling and contribute to a fund to meet the cost gap. The minister could use the powers in the act to make industry waste reduction agreements, which the government has so far neglected.

I could quote many other examples of the government's attitude to the environment, which seems to be that you either make money out of it or ignore it. The environment is certainly not on its priority list. There was little mention of the environment in the Governor's speech, and it does not seem to be part of the government's plans.

Those two issues are of great concern. The minister needs to act to change policies that respond to those problems, but essentially it all comes back to the government's values.

The government does not value the environment; it is not setting a priority for conservation. Its priorities are commercial development, exploitation or to simply ignore the problem and hope it goes away.

Mr COLEMAN (Bennettswood) — I too congratulate the government and the Governor on the

delivery of the Governor's speech last Tuesday week. I draw on a paragraph from that speech which I think epitomises the Governor's contribution to this state and the vision laid before this Parliament for the government in the future — a vision the complete antithesis of the ordinary contributions we have heard from members of the opposition. The Governor said this:

The government's approach will lead Victorians as they strive in their own lives and local communities, admittedly at times with great difficulty, to improve their position and the general environs of their lifestyle, and so to balance their own interests with those of an increasingly demanding world. We need therefore to examine what we need to do as a partnership of Victorians to strengthen the freedom and independence we enjoy, create a more vibrant sense of community, and mould a cohesive, caring society.

As an objective for the future those words encapsulate what we should all be trying to achieve for future generations.

In accepting those words, we have all been particularly graced by the appointment of Sir James Gobbo as the Governor of this state. I am sure he, along with his wife, will serve Victoria brilliantly. To date the contributions from both sides of this Parliament indicate clearly that Sir James's appointment has received broad acceptance. As a person for whom society's objectives could be used as a catalyst his personal success and that of his family since arriving in this country will operate as a beacon for many other families — families that have been here for a long time and families that have arrived only recently. Australia is still an open society; it is a place where with dedication, hard work and commitment virtually anybody can achieve the ultimate in community service and self-satisfaction, and I am sure Sir James will equip himself brilliantly in those areas.

Education was one of the issues raised in the Governor's speech. Recently we witnessed the pathetic performance of the honourable member for Footscray, the shadow spokesman for education. He tried to denigrate a process which I believe has been the most successful education initiative undertaken in Victoria for some time. Listening to the opposition you would not think it had 10 years in government to address some of the maintenance issues that have dogged the education system for so long. However, Labor was in government in Victoria from 1982 to 1992 — and we all know that in the five and a half years this government has been in power buildings no longer deteriorate. Over time the outgoing Labor government had an opportunity to devote some funds to the maintenance of properties. But why couldn't it? Simply because, as in so many other areas of its public

administration, it was unable to take on the change in bureaucratic structures to accord with what was happening in the community. In many areas of government administration there have been similar outcomes in local government and in the education system.

There was a surplus of schools in some parts of the state and a demand for new school accommodation in others. The previous government was unable to achieve any outcomes and was left with a considerable maintenance backlog because it tried to maintain too many structures. The Labor government was disinclined to take on the teacher unions that were dictating the process, and as a result, we were oversupplied in some areas and undersupplied in others. My electorate of Bennettswood has experienced that to the full. The incoming government's decision to devote funds from the sale of school properties and to reinvest those funds in other school properties in the immediate area has considerably improved the structural arrangements for the conduct of education in this state.

Mount Waverley Primary School has a long history; it served an area similar to that serviced by the Bayview primary school. The decision was made to close the Bayview primary school because it had a history of being unable to maintain enrolments. The two schools amalgamated and relocated to the Mount Waverley Primary School site — a large site accommodating a range of buildings of varying age and all dilapidated. Some \$700 000 has been spent on the school, which will give honourable members an idea of what was required in upgrades to provide improved facilities for staff and students and to correct some of the difficulties created by the location of the buildings. As a result the school has evolved into a much more cohesive environment, and I am sure many benefits will flow from it. The school has improved considerably, and I congratulate members of the school council involved in undertaking that work.

The same thing has occurred at the Mount Waverley North Primary School. A decision was made to close the Narmara primary school. However, in a geographic sense the students found their way back to Mount Waverley North Primary School without a lot of difficulty. Here again there has been a considerable refurbishment of buildings both internally and externally and the school is able to enjoy increasing enrolments. Such a cohesive school community is a credit to the people who have been involved in the planning to the present stage. The school is attracting students from well outside the area. Essex Heights Primary School, where some of the Waverley North children now attend, has been vastly improved.

Buildings have been relocated to provide a considerable area for school meetings and assemblies, which has added significantly to the school's educational outcomes. Roberts McCubbin Primary School and what was the Box Hill South primary school and Bennettswood primary school were closed and the site was taken up by the Burwood campus of Deakin University.

Roberts McCubbin, the school created out of those two settings, has recently been the beneficiary of a significant upgrade. Again the school council determined to provide the best educational opportunities for the communities. As a result of the council's contributions, that money has been well spent and the school presents in wonderful order. Orchard Grove Primary School, to its credit, has been able to amalgamate four schools onto one site. The three pre-existing sites in a fairly close area have now been redeveloped and Orchard Grove has a vibrant school population and a very supportive parent group. In turn the school has made some significant advances as a result. However, it is not confined to primary schools.

Secondary schools, including Forest Hill Secondary College, have also been through that process, and one of its campuses occupies a site adjacent to Orchard Grove Primary School. Mount Waverley Secondary College previously occupied two sites separated by approximately 5 kilometres and has now redeveloped a junior annexe with a school population of approximately 1600 on the site of the former Waverley North Primary School. It is a major contributor to education in the eastern suburbs and is recognised as a school of excellence by the Department of Education and, as the number of enrolments indicates, by a substantial group of parents.

The Burwood campus of Deakin University has been the beneficiary of substantial commonwealth and state funds. It is a major university campus that is attended by a significant number of students. Claims made by the honourable member for Footscray about the deterioration of education must be judged against the clear evidence of the successes. The opposition continues with negative comments, yet the successes are clearly visible. Investment is continuing and the outcomes are on the board. The government's dedication to improving schools is to its great credit.

During the adjournment debate of 25 February the Leader of the Opposition used this coward's castle to attack Mr Jeremy Gaylard and a member for Koonung Province in the other place, the Honourable Bruce Atkinson. Undoubtedly Mr Atkinson will respond adequately to that attack. Having just heard the

honourable member for Bundoora complete her contribution it is clear who was the author of those comments made by Leader of the Opposition — they were the result of the selective use of research by the honourable member for Bundoora. I place on record that Mr Gaylard has made a substantial contribution as both a volunteer and an appointed official in advancing rural issues in Victoria.

Events at the Shire of Moira have been rolled in as part of the process of denigrating Mr Gaylard's public standing. Listening to the opposition one would conclude that Mr Gaylard had been appointed to official positions only since the Kennett government came to power and was a National Party nominee. The information being peddled is wrong on both counts.

As part of his community involvement dating back to the 1980s, Mr Gaylard has been involved with the Shepparton Agricultural Society as a member for 17 years, as chairman from 1985 to 1987 and vice-chairman from 1989 to 1991 — before the government was elected. He operated a successful business in Shepparton for some considerable time. Clearly he has a high standing in his district and community and peers recognise his capabilities.

He has held the following positions: chairman of the South Shepparton community house, chairman of the horse committee of the Victorian Agricultural Societies Association from 1987 to 1989, chairman of the association's finance and insurance committee from 1989 to 1991, a commissioner on the Broken River Improvement Trust from 1987 to 1994, and an executive member of the Shepparton and District Tourism Association. Those appointments came not from his membership of a municipal council but as a result of his own input in the area.

Mr Gaylard was also chairman of the Shepparton Preserving Company's relocation task force and convenor of Goulburn Valley Agecare, which set up a counselling service for rural people. He worked closely with the Italian senior citizens organisation on the establishment and refurbishment of its clubrooms and instigated council support for the Albanian community, which has a strong presence in Shepparton because of its heavy involvement with fruit production. Clearly Mr Gaylard established a standing in the community long before the government came to office.

Mr Gaylard has also enjoyed a public career. He was mayor of Shepparton from 1988 to 1990, a city councillor from 1986 to 1994, inaugural chairman of the Shepparton-Kyabram-Rodney Development Corporation, was very much involved in economic

stimulus in the broader Shepparton irrigation area and was vice-president of the Victorian Agricultural Societies Association.

A significant achievement of the former Labor government was putting the question of salinity and its impact on rural production into context and attracting commonwealth funding. Mr Gaylard is an irrigator on a farming property and for some time has had concerns about the impact of salinity. He was a member of the Salinity Program Advisory Council, an organisation that was involved in putting into place probably the most successful salinity mitigation program in Australia in the Shepparton irrigation area.

As a result, Mr Gaylard was a very significant advocate for his community. It should not surprise honourable members to learn that he was appointed by the then Labor government, so these are not positions he came to while this government has been in power. The Labor government appointed Mr Gaylard as a member of the Agribusiness Council of Victoria from 1990 to 1991. He was a member of the State Landcare Committee in the latter part of the Kirner Labor government. We have heard negative comments about the application of Landcare programs, but Mr Gaylard was appointed by the Labor government to the state assessment panel.

Such was his standing in his community that the Labor government appointed him to many of these organisations. In 1991 and 1992 he was a member of the rural affairs committee of cabinet. Not only was he able to provide a Labor government with deliberative advice about the application of Landcare, he was asked to draw up rural policy. It is not bad for someone who is described as a National Party hack to be appointed by a Labor government to those positions! Since that time he has continued serving his community. In 1990 he was appointed by the Kirner Labor government to the Murray Darling Basin Advisory Council.

I had the privilege of holding a ministerial position in 1992 and I had no problem appointing Mr Gaylard to undertake a number of tasks on my behalf. He is able to give a deliberative opinion; he is well connected to the community he serves and he gives advice that should be considered in all circumstances. In 1993 I appointed him as chairman of the review of regional water authorities and his recommendations resulted in significant changes to water administration in this state. Clearly his appointment as chairman of the Melbourne Market Authority to oversee the fruit and vegetable wholesale markets was assisted by his intimate knowledge of the horticultural industry in the Goulburn Valley and his good working relations with the Italian and Albanian communities, both of whom are

significant producers in that market. Since 1994 he has been the chairman of the sustainable regional development committee of the Goulburn Valley and is continuing as a member of a number of other organisations.

The attack on Mr Gaylard, mounted in this place on behalf of some councillors of the Shire of Moira, is unfortunate but is not something we are unused to. The honourable member for Bundoorra repeated the claim that there was a black hole of \$17.5 million in the budget of the Shire of Moira. Honourable members who were here when the Labor government's proposed amalgamation of municipalities and shires was attempted — the responsibility of the then honourable member for Reservoir, the Honourable Jim Simmonds — know how difficult the task was, but this government was able to succeed in addressing the matter.

The Shire of Moira is the product of five municipalities previously existing along the River Murray that always had difficulties. They stretched along a considerable length of the river and had disparate communities. The critical issue for consideration in the amalgamation was the administration of the former councillors and Mr Gaylard was appointed as chief commissioner of the newly formed shire because of his skills. Over a long period members of councils such as Cobram and people in towns like Yarrowonga endeavoured to build their own economic structures to support their own communities.

The objective was to bring together those municipalities to reduce administrative costs and provide a better service to ratepayers. Under Chief Commissioner Gaylard's leadership that objective was achieved, but it resulted in some tensions. When appointed as councillors of the Shire of Moira, some former councillors of the pre-existing shires wanted to revert to the old municipal structures, which would not have been of benefit to ratepayers. More importantly, some councillors wanted to argue old issues. The situation in Moira is not dissimilar from that in some other municipalities in the state.

The alleged \$17.5 million black hole is made up of superannuation liabilities of \$2.6 million; an adjustment in the rating year from a June base to a March base of \$5.6 million; a depreciation allowance of \$4.5 million — the inclusion of depreciation in council accounts has occurred only since the amalgamation of councils but was important to ensure that they operated on business lines; a cost of \$800 000 for a change in the accounting standards using the Australian Accounting Standard 27; and \$2.8 million for redundancies. One of

the criticisms made of the commissioners is that they did not take on the task of reducing administrative costs, yet included in the \$17.5 million is \$2.8 million for redundancies! Other items amounted to \$1.2 million. Honourable members should note that \$12.7 million of that total related to accounting charges which apply to all councils.

It is a misrepresentation of what has occurred to mount the case that has been put by the incoming councillors so they can avoid undertaking some of the work left by the commissioners. The commissioners at Moira have undertaken a substantial task. In the first year of their appointment much of the area was flooded. A substantial fight was engaged in with property owners about their endeavours to redirect floodwaters and about the costs of the damage caused by those floodwaters.

To the credit of the commissioners, the Shire of Moira is now a vibrant municipality. I am sure that in time the councillors who are leading the debate will realise the significance of the improvements that have been made. They have a community that can address some of the major issues that were not able to be addressed by individual councillors. Significant drainage issues arise throughout the municipality and it is improper that one part of the municipality should be treated differently from others.

In leading the attack against Mr Gaylard, the opposition ought to use the facts. A former Labor government appointed him to a number of positions because its members recognised his skills. I am sure that if she were asked the Honourable Joan Kirner would agree that the Labor government was willing to take his advice and that in all cases his advice was respected. The opposition's attack on Mr Gaylard based on the figures declared in the Shire of Moira denigrates Parliament and does nothing to help the advancement of Victoria.

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — The Governor referred to education a number of times during his speech while opening the second session of the 53rd Parliament. Education is the key to a better society and a better future for Victoria. It is essential to the development of the individual, the enrichment of society and the growth of our economy. Education opens the door to opportunity and is the springboard to social and economic development. School education is one of the most significant enterprises in the state. It involves more people and their hopes and aspirations than any other activity.

Education is also crucial if Victorians are to meet the challenges posed by a rapidly changing world. The information age is, first and foremost, an education age. As President Clinton said last month in his State of the Union address, 'It is a period in which education must start at birth and continue through a lifetime'. Labor considers education spending not as a cost but as an investment in people, who are Victoria's most important resource. That is why we believe the state's greatest strength lies in its people and why our economic plans for Victoria's future include a substantial boost in the state's investment in education.

I put on the record the thanks of this side of the house for the work of the parents and teachers who have kept the state education system running over the past five years. Victoria's schools have been badly hit by the Kennett government's savage attacks on the public education system. But things would be much worse if it were not for the hard work and dedication of our teachers and parents. Parents have had to raise record sums to keep their schools in essentials such as computers and specialist staff. They have had to fight cases all the way to the Supreme Court to defeat the government's attempts to discriminate against Victorian state school children. Teachers have taken on tasks above and beyond the call of duty to keep our schools functioning at their maximum capacity.

Over the past few weeks the taxpayers of Victoria have been subjected to one of the most dishonest and extraordinary misinformation campaigns ever in the history of the state. Over the past few weeks alone the government has wasted hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers money on advertisements and newspaper inserts associated with its 'Victorian Education, the facts' campaign. There was another one in today's *Herald Sun* about per capita funding for government school education.

So far at least 11 advertisements have appeared in the *Age*, the *Herald Sun*, the *Bendigo Advertiser* and others at a total cost approaching \$100 000. The full-page advertisements on the day of the recent teachers' strike cost nearly \$50 000.

One inserted leaflet — the one I am holding — repeats the dishonest claims the government makes about education. The document, which has been paid for by taxpayers, is worthless because it is full of lies. In recent weeks alone nearly \$250 000 has been spent on that campaign.

The minister also launched the expensive and glossy 'Learning Technologies in Victorian Schools' leaflet,

which cost more than \$20 000 to produce. When one adds all that up —

Mr E. R. Smith interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — We will come to the lies being peddled by you and others opposite.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Richardson) — Order! The Leader of the Opposition used an unparliamentary expression — 'the lies being peddled by you and others' — while pointing to an honourable member. I ask him to withdraw and to keep in mind the traditions and standards of this house.

Mr BRUMBY — I am always mindful of the traditions of this place. My recollection of the standing orders is that I am in order in using the expression, but in deference to you, Mr Acting Speaker, I withdraw.

The real reasons for this campaign are obvious. Firstly, because of its savage cutbacks, the government has absolutely lost the trust of Victorian parents; and secondly, the Minister for Education is trying to position himself for the leadership of the Liberal Party by increasing his profile.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Yes, they are standing behind me, supporting me, not like your mob. The Minister for Education is waiting with the knife poised over the Premier's back waiting for another mistake — or another bungled day in Parliament like last Tuesday. If the government is going so well, why is it having to spend hundreds of thousands of taxpayers' dollars on this education campaign?

I turn to the claims made in the leaflets. The first claim is:

Spending on government school education in Victoria has increased by \$351 million, or 14.5 per cent, over the past five years.

That is a rotten lie. An analysis of the budget papers since 1992–93 shows that spending has declined in real terms by 3.8 per cent. Almost \$82 million has been slashed from recurrent spending on government schools since 1992. The simplest way to explain the assault on education is to say that the salaries of 9000 teachers have been removed from the education budget. How can it be that real expenditure has increased when 9000 teachers have been removed?

The second claim is:

More than three-quarters of Victorian students stay at school to complete year 12.

That is deliberately dishonest and fails to give the figure for government schools. The government has aggregated all the figures so that the government school figure is included with all the others. The Bureau of Statistics figures released in January reveal that in 1997 the year 12 retention rate for government schools was 69.8 per cent, a massive fall from a high of 77 per cent in 1992. In some regional areas — I know Gippsland is probably the worst — the figure is as low as 59 per cent.

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — The honourable member for Tullamarine interjects that they can get jobs. He is about to jump ship to Gisborne because he knows he will lose his marginal seat of Tullamarine. He may wish to examine the latest ABS job figures, which show that at 35.9 per cent Victoria had the highest youth unemployment rate of any state in Australia.

The third claim is that:

Victoria's student-teacher ratio is 15.2 students to every teacher.

That is another dishonest and deliberate misleading claim. Principals, assistant principals and library teachers are included in the ratio, although they do not take classes. The Industry Commission report quoted earlier also noted:

While remaining in the national range, Victoria recorded the largest average increase in student-teacher ratios across jurisdictions, both for primary and secondary schools, between 1992 and 1996.

The fourth claim in the propaganda leaflet is:

In 1996–97, government subsidies resulted in \$33.2 million being spent on more than 15 000 new computers for Victoria's government schools.

We know the facts about that one. Because the government contributes only \$1 in \$3, local communities have been forced to raise most of the money to pay for their schools' computers. So although there has been a \$25 million boost for computers in schools, \$18 million of it has been contributed by parents. Many of the computers are old. In some areas the ratio is one computer for every 25 students. The Minister for Education is attempting to take the credit for the number of computers in schools when all the hard work has been done by parents.

The fifth claim is that languages are a priority. Although languages other than English qualify as a key learning area, the severe teacher shortage means many

schools are forced to use untrained teachers, student teachers, parent helpers and videos to teach students.

Debate interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.05 p.m.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Budget: education and health

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Premier to the fact that he has told Victorians via the *Herald Sun* today that he is about to engage in lolly-jar economics in which schools and hospitals suffering 'stress loads' can ring the Premier for a small lick but not for a 'large lick'. Is it not a fact that the Premier made this announcement while the Treasurer is out of the state because the Premier knows the Treasurer will be absolutely and totally opposed to such a lolly-jar approach to government expenditure?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — I answer in my capacity as the Premier and as the Acting Treasurer. Unfortunately for the Leader of the Opposition, this is not recent news as it was announced some weeks ago. When the budget comes down we hope to make a small amount of money available in education and health to be applied to some schools and hospitals that may find themselves under particular stress for one reason or another.

Unfortunately, the report in the *Herald Sun* this morning was incorrect. I only gave the interview yesterday and I would have hoped that within 24 hours there would have been consistency in the substance of it. Unfortunately what I said as portrayed by the journalist was that the entire government surplus of \$175 million surplus may be applied to schools and hospitals. That is not the case. What I said last night and what is on the record is that we hope to have a small amount of money available to be used by schools or hospitals where they are in particular stress positions. The schools and hospitals will make their applications to the relevant ministers and departments.

Mr Brumby interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Mr KENNETT — I cannot understand the stupidity of this man that he makes such an inane interjection. There are approximately 2000 schools in Victoria. It is true that from time to time, perhaps because of changes

of population or the absence of a teacher, schools have particular points of stress that do not require \$5 million to fix but simply require a rather immediate response from the department to meet those needs.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

Mr KENNETT — I happen to think that is a good policy. It is most apt that governments should be trying, with the money they are now making, not to introduce a program that may be across all schools and hospitals but actually tries to take into account — —

Mr Brumby interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition has asked his question. I specifically ask him to cease interjecting across the table.

Mr KENNETT — It will be one of the dividends we are able to return to Victorians because after five years we have the finances of this state back under control. We intend to apply those surpluses carefully and cautiously in a certain manner and order of priority. As I have said publicly previously, education and health are the two greatest service priorities confronting any government. Health accommodates about half our budget expenditure and education a little more than \$3 billion.

Health and education take approximately three quarters of the budget. Therefore, if we can find ways to do things slightly better rather than applying general programs across the board, we will do it. I have no doubt that it will be very well received by the community, particularly by schools and hospitals faced with temporary stress that can be overcome with the injection of a little more money. That has been well worth it.

Mr Bracks interjected.

Mr KENNETT — The honourable member for Williamstown interjects that this is in some way a slush fund. How can it be a slush fund if the government is taking part of the surplus that has resulted from its good management and saying publicly, 'This money is going to be used for education or in health'? It may be \$10 to \$15 million for each area, and it will be applied specifically to those areas under stress. It is a good policy, and I am sure schools, hospitals and the community will agree.

Again members of the community can only look down at how the Leader of the Opposition performs in this

place and literally shake their heads to think that there is the potential for him one day to be part of the government of this state.

Migration and humanitarian program

Mr WELLS (Wantima) — Will the Premier advise the house of Victoria's submission to the commonwealth regarding the size and composition of the 1998-99 migration and humanitarian program.

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — It is on the public record that the government in Victoria has long supported an increase in the number of skilled migrants to Australia and, importantly, the maintenance of current levels of family and what I could only describe as humanitarian migration. The government has stated in its pledge to the people of Victoria that it regards the cultural diversity of the community as one of the state's greatest assets.

Research has shown that immigration benefits Australia both economically and socially. It generates economies of scale. We have been asked to make a submission to the federal government on future immigration levels. In its submission the government has argued for an increase of 50 000. Immigration this year will be only 68 000 for Australia as a whole, and Victoria is out there very publicly arguing for an increase in skilled migration of 50 000.

At the moment a number of communities around the world are desperate and their people would be willing to settle away from the countries in which they currently reside. Those people would bring not only great skills but also great enterprise to this country and would grow the Australian economy. One example is South Africa. At the moment thousands of families from hard working backgrounds and with great skills are desperately trying to settle in other countries. Australia has benefited from South African migration, particularly Sydney and Perth, and to a lesser degree, here.

The government argues strongly that it is time for Australians to recognise that they should be prepared to put the long-term interests of the country before the short-term political considerations that are obviously part of any political party's consideration leading into an election. Given natural birth trends in Australia an immigration level of 68 000 is too low to provide growth. The government will argue the case very strongly. The government does it up front, recognising that some in the community are arguing against higher immigration levels.

An immigration level of 68 000 is below the requirements of the country. Unless we are prepared to attract more skilled migrants to the nation, and particularly to Victoria, our population level will stagnate and we will not be able to maximise the opportunities we would like to see developed. I hope the Victorian government's submissions will be supported by the opposition.

Mr Baker — Why didn't you make a ministerial statement and have a proper debate about it?

The SPEAKER — Order! Why doesn't the honourable member for Sunshine stop interjecting and making statements.

Mr Baker — You are abusing question time.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Sunshine will cease interjecting.

Mr Baker — Absolute abuse.

The SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Sunshine will cease interjecting. If he interjects again, I will simply name him.

Mr KENNETT — I trust that the opposition will support this enlightened policy so that we might have a bipartisan approach on the issue of immigration, not only for Australia but also for Victoria.

Crown Casino: property trust

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — I refer the Premier to a detailed report in today's *Australian Financial Review* which reveals that the office of the Minister for Finance confirmed on at least three occasions that it had received a formal submission for a listed property trust from Crown Casino on 11 February this year, seven days before the Australian Stock Exchange was notified, a matter which is now subject to a formal Australian Securities Commission inquiry.

Is it not a fact that the minister and the government have today conspired in an attempt to protect Crown from ASC prosecution by claiming that the submission was not received until after the ASC was notified, a claim that the minister, the Premier and the government know to be untrue?

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — I do not know where this man dreams up these pathetic sorts of questions from.

Mr Brumby interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition!

Mr KENNETT — The Leader of the Opposition sets out every day to be against something. He is never for anything — he is never for Victorians and he is never for the people who find jobs. He and the Labor Party must go into a little huddle and think, 'What can we be against today — what can we try to pull down today? We get these absolutely pathetic questions that lack any consistency or thought process; we get blunders by the honourable member for Niddrie, and attacks on personalities.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I would like the Premier to answer the questions without interjections from honourable members. It simply invites a broader answer.

Mr KENNETT — Mary will have your seat! The Leader of the Opposition uses adjectives — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr KENNETT — What did you say about Sunshine? You said the honourable member for Sunshine should be here before 10 o'clock. Is that what you think of him?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house will come to order.

Mr KENNETT — As most of the public would appreciate, the government has received an approach from Crown. That approach has been considered in due course, as I said it would. The Leader of the Opposition said he had information that we were about to give them a \$50 million bonus. He was wrong again. He has no substance, and his question today was also absolutely wrong.

The government does not conspire with anyone; it works with the people of Victoria to create things of value, such as jobs, and to restore the state to a position of strength, confidence and pride. I feel very sorry for the Leader of the Opposition because day after day he illustrates to honourable members and people outside that he comes in here without any strategy at question time.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier's remarks are not now relevant to the question asked.

Mr KENNETT — For the third time this week question time for the opposition has been, from anyone's point of view, totally without strategic core.

Operation Bushfire Blitz

Mr SPRY (Bellarine) — Will the Minister for Police and Emergency Services outline to the house the success of Operation Bushfire Blitz in providing fire-prone communities with first-hand information on how best to prepare their homes and families against the threat of bushfire?

Mr W. D. McGRATH (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I thank the honourable member for Bellarine for his question about this very important issue. When the government realised in late October, early November that, because of the climatic conditions, Victoria was facing potential outbreaks of bushfires of the seriousness of 1983, the Minister for Conservation and Land Management and I brought together two emergency management teams, consisting of NRE personnel responsible for fire preparedness and fire suppression and personnel from the Country Fire Authority under the leadership of Mr Len Foster.

A number of issues were canvassed at that meeting. Subsequently the Minister for Conservation and Land Management and I put a submission to government for additional financial resources. The government, through the Premier, Treasurer and cabinet, supported the provision of \$11 million in additional funds to put in place a range of strategies to bring about a greater degree of effort in relation to fire preparedness and fire suppression. The government can demonstrate that that investment — we still have another four or five weeks of potential high fire risk — has been beneficial to Victoria. Honourable members would be well aware of the large fire that was brought under control in the alpine region and the recent fires at Frankston. They would also be aware of the fires that occurred yesterday, a total fire ban day, at Macedon. There was a sense of calm about the Macedon fire yesterday even though the area had faced a similar onslaught in 1983. That was simply because of Operation Bushfire Blitz, which has involved qualified facilitators employed by the Country Fire Authority arranging street-corner meetings, speaking to approximately 33 000 people and addressing 5000 people at public meetings in high risk fire-prone areas around the fringe of metropolitan Melbourne and other districts around Victoria. People involved in those discussions and consultations now have a good understanding of how they should react in the face of a wildfire. It is fair to say that the calm experienced yesterday at Macedon was very much due to the preparedness of people who were informed of

how to manage their properties, themselves and their families in the face of oncoming fire.

The government has also introduced the sky-crane helicopter. Although an expensive operation, the helicopter has the capacity to lift 9000 litres of water in 40 seconds. The water is distributed at the leading edge of the fire that ground units have difficulty reaching. The sky-crane helicopter and other aircraft are very effective in ensuring that the leading edge of the fire is held rather than allowing it to streak ahead fanned by the very hot, high winds experienced on days of total fire ban.

Operation Bushfire Blitz, in conjunction with other initiatives put in place by the Minister for Conservation and Land Management and her department, me, the Country Fire Authority, the volunteers who make up the Country Fire Authority and the wider community, is the real reason there has been no loss of life or homes in Victoria during the fire period. It is well worth the cost of approximately \$400 000!

I emphasise that there are still four to six weeks of the high fire-risk season to run. I hope Victoria can maintain the community support the Country Fire Authority and the Department of Natural Resources have experienced and ensure that all Victorians and their properties get through the fire season without harm.

Minister for Finance: credit cards

Mr HULLS (Niddrie) — I refer the Premier to the fact that his Minister for Finance oversees the rules in relation to corporate credit cards which clearly state that misuse of the cards, whether or not restitution is made, may result in charges being laid. I refer to the minister's emphatic statements in the Legislative Council last week that 'the cardholder is required to use the card for business purposes only', that he and his staff have followed the rules for credit cards, and that he does not condone the use of corporate credit cards for personal use. In light of the fact that the Minister for Finance used his taxpayer-funded corporate credit card at the MGM Grand Hotel in Las Vegas in late 1996 for personal purchases and has therefore breached his own guidelines and has misled Parliament, will the Premier now immediately sack his minister?

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr KENNETT (Premier) — I hope the honourable member for Niddrie just keeps going like this day in, day out between now and the next election. He is irrelevant to Victorians, as is his party. As I have said so many times before, the honourable member for

Niddrie, the Leader of the Opposition and the former upper house member, Mr David White, are directly responsible for keeping all their colleagues in opposition. They will be collectively responsible for keeping them there after the next election.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr KENNETT — As I have said before, opposition members can ask questions about credit cards every day until the cows come home.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr KENNETT — That's good, because the public is not listening to you! The guidelines on the use of credit cards are just that: guidelines. They will continue to be used on the basis of common sense. That applies to all my ministers and to the public servants who have been issued with them to continue their good work on behalf of the people of Victoria.

Schools: information technology

Mr JOHN (Bendigo East) — Will the Minister for Education inform the house of the latest developments in providing computer technology to Victorian schools?

Mr GUDE (Minister for Education) — Unlike the honourable member for Footscray, who usually gets his mouth into higher gear than his brain, the honourable member for Bendigo East actually goes out to his schools, understands their needs and achieves good things for them.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Let's not have a diatribe between the Minister for Transport and the honourable member for Footscray across the chamber.

Mr GUDE — Prior to the last election the government made a commitment of \$20 million over four years to provide for the need for computer technology in our schools, and in particular to specify and try to install as many multimedia-capable PCs as possible into the system. I am pleased to inform the house of more good news for kids in Victorian schools.

The government will be providing \$6.7 million in 1998 to more than 1200 schools to facilitate the purchase of computer equipment worth \$27 million. The money will be provided to schools consistent with the previous scheme on a \$1-for-\$3 basis. The government anticipates that schools will purchase 15 000 new multimedia computers, 1700 notebook computers and 500 file servers. The program will ensure that the

government's commitment to a target of one computer to five students by the year 2000 will be met. It is very exciting going into schools and seeing the way the youngsters are taking to information technology and also seeing the principals and teachers working with them to provide them with quality educational outcomes.

There has been an enormous demand for this subsidy. In fact, it has been oversubscribed by our schools. I hear the jibe from the other side that schools do not have the funds, but I say to the members opposite they should go out into their schools and have a look. They should talk to the principals and to the parent bodies who will tell them that they want to be part of this fantastic government scheme that is delivering quality outcomes in schools.

I will give the house a few examples of how schools have embraced computers in school programs. The Leader of the Opposition probably would not know because he has not been to the Meadow Heights Primary School, but I have attended the schools in Broadmeadows in his absence. Meadow Heights has received \$24 000 and it has contributed \$95 000 to purchase 65 desktop computers.

The honourable member for Footscray is always bleating about there being no funding for schools, but he should go to the Footscray City College in his electorate, which will receive \$15 000 and contribute \$60 000 to purchase 30 new PCs. He should rush and get his press release out to try and take credit for the things that he knocks in our schools. Kings Park Secondary College in Keilor will receive \$45 000 and contribute \$183 000 to purchase 77 PCs and two file servers. Melbourne Girls College in Richmond will receive \$62 000 and provide \$247 000 to purchase 133 new PCs, 11 notebooks and 3 file servers.

I shall give one example of a country initiative in the electorate of the honourable member for Bendigo East who asked the question — I know how active he is in his schools: the government will provide some \$200 000 to Bendigo Senior Secondary College and the school will provide \$600 000 for the purchase of 300 PCs, 88 notebooks and one file server. I congratulate the honourable member for Bendigo East and I again encourage all honourable members, no matter which side of the house they are on, to pay a visit to their schools and see what fantastic things are happening.

Education: funding

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I refer the Minister for Education to the new literacy targets for Victorian schools and the fact that the secret 1996 research report by the minister's own Caldwell committee recommended a substantial increase in funding and a reduction in class sizes for prep to grade 2 and I ask: is it not a fact that the Premier today scuttled any prospect of a real boost to education funding because the minister is currently counting the numbers to topple the Premier from the Liberal Party leadership?

Mr GUDE (Minister for Education) — The only people counting numbers are in the Labor caucus. The only place where numbers can be bought is in the Labor Party!

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! If the house does not come to order I will simply go to the next item of business.

Mr GUDE — I understand the envy on that side of the house. Let us look at the numbers in the house — we have two to one!

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The time for raising questions without notice has expired!

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed.

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — The sixth claim that has been made by the government is that since 1992 funding to students with disabilities and impairments has increased by more than \$50 million. It is another lie. In 1997 the Kennett government expelled more than 1200 intellectually disabled students from schools just because they turned 18 years, after cutting \$17 million from the budget of the Minister for Education. The Supreme Court later found that the policy 'directly discriminates' against disabled students and was introduced in a 'harsh and unsympathetic manner'.

The facts that I have laid out today rebut all the claims made by the government. They are confirmed by two recent reports on Victoria's education system which totally demolish the claims that have been made by the

minister. They expose the lies, the hypocrisy and the double standards that are apparent in Victoria.

The first report, the 1998 *Report on Government Services* prepared by the Industry Commission for the steering committee for the review of commonwealth-state service provision, shows the true extent of damage inflicted by the Victorian government on Victoria's education system. The report indicates, firstly, that Victoria was the only state that has reduced expenditure on education — indeed, since 1992–93 expenditure on education in this state has had a 10 per cent nominal cut. Secondly, it shows that Victoria had the lowest expenditure per full-time student of all the states. Thirdly, it reveals that the Kennett government spends \$300 less per government school student than other states in Australia — 5.5 per cent lower than the Australian average. Fourthly, the report indicates that the Kennett government spends \$380 less than the Australian average per student in all schools. Fifthly, it shows that the Kennett government's expenditure on primary school students is \$257 less than the Australian average. At the same time, Victoria's education assets have been sold off at breakneck speed. Between 1995 and 1996, \$1.7 billion in assets, or 25 per cent of the value of the capital stock, was sold off.

On Monday the latest Commonwealth Grants Commission study was released. Yesterday it received some coverage in the *Age* in an article with the headline, 'Victoria's still the country's top taxing state'. It shows that despite being the highest taxing state with a tax burden in 1996–97 some 8.3 per cent higher than the national average, Victoria was spending just 88 per cent of the national average spent on education. It is important to understand that Victoria is the highest taxing and charging state in Australia, taxing way above the state average but spending just 88 per cent of the national average on education.

According to the grants commission's figures education spending in Victoria was 12 per cent below the national average in actual dollars and 4 per cent below after adjusting for costs. TAFE fared worst, but Victorian primary schools received 7 per cent less funding than other states. The report concluded that Victoria now spends the lowest amount per student in both primary and secondary schools. In the same period New South Wales and Queensland, our major competitor states, increased education funding by about 6 per cent. One would have thought in those circumstances that it was time to put \$175 million back into state education or health services.

However, today we saw another humiliating change of position, a backdown by the Premier, who was

previously out there talking about \$175 million for education and health and today, in question time, what does he say? He offers a lolly-jar approach in which he says he will provide about \$15 million to the Victorian education system for a political slush fund through which it will be possible to ring up the Premier to get something out of the lolly jar and to get a small lick, but not a large lick. The opposition says it wants real resources for the state education system.

The real facts about state education are these: fact 1, the government has removed 9000 teachers and closed 360 schools; fact 2, teacher-student ratios have blown out; fact 3, retention rates in our schools have crashed to below 70 per cent and Queensland, with all of its difficulties in the remote and rural areas, has now overtaken Victoria in state school retention rates; fact 4, Victoria is now spending no more than 88 per cent of the national average on education and less in real terms than it was in 1981–82, the last year of the Thompson Liberal government; and fact 5 is that class sizes have increased dramatically.

I alert Parliament today to a survey my office undertook among a random selection of state primary schools in the south-eastern suburbs. Four schools were selected from those areas, and a compilation of the class sizes was obtained from prep to grade 6. Of the 52 classes in the four schools only four were under the internationally recognised optimal benchmark of 25. There were 14 classes of 30 or more. In school 1 there is a prep grade of 30; school 4, grade 1, two classes of 32 students each and classes in grade 5 of 30 and 32. This is a long way from the education minister's boast of 1 teacher to every 15.2 students. It exposes the myth, the dishonesty and the misrepresentation of that claim. The fact is that 14 classes out of 52 contain more than 30 students.

Where it really counts in a world based increasingly on knowledge, innovation, literacy and numeracy, Victoria is going backwards.

Fact 6 is that Victoria's key comparative advantage as the nation's best educated state has gone; fact 7 — and I want to spend some time on this — is that inequality is worse today in the Victorian education system than at any time since the 1930s. I will go into that because the best way to measure the degree of inequality in state schools is to compare the number of high achievers, those students who obtained a TER score of approximately between 40 and 50, and 7.5 per cent of the total in each school and region, particularly in subjects that open the door to the prestigious professions of law, medicine and accounting.

Assisted by Melbourne University academic Janet McCalman, my office undertook a detailed analysis of the outcomes for VCE high achievers in 1997. The analysis reveals a picture of breathtaking inequality that has dramatically worsened as a result of the policies of the Kennett government. The findings were that in the eastern region the average percentage of high achievers per school was 6.28 per cent; in the southern region the average was 4.1 per cent; for the top five elite and selective government secondary schools the average was 21.6 per cent; for a selection of elite private schools the average was 24.5 per cent.

The statistics show that inequality is worse now than at any time since the 1930s. One of the key measures is the number of high achievers in key subjects. In 1996 English results at Methodist Ladies College (MLC), an excellent school — —

Mr Maclellan interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — I will come to the figures; they ought to concern you.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! I ask the minister to stop interjecting.

Mr Maclellan — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I asked the Leader of the Opposition whether that was an elitist score.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order because the question came from the minister through an interjection, which is disorderly.

Mr BRUMBY — You are like the Premier: you have lost it. You get a thousand people turning up at a public meeting! Why don't you do the decent thing and resign?

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition will address his comments through the Chair.

Mr BRUMBY — You have mucked up the suburbs of Melbourne — —

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition will address the Chair and stop discussion across the table. I also ask the minister to desist from interjecting!

Mr BRUMBY — MLC had close to 100 young women in the high achievers category for VCE English last year, yet the 40 schools north and west of the Yarra had between them a total of just 84 high achievers in English. At one private school there were close to

100 high achievers in one subject but in the 40 government secondary schools north and west of the Yarra running right round to Eltham there were just 84 high achievers.

Mr Perton interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! The honourable member for Doncaster should stop interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — In chemistry the government schools north of the Yarra had 26 high achievers in total, 11 of them coming from University High School. Scotch College on its own had 26. In specialist maths, schools north of the Yarra had 26 high achievers, 12 from one school. Melbourne Grammar School alone had 20.

Mr Perton interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! If the honourable member for Doncaster does not stop interjecting he will be asked to leave the chamber.

Mr BRUMBY — In subjects such as history the inequality in outcomes is even more marked. I make the point here that those on this side of the house have always believed in having an education system that provides opportunities for any child at any school he or she attends to go on and achieve success in life. What has happened after five and a half years of this government? A total of 9000 teachers are out of the state education system, needs-based funding of schools has been abolished, class sizes are up and subject choice down, retention rates are down, youth unemployment is up and there is the worst inequality in outcomes.

Mr Maclellan interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Rather than interjecting inanely across the table, Minister, you ought to be profoundly embarrassed at the extraordinary inequalities you have created. One of the things that was always believed previously across political parties in this state was that whatever a person's background, income or gender, he or she had the opportunity to get on in life through education. You people on that side of the house have totally destroyed that by bringing about the worst ever inequalities in the Victorian state education system.

Mr Maclellan interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — You hate the facts, don't you? You hate the facts about the way you have destroyed state education. You hate the fact that Victoria has

lower retention rates and the highest class sizes in Australia. You hate the facts.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! I ask the Leader of the Opposition to address the Chair. That will stop some of the interjections.

Mr BRUMBY — Around the world social democratic parties like the ALP are winning the battle of ideas in just about every area, including education. People realise that in the global economy of the 21st century the successful economies will be those that raise the educational standards of all, not just a few, of their inhabitants.

In Britain, Prime Minister Blair has stated that his three main priorities will be 'education, education, education'. In the United States, President Clinton has said that he will build a bridge to the 21st century through a nationwide crusade and a massive investment in public education, promising to give every American who wants it a chance to go to college:

We must make two years of college just as universal in four years as a high school education today.

The key to ensuring success in the 21st century will be higher educational standards for everybody — not lower standards as the government is producing. A small elite cannot do the job. This government is condemning more and more of our young people to failure.

Today on behalf of the Labor Party I make a number of pledges about education in this state.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! Government members on my right are too rowdy. I ask them to be quiet.

Mr BRUMBY — The first is that we will raise standards and improve opportunities for all students by substantially increasing public investment in education.

Secondly, we will reduce class sizes in order to improve the quality of education for all Victorian students.

Thirdly, we will unashamedly focus in the primary years on raising standards of literacy and numeracy and we will put teachers back in the classrooms to teach these vital skills.

Fourthly, we will emphasise cooperation, not competition, between schools.

Fifthly, we will improve the professional standing of teachers, including addressing professional development and the security and predicability of their employment.

Sixthly, we will vigorously tackle inequality through needs-based education funding and we will produce in this state an education system that gives every child the opportunity of going on to achieve success.

Seventhly, we will increase the availability of learning technology resources and address the inequalities that are occurring across the system.

Finally, we will encourage the expansion of vocational education and training in post-compulsory schooling.

In conclusion — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER — Order! Members on the government benches should be quiet.

Mr BRUMBY — Under this government we have witnessed a total distortion of the priorities of government in this state. We have seen the neglect of our state education system, our health system and of our basic community services. We have seen 9000 teachers ripped out of the state education system. As I said, we have seen massive — the highest of any state in Australia — declines in retention rates, and the largest class sizes and the worst performance of any education system in Australia.

Today's *Herald Sun* has an article about \$175 million to be spent on services. The Premier is reported as hinting that the \$175 million will go into some sort of lollipop system for education and health. But today in question time the Premier ruled out spending \$175 million and said he will be putting \$15 million into the state education system.

This is a government with the most warped, distorted, perverse and obscene priorities in the history of this state. It is a government that says it cannot find money for state education. I will tell honourable members some of the things this government can find money for: since 1992, more than \$300 million for extra spending on consultants; \$100 million for spending on office renovations; more than \$80 million for political advertising and propaganda; more than \$820 million for the Premier's friends in the CBD; and \$250 000 to fund a retirement package for the Premier when Phil Gude finally gets the numbers.

The government can find money for all of those things and for special deals for the casino. It can waste and mismanage the resources of the state but when it comes to looking after our most fundamental asset, Victoria's children, the children we want to be able to go on to have a decent future and opportunity to get a job and to enjoy success in life, the government says it cannot find the money. The government has money for everything else except for the things that matter.

Today I put it on the agenda that the Labor Party will make sure that at the next state election education, health and jobs are the issues. When the people of this state look at the government's record, as they are looking at it already after five and a half years, they will see that it is a shocking, shameful, appalling record. You have destroyed the state education system; you have destroyed the opportunities and minds of thousands of Victorian families and you will pay the political price for that at the next state election!

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — I echo the comments of previous speakers in expressing my loyalty to and appreciation of His Excellency the Governor of Victoria, Sir James Gobbo, and Lady Gobbo. They give excellent service to this state and to all Victorians. I am pleased also to indicate that His Excellency made his first country visit to Mildura in my electorate. Sir James and Lady Gobbo made a lasting impression on Mildura with their charm and friendship.

In days gone by, it was customary for the Governor to travel by vice-regal train. It appears that like the Met automatic ticketing system the vice-regal train has become unreliable and is not used any more.

I wish I could congratulate the government for the return of the Mildura Vineland rail passenger service. The current bus passenger service is a disgrace and causes some discontent in my community. Also, it is suffering from extremely low patronage. It was brought to my attention that recently a V/Line bus departed from Mildura with only three passengers. That is a far cry from the past when six days a week a Vineland five-car passenger set would leave full of passengers.

This government deserves some recognition and commendation for a number of the areas which I will detail later in this contribution to the debate on the address in reply.

However, first I mention that at question time last Tuesday I was staggered to hear the comments of the Premier about Hugh Delahunty, the brother of Mary Delahunty. This glowing endorsement is contrary to what might be said about the Hugh Delahunty that I

know. Is the Premier now running National Party preselections for Wimmera? More importantly, does the Premier know that under the stewardship of former Chief Commissioner Delahunty the Mildura Rural City Council lost \$2.5 million in mismanaging three road contracts? Does the Premier realise that this was 20 per cent of the total rate revenue in one financial year of the council?

On many occasions in 1996 I communicated these concerns and I was continually reassured by the chief executive of the council and Chief Commissioner Delahunty that everything was in order and that I was just showing a lack of understanding. I received advice from sources within the Mildura Rural City Council that the reassurance was incorrect and that they were aware of the burgeoning cost blowout and had regular briefings on the sites.

Page 24 of the Walshe report to this Parliament on the review into the Mildura Rural City Council, which was produced on 13 November, states:

According to the chief executive officer, this memorandum was presented to the commissioners on 13 November 1996. While the commissioners recall seeing a memorandum similar to the above mentioned, they do not recall seeing this memorandum which clearly detailed losses on the contracts in excess of \$800 000.

I am advised that Chief Commissioner Delahunty panicked when he was given this advice and directed that the financial memorandum be redrafted to conceal the truth.

That was mentioned on the same page, and the file was marked 'Not for filing'. On the copy that was given to Mr Delahunty I have seen written, 'Who knows about this?'. On Commissioner Carey's copy there is a detailed amount of highlighting which is used to mark individual losses.

This memorandum has been widely circulated, and I understand most councillors of the City of Mildura have seen it. Mr Delahunty has either continued to deny knowledge of the \$800 000 loss or has refused to comment. I quote from an article in the *Sunraysia Daily* published on 9 December 1997, which states:

Former Mildura Rural City Council Chief Commissioner Hugh Delahunty would not comment yesterday on whether or not he knew of at least \$800 000 in council roadwork losses.

Cr Delahunty is currently mayor of Horsham Rural City Council. Asked what he thought of these suggestions, Cr Delahunty said he would not be commenting. However, when asked a similar question on ABC radio yesterday morning he said the commissioners were given loss estimates, but these were not complete statements, as there was 'still the issue of liquidated damages' to be settled.

'Can I reassure you that we did not know the exact cost of the overrun', Cr Delahunty said, adding at that stage commissioners knew of a 'definite overrun of about \$150 000'.

He said he agreed with the Mildura mayor, Eddie Warhurst, that the exit audit, conducted during the transition period from commissioners to councillors, was a general overview. 'It didn't highlight that we had major problems, Cr Delahunty said.

On yesterday's front page of the *Sunraysia Daily* the headline is 'Hugh gets Jeff's nod'. The article continues:

The Premier added that when Mr McGrath quits Parliament his most likely replacement in the seat of Wimmera would be current Horsham mayor and former Mildura City Council Chief Commissioner, Hugh Delahunty — the brother of new ALP recruit Mary Delahunty.

The article further states:

'I think it is true to say that we have another member of the family on our side of the Parliament as Hugh Delahunty is tipped to succeed Bill McGrath if he decides to go at the next election', Mr Kennett said.

Those comments by the Premier are arrogant and presumptuous. On the \$2.5 million road losses from our council, Mr Delahunty as chief commissioner has refused to accept the truth and has displayed a reckless disregard for it. He has shown a total disregard for the responsibility for any of these losses.

Clearly he knew the truth. When a ship runs aground the captain must bear some responsibility for the event, whether he is on the bridge or not. Is this the type of person the people of Wimmera want as their representative? I think not. Unfortunately for Mr Delahunty his political ambition was a stronger call than telling the truth and accepting responsibility. The people of Wimmera will choose the next representative, and I believe it may be an Independent because many country voters have had enough and are not accepting the elitist, born-to-rule mentality displayed by the Premier on occasions.

Mr E. R. Smith — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, it is a longstanding tradition of this house that if an honourable member is referring to documents he should table them. I am not talking about the press cuttings; I am talking about the documents he referred to before.

Mr Batchelor — Further on the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Glen Waverley's own words were that the honourable member for Mildura was referring to notes. An examination of standing orders would show that he may refer to any range of notes. The honourable

member for Glen Waverley indicated that there were press clippings and other pieces of information there. If that is the case he does not have to make them available, and I suggest you find out from the honourable member for Mildura what he has been referring to.

Mr Maclellan — Further on the point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the honourable member for Mildura, being a former policeman, is perfectly capable of distinguishing between notes of his own making and documents referred to. I am sure he will be only too glad to honour the tradition of making those documents available. He does not need to be given additional time to think by the honourable member for Thomastown making a rather silly contribution on the matter. There was not the slightest suggestion that the honourable member for Mildura was not willing to accept the point of order and make the documents available.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! Is the honourable member referring to copious notes or documents he wishes to table?

Mr SAVAGE — I am referring to my own notes, but I have referred to newspaper cuttings and I am only too happy to make them available when I have finished.

Mr E. R. Smith — What about those other things?

Mr SAVAGE — I am happy to make that one available and the electorate surveys to which I will refer later. I am happy to make available all the material I have before me except the notes to which I am referring.

Mr E. R. Smith — That is all I ask you to do.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! The honourable member is prepared to make the documents available and keep the copious personal notes to which he is referring.

Mr SAVAGE — I indicate for the record that in my dealings with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, both as a minister and in his capacity as the honourable member for Wimmera, I have found he has always acted in a helpful way and has been most cooperative with me.

On a positive note, contrary to what most government members think, I acknowledge the value of many of the economic measures introduced by the government. In the area of public safety and crime sentencing the Kennett government has been most pro-active and visionary. However, the balance between the rights of

the victim and the rights of criminals has yet to be adjusted more in favour of the victim.

I read with some concern the story in the *Sunday Age* last weekend about the murder of Rob Foots in the Albury-Wodonga area, and the subsequent conviction of David Cox for manslaughter. No member of this house who read that article could have failed to be moved by the trauma and loss suffered by this family and the feeling of contempt for the perpetrator, who should have received life instead of six years for manslaughter.

One aspect of injustice that continues to prevail in this state is the removal of fair crime compensation for victims of crime. Victoria fares very well in comparison to other states in terms of the level of crime and public safety. Making comparisons of crime statistics is often somewhat illusory, as often when citizens live in high crime areas they have a lower tendency to report criminal activity, thereby reducing the statistics.

We often do not know the full extent of criminal activity and behaviour in our community. What is quite clear, though, is that we are fortunate to have a state police force that is good at following the motto, 'Uphold the right'. However, because of the budgetary crisis there will be difficulty in the future, which is depressing. Eighty-five per cent of the police budget is expended on wages and allowances, leaving precious little for manpower increments. The authorised target strength of 11 000 is well short of this figure, with current recruiting and training resulting in numbers lower than those for losses by natural attrition and retirement. It is a problem.

The coalition is to be congratulated on the continued legislative reforms that have reduced the road toll from 1075 to 377. I understand previous governments are in some way responsible for this large reduction. The figure is still unacceptable, however, and new measures forecast for the present session will no doubt have continued impact on this annual slaughter.

I am pleased to acknowledge the government's commitment to reducing the cost of electricity to householders and small businesses in the coming three years. I have serious misgivings and reservations about the cost of electricity in my electorate after the year 2000 when deregulation occurs. Monopolies will continue to exist in the transmission of electricity, and the charges will be determined by the Regulator-General. It has not been confirmed to me that the Regulator-General will be given commercial-in-confidence data to enable him to make a value judgment about the level of charges, and

therefore we could have a situation where a contrived cost is higher than it should be.

Transmission costs are now double generation costs, so there are significant problems with long distance transmissions. There is also a danger in deferring maintenance until after deregulation to enhance the possibility of a greater return on capital investment.

The government needs to give more attention to health. A letter published in the *Age* of 21 February about an 80-year-old person who spent some time in the Royal Melbourne Hospital gives a good insight into some of the problems besetting our hospital system:

My 80-year-old father has just had a four-day stint at the Royal Melbourne Hospital and, quite frankly, the state of this once-wonderful hospital flagship was appalling.

He did not see a cleaner in the ward during his stay, the floor was littered with dirt, as were the insides of the lifts, a tap dripped continuously not a metre from his bed, and one could barely see out of the windows for the dust. For the first two days he shared his room with two older women, who were only separated by a curtain and who had to suffer the indignity of using the commode chair in full hearing of any men in the ward. I filled out his food menu, taking care to write, in big letters and underlined, 'no pork' for one of his evening meals. He was given pork.

Paint was peeling off the walls and my father's bed was broken, so he had to be elevated with pillows. There were only two blood pressure machines in use. There would normally be around eight but the others were broken, so nurses constantly ran around the ward searching for the two good ones. The Royal Melbourne Hospital is sad, very sad. Staff morale seems to be at an all-time low, and this, of course, doesn't help the return to health of sick people. A friend suggested we should ban politicians from having private health cover so they would have to endure the conditions that they have foisted on the average Joe.

To my mind, the Royal Melbourne Hospital is in crisis and I demand to know what the government is going to do about it. (I shudder to think what other smaller hospitals are experiencing.) The year 2000 is nearly here and we have gone backwards. Maybe that's the way they plan to celebrate the hospital's 150th birthday — return the hospital to the way it was in 1848.

That letter was written by Heather Frith. I am not saying the health system needs X amount of money because there is a limit to what any state can afford, but those conditions are totally unacceptable.

The next issue I am concerned about affects my electorate. Mildura has been chosen as the site for the next privatised hospital. The decision was foisted on the local community without any consultation. In December 1997 I conducted a telephone poll of 750 people based on ABS statistics. The question was, 'Do you support or oppose the privatisation of our hospital?' The results were as follows: 61.2 per cent

were opposed; 17.8 did not know; and 21 per cent supported it. Governments are lost and won on lesser percentage differences than that! That is a clear indication that we need to consult with our communities to ensure they understand and accept whatever is proposed.

On 1 November 1997 the *Sunraysia Daily* quoted a vague assertion from Mr Dane Huxley, the chairman of the Mildura hospital steering committee, that the majority of Sunraysia residents surveyed by an unknown research company were in favour of the proposed privatisation of the Mildura Base Hospital. When asked about his assertion he refused to reveal any details about the questions, disclosing only the number of persons polled. My requests for the details were refused.

I am concerned that a privatised hospital will be profit driven and not patient oriented. I am worried that the primary focus will be on making money, because that is why people invest in companies that run hospitals. We are continually told that everything will be better than it currently is. The number of beds in the Mildura Base Hospital has fallen from 212 in 1988 to 97 in 1998. In other words, in 10 years it has lost more than 100 beds.

Bob Browning wrote an article on privatisation in the *News Weekly* edition dated 7 February under the heading 'Privatised hospitals: cut-price health care':

Too few people are aware of how radically our health system is being changed. Public scrutiny has been insufficient. Privatisation and competition policies are enabling changes to take place behind closed doors with commercial-in-confidence signs written large. Stealth is not too strong a term to use in connection with some of the processes of change in our health system ... A report, 'Private Care for Public Patients', by Western Australia's Auditor-General Des Pearson was tabled in the state Parliament. The *Australian Financial Review* described it as 'scathing'.

The Auditor-General examined the privatisation of the former Wooneroo hospital in Perth. Wooneroo is to be replaced by a \$58 million development, the Joondalup health campus. The campus is being built by Mayne Nickless under contract to the WA government.

In terms of the new health management jargon, the project will be a co-location.

'Co-location' refers to a private and a public hospital being situated on the one site.

The Auditor-General's report seriously questions whether the privatised, co-located hospital will use resources more efficiently than the previous public hospital system ...

The Auditor-General's investigation found no 'reliable information' that the contract would provide 'net tangible

benefits to the state from either its services or facilities, relative to the public sector model it was replacing'.

The Auditor-General noted that the operator had a financial incentive to:

'influence admission, treatment and discharge patterns in order to increase the proportion of more profitable treatments ...

'structure patient treatment to optimise the number and nature of episodes of care —

these are all at a greater cost to the taxpayer —

'code information from medical records to attract the highest possible principles'; and

'discharge and transfer patients in a way that optimises profitability ...

The Auditor-General concluded that it was 'possible therefore for the operator to seek to limit the quality of services provided where, for example, the operator considers it has not been in its commercial interests'. 'Clinically inappropriate practices' were 'particular risks associated with the contract'.

I note that in the documents on the Latrobe Valley hospital there is no mention of any conclusive evidence that a privatised hospital is more efficient for the taxpayer than a public one.

Mr Maclellan — What would convince you?

Mr SAVAGE — I want to be convinced the issues raised by the West Australian Auditor-General have been addressed in Victoria. I want to make sure we do not follow the same path, because Mayne Nickless has health care beds in this state. The article continues:

For the moment, it is mainly Australian corporations which are bidding for the new profit-making opportunities which governments are creating out of Australia's public hospitals. But even bigger corporate fish are circling. Transnational companies, mainly American, are watching from the wings, keeping an eye out for takeover opportunities.

The ease with which American companies and other transnationals move into Australia will be enhanced by the Multinational Agreement on Investment, which seeks to liberalise international investment and remove restrictions on the movement of capital. It is bad enough dealing with the large companies that Australians own, but it is even worse when foreign companies move in and take control of our privatised health service.

Will Australia follow New Zealand, where patients who are seriously ill are judged to be non-viable? Most members will have seen the article in the *Age* by the ethicist Nicholas Tonti Filippini about a New Zealander who needed dialysis but who was considered not to be worthy of the assistance he needed to keep him alive.

When must a privatised hospital system take into account the human aspect of its most important —

Mr Maclellan — When you are a patient at Epworth.

Mr SAVAGE — Mr Acting Speaker, the minister has missed the point. We need to see some proof that we will benefit from privatisation.

Mr Maclellan interjected.

Mr SAVAGE — I assume the government will guarantee that people who are gravely ill are not denied access to dialysis because they are considered non-viable. Can the minister give the house a guarantee that what happened in New Zealand will not happen here? He cannot. It is important to raise issues such as those to discover whether following the privatisation path is right for our health service. It is time we took stock.

I note with concern that our electricity industry is mostly owned by foreign interests. I heard the Premier recently express concern about Victoria being worse off if the casino was taken over by Sheraton or another American company. I view the electricity industry, the health service and other services as more worthy than Crown Casino of being owned by Victorians.

I acknowledge some of the achievements of the coalition government, and I also note some of its failings. We will never have a perfect government in Victoria, no matter what the colour of its cloth. The danger every government faces when it is in office for too long is that it fails to heed community messages and instead believes in its own infallibility. I hope the government does not make that mistake.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

TRANS-TASMAN MUTUAL RECOGNITION (VICTORIA) BILL

Second reading

Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning and Local Government) — On behalf of the Premier, I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill is a direct result of the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Arrangement signed by all Australian

heads of government at the meeting of the Council of Australian Governments held on 14 June 1996 and signed by the Prime Minister of New Zealand on 9 July 1996. The intention of the arrangement is to extend the mutual recognition principle to New Zealand. I take it this will be deeply offensive to the honourable member for Mildura, who does not like foreigners owning anything in Australia.

The arrangement and the bill have their basis in the Mutual Recognition Agreement established by the commonwealth and the Australian states and territories in 1992. That agreement and the commonwealth act which gave effect to it (the Mutual Recognition Act 1992) removed regulatory barriers to the movement of goods and service providers between the Australian jurisdictions. Again, the honourable member for Mildura will not like that, because it will mean evil, foreign-owned electricity will be able to be moved across state borders.

Under part 9 of that agreement, the parties agreed to review in due course with New Zealand the potential benefits of a mutual recognition scheme extending to New Zealand. I am pleased to present to honourable members the fruits of the review that they see before them now.

The arrangement extends the mutual recognition principle to New Zealand in relation to New Zealand goods and occupations by providing (with some limited exceptions) that:

goods that may legally be sold in any participating Australian jurisdiction may be sold in New Zealand and goods that may legally be sold in New Zealand may be sold in any participating Australian jurisdiction; and

a person registered to practise an occupation in any participating Australian jurisdiction is entitled to practise an equivalent occupation in New Zealand and a person registered to practise an occupation in New Zealand is entitled to practise an equivalent occupation in any participating Australian jurisdiction.

The bill adopts, pursuant to section 51(37) of the commonwealth constitution, the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act 1997 of the commonwealth.

The objective of the arrangement and of this bill is to remove regulatory barriers to trade in goods and services, thereby increasing competition while maintaining public health and safety and the environment. This complements the removal of tariffs on trade between the two countries under the closer

economic relations agreement. Other related objectives include the reduction in compliance costs for businesses dealing across jurisdictions and an increased level of transparency in trading arrangements.

The bill is consistent with and gives effect to this government's commitment to reducing the impost and the cost of government regulations on business and to removing artificial barriers to trade for the benefit of the whole community.

The bill will facilitate competition between Australian and New Zealand producers of goods and services across Australia and New Zealand by removing regulatory barriers to trade. While some products (such as gas appliances) and some occupational markets (such as doctors) are exempt from the arrangement, the exemption does not impose any increase in restrictions on competition over those that already apply. While there is also provision under the arrangement for further exemptions (such as dangerous goods where jurisdictions cannot agree on a common standard) barriers to competition will be more difficult to establish under the arrangement than without it.

The commonwealth act, although logically consistent with the existing Mutual Recognition Act, has some additional matters in order to accommodate the trans-Tasman nature of the new scheme. Thus, there are a number of laws relating to goods which will be excluded from the operation of the mutual recognition principle (for example, laws in relation to tariffs and prohibited imports, tax laws, intellectual property laws and laws relating to the sale and import of goods where the objective of those laws is to give effect to the international obligations of either country or both).

Consistent with the existing Mutual Recognition Act, there are a number of laws which will be permanently exempt from the operation of the mutual recognition principle (for example, laws in relation to quarantine, sale of firearms, indecent material and gaming machines). Any additions to the list of laws excluded or permanently exempted from the operation of the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Scheme would require the unanimous consent of all the participating jurisdictions, including New Zealand, pursuant to sections 44(3) and 45(4) respectively of the commonwealth act.

There are a number of laws covering goods with different regulatory requirements which are the subject of ongoing cooperative arrangements between Australia and New Zealand. These laws will be temporarily exempt from the operation of the mutual recognition principle (such as laws covering therapeutic goods,

hazardous substances and road vehicles). It is intended that once cooperative arrangements in respect of these areas have been completed they will be subject to either mutual recognition, harmonisation of standards or permanent exemption.

Any additions to this list of laws would require the agreement of two-thirds of the participating jurisdictions, pursuant to section 48(5) of the commonwealth act. Also, section 46 of the commonwealth act allows any jurisdiction to temporarily exclude goods or laws relating to goods for a period of up to 12 months where that is necessary for public health and safety or for environmental protection.

In short, this bill is a significant continuation of the government's economic reform agenda. It balances the need for economic reform with the needs of public health and safety and environmental protection.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray).

Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning and Local Government) — I move:

That the debate be adjourned for one week.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRACKS (Williamstown) — With your indulgence, Mr Acting Speaker, I ask the minister to explain to the house the reason for the one-week adjournment so the opposition can consider whether to divide.

Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning and Local Government) (*By leave*) — If the opposition wishes to resume the debate at the commencement of the next week's sitting, which will be the Tuesday of the following week, the bill will be put on the notice paper and, if it suits the opposition, the debate will be able to be resumed. If it does not suit the opposition on that day, the bill can be considered later.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 50

Andrighetto, Mr	McGill, Mrs
Ashley, Mr	McGrath, Mr W.D.
Burke, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	McLellan, Mr
Clark, Mr	Maclellan, Mr
Coleman, Mr	Maughan, Mr
Cooper, Mr	Napthine, Dr
Davies, Ms	Perrin, Mr
Dean, Dr	Perton, Mr
Dixon, Mr	Peulich, Mrs

Doyle, Mr	Phillips, Mr
Elder, Mr	Plowman, Mr A.F.
Elliott, Mrs	Reynolds, Mr
Gude, Mr	Richardson, Mr
Henderson, Mrs	Rowe, Mr
Honeywood, Mr	Ryan, Mr
Jasper, Mr	Savage, Mr
Jenkins, Mr	Shardey, Mrs
John, Mr	Smith, Mr E.R. (<i>Teller</i>)
Kennett, Mr	Spry, Mr
Kilgour, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Tehan, Mrs
Lean, Mr	Thompson, Mr
Leigh, Mr	Traynor, Mr
Lupton, Mr	Treasure, Mr
McArthur, Mr	Wade, Mrs
McCall, Ms	Wells, Mr

Noes, 23

Andrianopoulos, Mr	Hulls, Mr
Baker, Mr	Langdon, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Batchelor, Mr	Leighton, Mr
Bracks, Mr	Lim, Mr
Brumby, Mr	Loney, Mr
Cameron, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Maddigan, Mrs (<i>Teller</i>)
Campbell, Ms	Mildenhall, Mr
Cari, Mr	Pandazopoulos, Mr
Cole, Mr	Robinson, Mr
Garbutt, Ms	Sheehan, Mr
Gillett, Ms	Thwaites, Mr
Hamilton, Mr	

Motion agreed to.

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 5 March.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mr MACLELLAN (Minister for Planning and Local Government) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of the Financial Management (Amendment) Bill 1998 is to amend the Financial Management Act with respect to accrual output budgeting and to support the implementation of major budget sector reforms.

Background

Over the past five years, a dramatic improvement has been achieved in both the state's financial position and the quality and cost of government services delivered to the community. This improvement is due to prudent financial management and sweeping reforms to the delivery of government services.

The Financial Management (Amendment) Bill 1998, and the annual appropriation bills which will be

introduced later this sitting, are part of a package which will ensure a more rigid discipline in budget management, accounting and reporting, based on accrual accounting principles.

As a result of the proposed legislation future governments will no longer be able to run deficits and hide the consequences. The government of the day will be required to record, report and seek parliamentary authority for expenses and obligations as they occur. In this context expenses include both cash and non-cash items. In addition, the implementation of accrual output based budgeting will improve the management of the state's assets and its allocation of resources.

The bill represents the next stage in reforming the management of public finances in Victoria. The reforms are being undertaken in the context of the management reform program which represents a cohesive framework for restructuring the financial operations of the state.

These changes are important to the people of Victoria and reflect the commitment of the government to proper stewardship of the community's assets. The opportunities for Victorians will be improved through better value for money services funded by taxpayers, through the government. Greater security will result from the increase in financial oversight by the Parliament.

Many of the reforms have their origin in the findings of the report of the Victorian Commission of Audit tabled in 1993. Action is still outstanding on the commission's concerns that:

The present public sector structures do not clearly identify management responsibility for results. The flexibility of managers to determine the most efficient and effective way in which to deliver services is severely limited.

Although notionally based around a program structure, the existing budget and financial management system maintains a focus on inputs rather than outputs.

A system of full financial accounting should be introduced, which attributes all the costs of delivering a service. Appropriations and financial reporting should be in this format.

The appropriation and budget structure should be amended to allow public sector managers more flexibility in financial management.

Financial controls focus on controlling spending in accordance with parliamentary appropriations, rather than on managing performance and key risks.

The proposed amendments establish a framework in which the recommendations of the Commission of Audit can be finalised. Through these amendments the disciplines of conventional financial management will be applied to the operations of the budget sector.

The shift to greater transparency in budgeting and managing involves a move away from a focus on inputs and cash costs towards an understanding of the outputs being purchased by government and the full costs of services. In effect this means that a commercial perspective will be applied to the purchase and delivery of services, whether they are provided directly by a department or otherwise. The first step to output budgeting was taken in the 1997-98 budget in which departments identified their major outputs and output performance measures.

In anticipation of the 1998-99 budget being presented on an accrual output basis, the Financial Management Act 1994 requires amendment, principally to align its structures and language with the concepts of accrual management. The transition to a new way of viewing and managing public sector resources will not be achieved in one or two budget cycles. It is anticipated that the process of change is likely to take three to five years.

Management techniques

Under the management reform program, the financial management of the Victorian public sector is to be supported by the use of conventional business financial and reporting disciplines. This will entail a move away from cash concepts that are better suited to household budgets. From 1998-99 departments will budget, manage and report on the total resources under their control. Departmental operating statements and balance sheets will be the principal tools through which the government will measure the financial performance of departments. Departmental cash flow statements will be the basis on which cash requirements will be agreed, controlled and monitored.

Budgeting for performance

The setting of output targets for each department will link budget decisions to the outcomes which government seeks to pursue for the benefit of the Victorian community. In its role as both funder and owner of the state's public sector operations, government will agree on the price of outputs to be delivered and the standard of performance to be met in

their delivery. The setting of performance benchmarks for the quality and cost of services will better enable government to assess the competitiveness of departments as service providers.

Accountability and reporting

There will also be important consequences of the shift from cash to accrual management for the level of parliamentary accountability. Full accrual management will increase the transparency of reporting departmental activities to the parliament. The present focus of the annual budgeting, appropriation and reporting process on cash payments has meant that the state's assets and liabilities have not been subject to full parliamentary scrutiny.

The shortcomings of the present cash system became evident in the early 1990s and are exemplified in the financial obligations entered into by the previous government. These obligations were reported and funded only to the extent that they fell due within any particular financial year. The accrual output based system will introduce a new standard of financial accountability for government in that appropriations will cover both resources consumed and obligations incurred. Thus in future no government can improve its financial position by deferring payments (whether it be grants or accounts payable) or by entering into financing arrangements with, for example, balloon payments (since the effective financing cost will be charged each year not just the cash cost).

The new arrangements will ensure that high standards of disclosure are applied in the budgeting processes for government activities. No longer will it be necessary to resort to specially convened inquiries to determine the true financial position of the state. The state's financial position and cost of services will be clearly set out in the state budget, annual financial statement and in the annual reports of departments. The information will be in a form more readily understood by financial commentators and any member of the community familiar with conventional financial statements.

Proposed Financial Management Act 1994 amendments

The amendments to the Financial Management Act 1994, which are echoed in the appropriation bills, have three principal objectives.

Firstly, the bill amends the Financial Management Act to take into account the changing nature of appropriations in an accrual environment. Until now annual appropriations have provided departments with

an authority to spend cash up to a limit specified in the annual appropriation bills.

Changes to the Financial Management Act and appropriation bills are necessary to accommodate the fact that departments should budget and manage according to the full cost of services agreed to be delivered, not according to the limits of cash made available by the Parliament. Some of these costs do not require cash in the year of the appropriation, for example, the long service leave entitlements of staff in a department may not crystallise and require cash to be issued for many years.

The intention of these amendments is to give departments an authority to make arrangements or to incur expenses or obligations in any year up to a limit approved by the Parliament. That limit, specified in the appropriation bills, will represent the full extent of payments that may be made against the expenses and obligations incurred in the year of the appropriation. Cash payments, in respect of those payments may, however, be made in the year of appropriation or in subsequent years.

For the first time Parliament will authorise the full cost of government funded services, not just the particular year's cash requirement. The legislation will break the rigid connection between annual appropriation authority given by Parliament to a department in respect of a year and the cash payments made by a department in that year.

The proposed amendment to section 33 of the Financial Management Act is the linchpin of the reforms. It will enable departments to make payments for expenses or obligations incurred in respect of a financial year, in that financial year or in some subsequent year. In other words, it will be possible that the cash flow requirements of a department in any year will not match the level of appropriation authority for that year. Separating the incurring of an expense or obligation by a department from the payment of cash in respect of that expense or obligation is necessary for effective accrual management and conforms with conventional business practice.

Secondly, the bill aligns the language of the Financial Management Act to take into account the distinction between cash and accrual concepts. It also supports the separation of the roles of government. The reforms will reinforce the different types of budget decisions that the government may take depending on whether it adopts a funder, purchaser or provider perspective.

Previous appropriation purposes of 'capital' and 'recurrent', which focused on inputs, will be replaced by three new appropriation purposes which will provide parliamentary authority for departments to purchase outputs; to increase their net asset base; and to make payments on behalf of the state.

The companion legislation supporting the reforms, the appropriation bills to be introduced later this sitting, will be structured along these lines.

Third, the bill provides for ministerial directions to be issued in support of the administration of these reforms. Clearly, the control of cash remains no less important than it has been in the past. Ministerial directions will be required to ensure that cash profiles are set and observed by departments.

Another significant area requiring a thorough system of checks and balances is the management of the financial assets of departments recorded in the public ledger, which includes the opening balances of departments. Parliamentary authority for payment in respect of expenses incurred prior to 1 July 1998 will be sought in the context of the 1998-99 appropriation bills. Under section 33 departments will only be able to apply these financial assets in a manner consistent with the purposes for which the provisions were established. This is an important safeguard to prevent an irresponsible government redirecting funds to other, unauthorised purposes. The ministerial directions issued will ensure that the method of recording and applying these assets is subject to stringent control and audit. Accountability for the application of these funds will be supported by information in departmental annual reports and the annual financial statement. These will explain movements in the provisions made for expenses incurred by departments and payments made in respect of those provisions.

Future amendments

The 1998-99 budget year will be a pioneering year in the implementation of financial management reforms. The success of these reforms will partly depend on the ability of public sector managers to make use of the new framework, and establish a culture of heightened responsibility and accountability for financial and resource management within departments. Refinements to the framework over the course of the next two to three years are inevitable as the impacts of the reforms are reviewed.

Conclusion

These amendments provide the basis for sustained fiscal responsibility in Victoria. They are consistent

with trends in most jurisdictions in Australia and in major advanced economies around the world. In Australia, this initiative will put Victoria at the forefront of public sector reform. The amendments are the culmination of many years of policy development, including the introduction of accrual accounting over the past 10 years, a period that includes 5 years of this government and 5 years of the previous Labor government. The reforms will set the scene for an increase in the competitiveness of our public services and parliamentary oversight of public resources.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr BRACKS (Williamstown).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 12 March.

EDUCATION (TEACHERS) BILL

Second reading

Mrs WADE (Attorney-General) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

In Victorian government schools, teachers must first undergo a criminal record check before being considered suitable for employment. If the check discloses they have been convicted of a sexual offence involving a child, they will not be offered employment. If after their employment they are convicted of a sexual offence involving a child, disciplinary proceedings are taken to ensure they are dismissed from the teaching service.

The system applying to non-government schools is different. This bill, when passed, will ensure that no teacher convicted of a sexual offence involving a child will teach in any Victorian school. It will do so by making changes to the provisions relating to teachers in non-government schools.

Section 44(2) of the Education Act 1958 prohibits any person from teaching in a non-government school unless that person is registered by, or has permission to teach from, the Registered Schools Board under section 37 of that act.

Section 41 of the Education Act 1958 authorises the Registered Schools Board (with the consent of the Governor in Council) to deregister a teacher convicted of an indictable offence or found guilty of conduct unbecoming a teacher.

The procedure under section 41 involves —

- (I) the Registered Schools Board being advised of the conviction;
- (II) a copy of the conviction being obtained from the court;
- (III) a notice being forwarded to the teacher advising that the board proposes to exercise its powers and giving the teacher the opportunity to be heard;
- (IV) giving the teacher the opportunity to be heard;
- (V) the board making its decision;
- (VI) obtaining the consent of the Governor in Council to any deregistration; and
- (VII) advising the teacher of the board's decision.

There are substantial costs involved, as well as administrative resources required, in any proceedings under section 41.

The main purpose of the bill is to amend the Education Act 1958 to provide for the disqualification from teaching of teachers found guilty of sexual offences against children.

The bill states that teachers registered by the Registered Schools Board, or having the permission of that board to teach, are automatically deregistered or cease to have the board's permission to teach if they are convicted, or found guilty without conviction, of a sexual offence involving a child. If a teacher lodges an appeal to a higher court against the conviction or finding of guilt, the deregistration will continue until the outcome of the appeal.

For convenience, in the remainder of this speech the word 'conviction' is used to also include a finding of guilt without conviction.

Not all convictions will result in a teacher being automatically deregistered. Only those involving sexual offences against children will result in automatic deregistration, and the automatic deregistration is to occur on the same date as the conviction.

The bill will apply to all convictions occurring after the commencement of the bill, irrespective of whether the facts on which the conviction was based occurred before or after the commencement of the bill.

There are four subjects which can be taught in a non-government school for which registration with the Registered Schools Board is not required. Those subjects are listed in section 34IA of the Education Act

1958 and are instrumental music, choral music, voice production and religion.

Following consultation with the Registered Schools Board, the bill retains the four subjects as exemptions from registration, but provides that any person convicted of a sexual offence against a child cannot teach any subject in a non-government school. This option was adopted because many teachers of the four subjects would not meet the requirements for registration and their enrichment to the educational experiences offered by schools would be lost — for example, instrumental music teachers and teachers of religion. In implementing this option the following consequential amendments have also been made to mirror the present sections relating to deregistered teachers —

- (I) any person convicted of a sexual offence against a child cannot sue for services provided as a teacher in a non-government school after the date of that conviction;
- (II) the board may cancel the registration of a school if the school knowingly employs as a teacher a person convicted of a sexual offence against a child. The date of the conviction must be after the commencement of the act;
- (III) a non-government school must not knowingly employ as a teacher any person convicted of a sexual offence against a child. The penalty for a breach is one penalty unit. This is the existing penalty in section 80 of the Education Act 1958.

Constitution Act 1975: section 85(5) statement

I wish to make a statement under section 85(5) of the Constitution Act 1975 of the reasons for altering or varying that section.

Clause 8 of the bill inserts a new section 81A(2) in the Education Act 1958 which states it is the intention of the proposed section 38 of that act to alter or vary section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975. The proposed section 38 provides that a person is not entitled to recover in a court of law for services rendered during any period the person was an unregistered teacher or did not have the permission of the board to teach or who was disqualified from teaching under section 41A(3). The reasons for altering or varying section 85 of the Constitution Act 1975 are as follows —

- (I) firstly, a person fitting any of the above categories should not be teaching any subject in a non-government school, and he or she should

not have any right to payment for services rendered in breach of what in essence is a disqualification; and

- (II) secondly, the inability to sue for payment for services rendered as a teacher in breach of the disqualification is the same inability that presently applies under section 38 of the Education Act 1958 to deregistered teachers or teachers who do not have the permission of the board to teach. Furthermore, it should also provide an incentive to disqualified teachers not to continue in employment as a teacher after the date of their conviction and disqualification.

The bill defines sexual offence by reference to various sections in the Crimes Act 1958 covering sexual offences against minors, assisting in the commission of sexual offences against minors, and abducting, procuring or soliciting minors for sex.

The bill also defines sexual offence to include offences under sections 68 to 70 of the Crimes Act 1958. Those sections cover —

- (I) the production of child pornography (for which a conviction carries a level 5 imprisonment of 10 years maximum);
- (II) the procurement of minors for pornography (for which a conviction carries a level 5 imprisonment of 10 years maximum); and
- (III) being knowingly in possession of child pornography (for which a conviction carries a level 7 imprisonment of two years maximum).

These sections dealing with child pornography are included because teachers have the day-to-day care and control of children, and they hold a special position of trust over young children. Any person convicted of involvement in child pornography, or for knowingly being in possession of child pornography, has by his or her behaviour displayed a disposition or character unworthy of the trust which needs to exist between parents, teachers and children, and is not a fit and proper person to be trusted with the care and the minds of our young children.

Section 41 of the Education Act 1958 will continue to exist, so that the registered schools board will have the right to conduct proceedings under that section against teachers convicted of other indictable offences or engaging in conduct unbefitting a teacher.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 12 March.

SUMMARY OFFENCES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mrs WADE (Attorney-General) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill introduces a number of amendments into the Summary Offences Act 1966 (the act). The amendments are designed to repeal the law of habitual drunkenness, to raise the penalty for the offence of making a false report to police, and to clarify the circumstances in which a court can order a person who is found guilty of making a false report to police to reimburse the costs incurred by the police in investigating that false report.

Habitual drunkenness

Section 15 of the act is a sentencing provision which states that 'any person having been thrice convicted of drunkenness within the preceding 12 months who is again convicted of drunkenness shall be liable to imprisonment for twelve months'.

The repeal of habitual drunkenness enables the problem of chronic alcoholism to be addressed by health and social support mechanisms rather than by the criminal justice system. The repeal acknowledges that it is inappropriate that a person could be sent to gaol for up to a year for having been found drunk on four occasions. The offence of public drunkenness remains: it is only the penalty for habitual drunkenness which is repealed.

Making a false report to police

A deliberate false report to police, particularly of serious offences, can result in large investigations and a significant waste of valuable police time and resources. It may also lead to the arrest, detention and conviction of an innocent person. The offence is punishable by a penalty of up to \$1500 or imprisonment for three months. In addition, if a person is convicted of the offence, the court may order the offender to 'pay to the informant a reasonable amount for any expenses incurred by members of the police force arising out of or incidental to the commission of the offence'. The fact that a person has been found guilty of an offence

does not enable a court to make an order for reimbursement. A conviction must also be recorded.

Under section 7 of the Sentencing Act, if a court finds a person guilty of an offence the court may sentence the offender by making a community-based order, imposing a fine or adjourning the matter on certain conditions, all without actually recording a conviction.

The bill amends section 53 to include persons who have been found guilty but for whom a conviction has not been recorded. This amendment will bring section 53 into line with other compensation provisions and will ensure that the reimbursement of expenses may be ordered whenever appropriate. The courts have held that section 53 permits them to order reimbursement only for incidental expenses and not for overheads, such as the salaries of the police members involved in investigating a report. In many cases the only cost resulting from a false report is the hours involved in investigating the report. The bill amends section 53 to expressly cover remuneration.

The power to order expenses remains at the discretion of the court. The court will have to be satisfied not only that the expenses were reasonably incurred, but also that the amount of expenses awarded is reasonable.

The compensation provisions in the Sentencing Act expressly state that compensation may be paid in instalments and that, in determining the amount and method of payment, the court may take into account the financial circumstances of the offender and the nature of the burden that payment of the compensation will impose. The bill is drafted to provide that similar considerations apply to expense orders under section 53.

The maximum penalty which can be imposed under the section at present is 15 penalty units (\$1500) or imprisonment for three months. The government considers that this penalty does not accord with the potential gravity of the offence particularly because an innocent person could be imprisoned. The bill raises the maximum penalty to 120 penalty units (\$12 000) or imprisonment for one year.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr HULLS (Niddrie).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 12 March.

PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mrs WADE (Attorney-General) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The bill is directed towards improving the operation of the Public Prosecutions Act 1994 (the act). At present considerable inconvenience and delay can be caused if the Director of Public Prosecutions or the Chief Crown Prosecutor is temporarily unavailable to exercise various powers personally. The bill introduces a more flexible mechanism under which some of their powers may be delegated. In addition, the bill clarifies the act in relation to certain powers which are ancillary to the director's primary powers for prosecuting offences.

Delegation

The act permits the Director of Public Prosecutions to delegate to the Chief Crown Prosecutor or a crown prosecutor any of the director's powers other than four nominated powers. Those powers are:

the power to make presentment or to enter a nolle prosequi;

the power to consent to the bringing of certain proceedings;

the director's powers and functions as a member of the director's committee; and

the power of delegation itself.

If the director is absent because of illness or other commitments, the act provides for the appointment of an acting director by the Governor in Council. The bill provides a more flexible procedure for delegation in relation to each of the four powers other than the power of delegation itself.

The director's powers and functions as a member of the director's committee

Through unexpected circumstances, such as sudden illness, either the director or the Chief Crown Prosecutor may be unavailable to act as a member of the director's committee. If this occurs, a special decision under section 23 of the act cannot be made for a number of days. This may cause significant delay and disruption to a trial and inconvenience to jury members.

Clause 6 of the bill enables the director and the Chief Crown Prosecutor to delegate their powers in relation to

a special decision. The director and Chief Crown Prosecutor may only delegate their powers to those persons who would normally be appointed as acting director or acting Chief Crown Prosecutor. The new delegation power is only to be used in relation to urgent matters when either the director or the Chief Crown Prosecutor is unavailable and there is insufficient time to appoint an acting director or acting Chief Crown Prosecutor.

The power to consent to the bringing of certain prosecutions

A number of statutory provisions require the director to give his consent before a prosecution may be brought. Presently the act precludes the director from delegating his power to give consent in these matters.

Requiring the director to personally consent can result in inconvenience and delay. Crown prosecutors make many decisions involving serious offences and issues of public interest.

Clause 8 of the bill amends the act to permit the director to delegate the power to consent to the bringing of prosecutions for certain offences, such as those under the Judicial Proceedings Reports Act 1958 and the Estate Agents Act 1980.

Clarification of powers

Clause 7 of the bill provides the director with an express power to indemnify a witness. The indemnification may be either not to prosecute a person for an offence or not to use certain evidence given by a person against that person.

Currently the act does not expressly empower the director to grant such indemnities. It is a common practice throughout Australia for directors of public prosecutions to give an undertaking or indemnity to a witness when the witness is to give evidence that would otherwise incriminate them.

The act permits the Director of Public Prosecutions to take over and conduct any proceedings in relation to a summary offence or an indictable offence triable summarily. It does not, however, expressly permit the director to take over purely indictable offences.

Clause 4 of the bill gives the Director of Public Prosecutions the power to take over and conduct any proceedings in respect of an indictable offence other than a proceeding brought under section 354 of the Crimes Act. Section 354 permits indictments to be brought by a member of the public. It is not proposed to alter the powers of the director in relation to them. The

act does not expressly permit the director to institute, conduct or be a party to civil proceedings.

Clause 5 of the bill expressly provides that the director has the power to be involved in certain civil proceedings, such as applying for an injunction to restrain a person from engaging in conduct that may jeopardise the conduct of a trial. The bill will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of prosecutions in Victoria.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr HULLS (Niddrie).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 12 March.

GEOGRAPHIC PLACE NAMES BILL

Second reading

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Conservation and Land Management) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The purpose of this bill is to make provision for the naming of places and the registration of place names and to amend the Survey Co-ordination Act 1958 and the Local Government Act 1989.

Geographic place names serve two major purposes. The primary purpose is the practical need to identify localities and features and to communicate direction. Place names also express tangibly the human activity of investing the landscape with meaning and memory. Victoria's place names have been derived from a wide range of sources. Many names were influenced by the culture and nationalities of early white explorers, surveyors and administrators and many reflect the extensive use of Aboriginal place names.

The administration of place names in Victoria up to the Second World War was carried out under various land acts. A comprehensive postwar mapping program identified the need to coordinate and standardise the drawing and publishing of official maps and plans and the naming of places.

The Survey Co-ordination (Place Names) Amendment Act passed in 1965 established the Place Names Committee to perform this role. Three decades later significant changes in land information mapping and geographic place names have removed the need for a centralised assignment of names. The state is mapped and the focus is now on meeting the needs of users of land information and organisations with a role in the

naming of places. Land information is an integral part of Victoria's social and economic fabric. This bill is part of a wider initiative by government to reform data holdings and services across the state.

Customer-focused integrated land information is a key goal. The government's aim is to provide up-to-date land information that is easily accessible and affordable through a variety of user-friendly electronic services. In 1995 the government commissioned a review of the place names function. Analysis revealed considerable duplication and overlap between the Place Names Committee, local government and other public authorities.

The review recommended that the process should be streamlined by delegating to municipal councils or administering bodies the responsibility for naming places. Only the naming of places of special character was recommended to remain centrally determined. It was further recommended that principles guiding the naming of places be redeveloped consistent with national and international practice and widely disseminated throughout the community. The review also focused on the evolving requirements of the users and beneficiaries of the register of place names.

Contemporary emergency service organisations using sophisticated communications technology now require real-time data which is accurate, up to date and more complete than ever before. Other community services and dispatch organisations are vitally interested in the clear definition of boundaries of places or localities for administration and planning purposes.

The state digital map base on which emergency service response is based is widely recognised as a stable and high quality database. However there is a need for appropriate legislative authority to ensure that all current information relevant to the map base held by any public or private agency is provided as quickly as possible. In view of the unquestionable public benefit involved it is critical to ensure the prompt notification of changes, especially for such things as road and street names, new subdivisions and suburb boundaries.

Historical and community groups also have high expectations of easier access to place names information. There is also a growing interest and awareness of the importance of indigenous names in Australia's cultural heritage.

I turn now to the bill. The bill defines 'place' as any place or building that can form part of administrative localities, landscape features and service infrastructure, and introduces three essential changes in the naming of

places. Firstly, the bill provides for guidelines which will allow local government authorities and other bodies to select and assign place names. These guidelines will be made by the Governor in Council and will provide a mechanism for a system of notification and central registration of new place names. This will ensure that all changes are notified to the state digital map base as quickly as possible. Under the guidelines there will be a clearer power for the minister to name places that are of a special character or significance. The new procedures for notification and registration will also be used to compile additional information essential for emergency service dispatch. Examples include major infrastructure developments, changed traffic conditions and entrances and exits to major venues.

Secondly, the bill provides for the establishment of a position of Registrar of Geographic Names with responsibility for policy development, collection and registration of approved names and management of the database of geographic place names.

Thirdly, the bill replaces the previous standing committee with an advisory panel with wide-ranging expertise to advise on the naming of places of special character. This is designed to ensure a more flexible process capable of providing the depth of technical knowledge and policy advice required on matters. Members of the panel will be drawn from the fields of mapping/geography; land information data management and service provision; local government; Aboriginal culture and language; orthography and linguistics; and, heritage and history.

The panel will be convened as required to comment and advise on the naming of places or features which cross local or regional boundaries, have special character or which have an affiliation for a wider group of Victorians.

These measures return control of place and feature naming to local communities and provide pro-active services to users and beneficiaries of the register of geographic places names. The reforms emphasise the role of local government authorities as critical providers of data. It is important that there is greater awareness of the significance of widely known current place names at the local level. This is the point at which additions to critical land information take place (including locality and feature names, street naming and addressing, and subdivision creation). The new procedures will significantly assist the regular updating of the register of geographic place names and the state digital map base. Land information collated with the assistance of local government authorities will provide a vital service

to emergency services and other community organisations.

The changes will ensure that procedures for altering or applying new locality or feature names are simpler and easier to use, reflect community preferences and concentrate resources on the provision of improved community information.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms GARBUTT (Bundoora).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 12 March.

TERTIARY EDUCATION (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Conservation and Land Management) — On behalf of the Minister for Tertiary Education and Training, I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Education is a state responsibility under the Australian constitution and higher education institutions are established by state governments. Funding for universities is provided by the commonwealth under the terms of an agreement between the commonwealth and the states.

A subsequent agreement between the commonwealth and the states in 1991 made explicit provision for the states' responsibility for controls over the term 'university' and degree titles. The mechanism by which Victoria manages approval is set out in the Tertiary Education Act 1993.

With an increasing number of private providers within the state and further privately provided programs expected, it is important that the responsible minister be in a position to monitor the overall level and nature of provision to plan for the strategic development of higher education. This will require provision of basic statistical information relating to student enrolments in various areas of study and other matters as may be required from time to time for the effective coordination of higher education.

The Tertiary Education Act currently provides a power for the minister to obtain such information from government-funded post-secondary institutions but does not extend to private providers. This bill will provide the necessary power.

Steps are being taken to specify in greater detail the procedures and criteria through which applications for approval to operate as a private university will be assessed. This action follows a legislative review of implementation of competition policy last year.

Decisions to approve private universities to operate in Victoria are made by order published in the *Government Gazette*. To ensure that the public is fully informed on a continuing basis about such approvals, arrangements will be made to include in the schedule to the Tertiary Education Act which lists Victorian universities, a note listing any private universities authorised to operate within the state.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr HAMILTON (Morwell).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 12 March.

Remaining business postponed on motion of Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Conservation and Land Management).

ADJOURNMENT

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Conservation and Land Management) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Crown Casino: tax concessions

Mr BRACKS (Williamstown) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Premier. I seek from the Premier an assurance that no deals, either formal or informal, have been undertaken with the principals of Crown Casino, Mr Lloyd Williams and Mr Ron Walker, or any other persons associated with Crown Casino concerning the proposal to reduce the arrangements between the state government and the casino on the high-roller tax, which is also known as the super tax.

I refer particularly to the statement from Crown that it was envisaged that the high-roller tax would not apply to gaming revenue. The key issue is how Crown got the impression that it had an understanding that the high-roller tax would be reduced when there was already in place legislation to ensure that the tax would be paid at a certain level. How did it make that statement? How did it come to believe there were arrangements in place to reduce the high-roller tax?

I would like the Premier to tell the house that there were no deals, no informal arrangements and no discussions concerning the Premier bringing in legislation to reduce

the high-roller tax. Honourable members need to be assured that there is a proper process for these arrangements and there are no informal arrangements that would allow the Premier to do a deal and say, 'Trust me! I will deliver it, I will go to Parliament and I will get the legislation changed. I will convince cabinet to reduce the high-roller tax'. That is obviously what Crown believed to be the case, and why it put the statement out saying it had an implicit understanding about these matters.

The Premier needs to explain what went on, what discussions were held and whether there were agreed arrangements. If there were agreed arrangements, he should explain to the house his version of events so that honourable members and the public can be assured that things are done above board — as they are supposed to be done — and involve the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority, the cabinet sub-committee and the cabinet — not just the Premier having lunch with the principals of Crown Casino.

On an examination of the statement from Crown that appears to be the case. The Premier should come into the house and explain what led to the statement by Crown that there was some arrangement about a reduction in the high-roller tax.

Public transport: automatic ticketing

Mr ROWE (Cranbourne) — Will the Minister for Transport advise the house and the public of the validity or otherwise of repeated claims and assertions by the honourable member for Thomastown regarding the effective operation and possible vandalism of the automatic ticketing system.

Mr Batchelor — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, the adjournment debate is for raising matters of government administration. It is not question time. The honourable member for Cranbourne has asked — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — What is your point of order?

Mr Batchelor — The point of order is that it is not a time to ask questions of the minister.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr ROWE — Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I raise the matter because the claims made by the honourable member for Thomastown are causing concern in the community, particularly in my electorate where people are not sure whether they can purchase

tickets using the automatic ticketing machine or one of the other methods available. Many of the honourable member's claims in the past about the PTC and the public transport system have been false, baseless and designed largely to mislead the public and cause concern about the safety, effectiveness, viability and useability of the ticketing system.

Contrary to the honourable member's claims, by using the service I have found that it is providing an excellent service for people in Cranbourne. The automatic ticketing system is working very well. People have access not only to the automatic ticketing system but also to the telephone purchasing system, the mail-out system, the office system and agents. From speaking with passengers on the system and in the work that I do with the Minister for Transport I am finding that the system is working well. The public is accepting it well. It is very easy to use, in fact much easier than the City of Melbourne's new parking machines. It took me a little time to work those out. I call on the minister to dispel any doubts the public may have because of the irresponsible ramblings of the honourable member for Thomastown.

Crown Casino: second hotel tower

Mr BRUMBY (Leader of the Opposition) — Will the Premier investigate as a matter of urgency the timing of the government's knowledge of the Crown Casino decision not to proceed with the second hotel tower. The December prospectus for Crown's \$146 million rights issue stated that —

Mr E. R. Smith — On a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, I thought the rules of the adjournment debate precluded members being able to raise the same subject twice. I ask you to rule the Leader of the Opposition out of order.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — I do not uphold the point of order. The Leader of the Opposition is raising a different matter about the Crown Casino tower. That was not the matter raised by the honourable member for Williamstown.

Mr BRUMBY — Thank you for your ruling, Mr Acting Speaker. The exact wording in the prospectus is:

The company expects to commence development of the proposed southern hotel tower by mid-1998.

Part of the explanation for the rights issue was to improve Crown's financial position so that it could proceed with the second tower development. After being out for two months stating that the expected

development of the tower would be complete by mid-1998 the prospectus closed on Friday, 6 February. However, on Monday, 9 February — the next working day — according to the *Australian Financial Review* Mr Lloyd Williams wrote to the Minister for Gaming, Mr Hallam, to inform him:

... the company cannot proceed with the construction of the lyric theatre or the southern tower of the hotel.

What an extraordinary tale! The prospectus had been out for the best part of two months, and it said that the tower would be built and completed by the middle of 1998, and that money was needed to help do it.

Mr McArthur — I raise a point of order, Mr Acting Speaker, in relation to relevance of this matter to the adjournment debate. All the Leader of the Opposition has discussed so far are matters relating to commercial law and issues relating to a prospectus on rights. These are properly matters concerning the Companies Code and are federal issues. They do not relate to state government responsibility, and I suggest they should be raised elsewhere.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr BRUMBY — This would have stunned the investors who had just injected \$146 million into Crown's bottom line and were unaware that the Crown prospectus was simply a fantasy designed to lure them into believing that Crown could meet its contractual obligations. It would have stunned them, that is, if Mr Williams had bothered to tell them.

I ask the Premier to investigate this matter urgently and to confirm exactly when the Minister for Gaming, any other members of the government and the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority first became aware of Crown's decision not to proceed with the construction of the southern tower.

Moir: accounting standards

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — I direct to the attention of the Minister for Planning and Local Government a matter concerning the Shire of Moira. Public reporting of difficulties experienced by the shire, as detailed in the Salisbury report commissioned by the elected councillors, resulted in the making of a number of allegations that have been widely reported. These include the main claim that expenditure exceeded revenue by \$17.5 million between November 1994 and 30 June 1997. This has impacted on the net asset base of the council by reducing investments and increasing debt.

The \$17.5 million so-called black hole has been widely reported by the media, and as recently as last night on WIN TV it was claimed:

In the last three months the Moira shire in north-eastern Victoria has become the case study, showing what happens when things go horribly wrong in local government. After amalgamation and the reign of commissioners, councillors were re-elected to discover that their shire was in a \$17.5 million black hole.

I note that during the period under review accounting standards changed as a result of the adopting of AAS27. A booklet prepared by Coopers and Lybrand entitled 'Commentary on 1996-97 results of local authorities' was circulated widely in October or November to municipalities throughout the state and to the media. I ask the minister to advise, firstly, whether the \$17.5 million black hole is an accurate indication of the problem in the Shire of Moira. When is the Auditor-General's report on Moira shire in particular and local government authorities in general due, and what steps might the minister be considering to again bring to the attention of both municipalities and the media the Coopers and Lybrand report on the AAS27 accounting standards?

Crown Casino: property trust

Mr HULLS (Niddrie) — I direct to the attention of the Premier the need for an urgent investigation of serious allegations that were raised in today's *Australian Financial Review* regarding the dates on which the Minister for Gaming, Mr Hallam, in another place and the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority were informed about certain decisions made by Crown Casino in relation to the restructuring of its asset portfolio.

The key issue I ask the Premier to investigate is the date on which the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority and the Minister for Finance and Minister for Gaming were informed about Crown's decision to spin off its assets into a list of property trusts, and whether they knew before the Australian Stock Exchange knew. The claim has been made that the minister's office confirmed that the property trust submission from Crown was received on 11 February 1998, which is a week before Crown informed its shareholders. According to the *Australian Financial Review* the minister's office confirmed three times in 24 hours that the report was received on 11 February. However, yesterday the minister's office changed its story to fit with Crown's version that the submission was received on 18 February, the same day the stock exchange was told.

The Premier needs to investigate this complete somersault because it smells of collusion. It would appear that the minister has changed his story to fit with Crown's version. Crown has breached ASC rules if it is indeed the case that it informed the government prior to informing its shareholders. It is important to investigate this matter, because if the minister received information about Crown's plans before the stock exchange was informed it is a clear breach of both disclosure laws and ASC laws.

More importantly, the Premier has to investigate whether the minister has colluded with Crown to amend the dates in relation to notification, because this would have serious ramifications. If the minister knew about Crown's plans before the stock exchange knew there was at least potential there for the minister to release that information, giving current investigators the opportunity to sell out before that information became public, and that smacks of insider trading. That is why this matter must be investigated immediately by the Premier.

Housing: Shepparton

Mr KILGOUR (Shepparton) — I raise with the Minister for Housing the matter of a supposed housing sell-off in country Victoria that the shadow Minister for Housing has broached. I have found that things are quite different from what is contained in the lies and innuendo that have resulted from the shadow minister saying that the Victorian government sell-off of public housing is continuing unabated. That differs completely from what is happening in my electorate, and it is obvious the shadow minister has not bothered to find out the truth from the department, as I have done. I have found that although the department is selling off some of the older stock, it is replacing it with many more much better dwellings.

I bring to the attention of the house the request of Mr and Mrs Carli, who came to see me the other day. They live in a house built in the 1950s and they wanted the department to repair it.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! Would the Leader of the Opposition and the minister find some other place to have their conversation? I want to hear the honourable member for Shepparton.

Mr KILGOUR — If the Leader of the Opposition shows his ignorance by not listening to somebody who is prepared to listen to him, we cannot do much about it.

Mr and Mrs Carli want to stay in their home, but the Department of Human Services said that because the house is about 50 years old the amount that would have to be expended to repair it made repairing it not worth while. The department said it would be happy to consider moving Mr and Mrs Carli into a better dwelling in another part in town. However, I ask the minister if it would be possible for Mr and Mrs Carli to arrange to purchase the property so they can continue to live in the house in which they have been living in for 15 years.

Will the minister also assure the people of country Victoria, as the department has assured me, that the department is selling off the older stock that is now worth much less than it was, because the government does not want to throw good money after bad — it would rather sell the stock to provide better housing for the people of country Victoria.

Rail: Box Forest Road crossing, Glenroy

Mr BATCHELOR (Thomastown) — I ask the Minister for Transport to act immediately to improve safety for pedestrians, road users and train drivers at the Box Forest Road level crossing. The only way to do that is to immediately install boom gates and implement the recommendations of a recent RACV report.

The RACV report is a damning indictment of the government's inaction and neglect. The report cannot be ignored and neither can the demands of local residents for the immediate installation of boom gates. The RACV report indicates that the line markings at the crossing are in poor condition, that few visual clues are provided to warn motorists of impending danger, that the signage and warning signals are inadequate and need to be improved, and that raised road pavement devices to warn car drivers of the approaching danger should be installed. As a final indictment of the government and a demonstration that the government has a lack of concern for safety the report has highlighted that safety fencing that had been damaged in earlier accidents had not yet been repaired.

The government's failure to act decisively and quickly can be seen only as a demonstration that it is negligent in the extreme and is seeking to delay these matters to cause confusion and create political controversy because its main aim is to try to avoid its responsibility. This government is negligent by its own actions. Something could be done about this problem if the government wanted to, but it does not care about the safety of people out in the northern suburbs; if it did it would act immediately as I now request.

Kingston: Cheltenham business

Mr LEIGH (Mordialloc) — I raise a matter about a particular property on the corner of Nepean Highway and Wallingford Street, Cheltenham.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! Will the honourable member advise the Chair of the minister with whom he wants to raise the matter?

Mr LEIGH — With the Minister for Planning and Local Government. A local councillor is operating an electrical business outside a residence. If the council wanted to sell it as a property development in a residential area, it appears to be a renovation gone wrong.

It fronts onto the Nepean Highway. The council and I have had signage pulled down and we have forced him to cut down the giant trailer he has out the front to various sizes. He is piling cars out the front and the backyard is an absolute mess. What is even more important is that this person is a councillor who I am sure would not be prepared to do this in his own community. He has come over to our community and is making a mess by running his business operations there.

He is deliberately running as close to the wind as he can in the way he operates this business. The residents in this attractive residential area of Cheltenham are sick to death of the nonsense that has gone on. It is appalling that any local government official could so misuse his position in another area and that he could behave and operate his business like this.

I have no personal animosity towards Mr Russell. I have known him over the years and he has never done me any harm, but microwave ovens have been dumped at the back of the property, five or six cars are parked on the footpath and elsewhere all over the place and the trailer that is now out the front is a cut-down version of what was complained of previously. Although the signs have been pulled down, it is just a joke.

I am seeking action from the Minister for Planning and Local Government. The council has done everything it can to control this character.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! What action is the honourable member asking for?

Mr LEIGH — I hope the minister can take some action against this councillor. Maybe there are some regulations that we can alter to deal with this gentleman. It seems that because the property is on a main highway he can use the frontage to run his

business operations. Nobody minds people running businesses from their own homes — that is perfectly acceptable, provided they do not upset the neighbours. But that is not what is going on here. As I said, the most appalling thing about this is that he is a government official in the municipality next door.

On behalf of the residents of the City of Kingston who live in that area I suggest he should move his business to his home area of Bayside and see if his own residents and constituents have the same impression of him that we have. I seek some indication of the ability of the minister to enforce the regulations.

Schools: information technology

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — I raise for the attention of the Minister for Education a matter that involves reviewing the resources available for providing computers in schools, given the pathetic, miserable, stingy, paltry announcement made by the minister today that the government would put \$6 million into computers compared with the \$18 million being put in by the parents. It brings the total commitment for computers to \$14 million being contributed by the government compared with a massive \$43 million raised by parents and local schools.

The government's contribution is paltry. The \$20 million being put in over four years in Victoria is chickenfeed compared with \$90 million over four years provided by the New South Wales government. But the worst aspect is the funny money aspect. Of the \$6 million, \$5 million is coming out of next year's budget. It is on the Bankcard!

Despite the record surplus in the state coffers and the so-called flash financial management — —

Mrs Henderson interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! The Minister for Housing should contain herself.

Mr MILDENHALL — It is not as if these computers are not needed. Schools are crying out for them. Many schools have a ratio of 1 computer to 30 students or 1 computer to 20 students — not the ratio of 1 computer to 7.5 students in the flash schools being promoted by the minister.

These arrangements were promised under the guidelines to be made before the first day of term — some four weeks ago. It is stinginess and maladministration on a grand scale. We need an end to this sleight-of-hand funding and below-par effort by the

government. Schools are crying out for these computers. The minister should listen to the cries and pleas of the parents and teachers in this state who need the technology to improve the quality of education in Victoria.

European wasps

Mr LEAN (Carrum) — I raise with the Minister for Conservation and Land Management a serious problem being experienced by both rural and suburban Victorians. The sanctity of the good old backyard barbie is coming under threat from a little pest known as the European wasp.

In 1997 the minister established a task force chaired by the Honourable Philip Davis in another place with the view of trying to establish what could be done about the European wasp problem.

One of the outcomes of the committee was that a number of brochures were printed and delivered to municipalities and schools, and a site was set up on the Internet as well as a 1800 number for people to ring to gain knowledge of the wasp and find out what they could do about it. The task force found that we may just have to live with the European wasp.

A media release on 5 November stated that:

Task force member, the senior entomologist with the South Australian Research and Development Institute, Mr Dennis Hopkins, described the position in his state, which first experienced European wasps in 1978.

After their brief initial occurrence the wasps remained unnoticed until 1983, and since had been apparent, but not on a widespread basis.

Mr Hopkins went on to say that the South Australian approach had been to accept that European wasps were present, that there was no simple solution to get rid of them and that the community had to learn to live with them.

At the moment the European wasp is in the suburbs of Melbourne, especially around Carrum, in plague proportions. Recently a constituent of mine, a Mr Robert Malone, had to move a function he was holding at his home inside. A Mr Rod Griffiths, who runs a company — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! Will the honourable member advise what action he requires the minister to take?

Mr LEAN — Certainly. I am coming to that. We have a problem with European wasps. The Keith Turnbull Research Centre is also looking into the

wasp problem, and I ask the minister whether she can inform us of any movement further down the track with research at the institute. What has happened since the task force was established to help eradicate or control the European wasp?

Housing: high-rise tower demolition

Mr THWAITES (Albert Park) — I seek an assurance from the Minister for Housing that the high-rise public housing towers in my electorate, such as Park Towers, and the flats in Dorcas Street will not be demolished.

Mr Leigh interjected.

Mr THWAITES — The honourable member for Mordialloc says I am only worried about votes. I am concerned that the motivation behind the government's demolition of high-rise towers is to force public housing tenants out of inner Melbourne. I consulted with and conducted a survey of the tenants of Park Towers and Dorcas Street. I received replies from 118 of the 470 tenants. That is more than 20 per cent, which for statistical purposes is more than enough to give a good indication of the prevailing attitude. I am sure honourable members will be interested in the outcome. The demolition of Park Towers or its sale for private housing is opposed by 100 per cent of the residents.

It is important that I give the minister a picture of why the residents oppose the move. The principal reason is access to public transport, which 96.6 per cent of the residents use. Most residents do not have access to a car, so if they are forced out to the outer suburbs they will find it impossible to get around. They will not be able to attend schools, hospitals, doctors and so on. As well, 65 per cent of the residents of Park Towers attend local clubs, 53 per cent attend local churches, 76 per cent attend the local library and 53 per cent attend other local institutions such as the doctor, the market and the shopping centre.

I will read briefly from a few of the responses. The first is from a couple who said:

My wife and myself find this area very convenient, and since we are over 80 years old so, God willing, we would like to live our days as quietly as possible.

The next response goes to the point the honourable member for Mordialloc so snidely raised:

I'm appalled that the ordinary Australians, people on low incomes, are being considered for relocation because the powers that be have decided that the million-dollar view from high-rise blocks would be better appreciated by 'rich ... buggers'. High rise was good enough for the ordinary

Australians when these suburbs were derelict and no-one wanted to live in them.

The views were once considered just all right, but they are in demand now. When it was a derelict suburb, no-one else wanted to live in it.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Responses

Mrs HENDERSON (Minister for Housing) — I thank the honourable member for Shepparton for raising the sell-off of public housing. He works very hard for the public housing tenants in his electorate, and as the Minister for Housing I appreciate that.

The claim by the shadow spokesperson, the honourable member for Altona, that there have been, to use her words, 'massive sell-offs' of public housing, is absolute nonsense. Not only that, it is extremely mischievous and does exactly what opposition members like to do — cause anxiety among people. We are selling public housing stock as part of our normal asset management. I remind honourable members that the Office of Housing owns some 70 000 dwellings. As the properties reach the end of their financial lifespan we sell them, which is good and prudent asset management. Contrary to what the opposition spokesperson said, every penny of that goes back into public housing.

I particularly mention the claim that we are selling masses of houses in Shepparton. Let me assure you, Mr Acting Speaker, that in the past couple of years we have put an additional 44 houses back into the City of Greater Shepparton.

The shadow minister seems to think that by causing anxiety she will get a run in the press. I point out to honourable members that in 1992 the Office of Housing provided direct assistance to 64 204 households, and in 1997 it provided direct assistance to 68 971. The work the government is doing in public housing is unprecedented.

Mr Bracks interjected.

Mrs HENDERSON — The honourable member for Williamstown will be pleased to know that the waiting list is shorter than it was when Labor was in government.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mrs HENDERSON — Not one member of the opposition backbench raised an issue on behalf of

constituents tonight. The honourable member for Shepparton raised the situation of Mr and Mrs Carli, who live in a house that requires extensive maintenance. The honourable member suggested that the Carlis could purchase the house they are living in, which is something we encourage. Tenants who have lived in their houses for seven years or more are able to purchase them, so many of the houses we sell are sold to tenants. I suggest to the honourable member for Shepparton that the Carlis may like to pursue that course.

The honourable member for Albert Park raised the demolition of high-rise towers in the inner city of Melbourne. As the house will know, one of the government's 1996 election commitments was to demolish one high-rise in the inner city. Substantial work has been done to prepare for that announcement. I am concerned that — —

Mr Thwaites interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition has already asked for action to be taken. I ask him to cease interjecting.

Mrs HENDERSON — I am concerned that the honourable member for Albert Park has surveyed a number of residents in one of the high-rises in his electorate — and I understand the honourable member for Williamstown has done the same in his. To cause anxiety among the tenants of the high-rise towers by suggesting that any of the towers will be sold off to a developer and turned into luxury accommodation is wrong. It is mischievous of the honourable member to even suggest that.

You know we will not sell one of the high-rises for luxury apartments. We will not do as you suggest. You are mischievous and you are causing anxiety among the tenants. If you actually cared about your constituents — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! I ask the minister to speak through the Chair.

Mrs HENDERSON — I will be pleased to. If the honourable member for Albert Park were seriously concerned about the tenants of Park Towers or anywhere else in his electorate by now he would have telephoned me to ask if he could have a chat about what is happening with the demolition of the high-rises.

I would be only too happy to discuss the issue with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I am disappointed that he has created this anxiety by running a survey and not contacting me so that the tenants in his electorate

might understand clearly that there is no sell-off to a private developer for luxury apartments.

Mr Thwaites interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! I have warned the Deputy Leader of the Opposition once already. He has asked for action to be taken, and the minister is providing an answer.

Mrs HENDERSON — This week is Housing Week in Victoria. Across the state there have been hundreds of events and dozens of activities. Housing tenants have been very much involved. It is a week of celebration. I am disappointed that the honourable member for Albert Park has chosen to cause anxiety among his constituents rather than directly raising the issue with me.

Mr COOPER (Minister for Transport) — The honourable member for Thomastown raised with me the condition of the Box Forest Road crossing on the Upfield railway line. He demanded that boom gates be installed immediately and said that the government is negligent in not having already done so. I refer the honourable member to the adjournment debate as recorded in yesterday's *Hansard* where the hypocrisy of the Labor Party and the point scoring by Mr Kelvin Thomson, a federal member of Parliament, on this issue is clearly set out.

The problems surrounding the crossing are not new; they existed during the 10 years that the Labor Party was in government in this state. Not only did the Labor Party ignore the Upfield line crossing, but it also starved it of maintenance and enhancement funds. As a result the coalition government has inherited the problem.

Mr Batchelor — What are you going to do about it?

Mr COOPER — I again suggest the honourable member have a look at yesterday's *Hansard*. The government is spending \$25 million repairing many of the rail problems left to it by Labor. A part of that is a new system which includes computerised interlocking signals on all of the crossings on the Upfield line. The boom gates cannot be installed independently; they have to be installed as part of the system.

Mr Robinson interjected.

Mr COOPER — That is happening right now, stupid!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! The minister should contain himself. That is

unparliamentary language, and I ask him to withdraw right now.

Mr COOPER — The ‘right now’ or the ‘stupid’?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! I ask him to withdraw ‘stupid’.

Mr COOPER — I withdraw and apologise to you, Mr Acting Speaker. The government is putting in the system right now and the boom gates are going in with it. If the honourable member for Thomastown were a reasonable spokesman on transport and did his homework he would know the reasons the boom gates cannot be put in right now.

If the honourable member believes he is representing the residents of that area properly he should visit them. I understand there is concern about the crossing prior to the installation of the boom gates. If the honourable member for Thomastown and the local MPs were prepared to approach me and discuss this issue, I might be prepared to close the level crossing until the boom gates are installed. If there is a genuine concern about safety at that intersection until the boom gates are installed, the PTC will close the crossing because it will not be until September that the system is in place and the boom gates are installed.

The honourable member for Thomastown, who for 10 years was part of a government that ignored this railway line, tried to close it down and starved it of funds, is now trying to grandstand. Honourable members know it is nothing more than hypocrisy and point scoring. He has not done his homework. He does not understand. All he can do is raise an issue that was addressed in this house last night. He is trying to catch up on something that has already been addressed by the government.

The honourable member for Cranbourne is concerned about recent claims by the honourable member for Thomastown on automatic ticketing. He is worried that the claims have caused concern among public transport commuters in his electorate and asked me whether I have investigated the claims. I advise the honourable member for Cranbourne that I have — my word I have!

In the adjournment debate of 19 February the honourable member for Thomastown advised that he had been contacted by a commuter who, on the previous weekend, had purchased a Metcard ticket from an automatic ticket selling machine at Mentone station. The commuter had attempted to validate the ticket but the machine would not validate it. The honourable member for Thomastown claimed that the traveller rang the 1800 Metcard help line to seek

assistance and was informed he would have to pay a \$7.30 administration charge to receive a refund on a \$5.20 ticket.

The Onelink consortium and the PTC have investigated the claim. A log is kept of telephone calls into the help line and the call summary reports for the two weeks prior to 19 February were examined. There was no record of a call being received about this incident because a name and ticket details were not provided.

On 18 February the honourable member for Thomastown arrived in a hurry and flurry for the adjournment debate and advised that at 9.00 p.m. or thereabouts he had visited Parliament station and found the automatic ticketing system in a state of almost total collapse. Among other things — we all know of the honourable member for Thomastown’s wont to say a lot of things — he said that the larger ticket vending machines were not accepting coin-only purchases and neither the validators nor the barriers were working.

The matter has been thoroughly investigated. The facts are that just prior to 9.00 p.m. that night two ticket vending machines and a barrier at Parliament station were deliberately vandalised. When the honourable member for Thomastown arrived two ticket vending machines were being replenished with coins by Armaguard, as is normal at that time of night. The vandalism had been reported very shortly before the honourable member for Thomastown arrived at the station.

If there is anything dirty or underhand in politics the honourable member for Thomastown has done it or is thinking about doing it. Honourable members must question how coincidental it was that the honourable member for Thomastown arrived at Parliament station on a sitting night at approximately 9 o’clock just after the ticketing system had been vandalised. Given the track record of the honourable member for Thomastown — the fact that he tried to rig an election back in 1985, the fact that he has been caught out many times for not telling the truth — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! The minister will refrain from making imputations against the honourable member for Thomastown.

Mr COOPER — What a coincidence! The system at Parliament station had worked perfectly all through the day, through two peak periods and all through the night, and just a few minutes before the honourable member for Thomastown arrived someone vandalised the system! Further investigations are ongoing — we will not leave it alone. The station has television

monitors and people are being interviewed to see whether further light can be thrown on the incident.

The honourable member for Cranbourne raised general concerns about the system. The ticketing system will be fully installed by June this year. It is working satisfactorily and within the parameters set down in the contract.

Ms Gillett interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Perrin) — Order! The honourable member for Werribee has been interjecting consistently. I will not accept any more interjections from her.

Mr COOPER — The government is satisfied that Melbourne will have a world-class ticketing system in place that will be accepted by all commuters in Melbourne.

Mrs TEHAN (Minister for Conservation and Land Management) — The honourable member for Carrum has raised with me the increasing number of European wasps in the suburbs of Melbourne. In spring last year the same matter was raised, but it related particularly to the incidence of European wasps in the western part of Victoria, especially around Ararat. The representations, particularly by the member for Ballarat Province in the other place, the Honourable Dick de Fegely, were taken so seriously that it was decided to conduct a symposium in Melbourne so that people would bring together all the information available to see what could be done to address the problem.

Late last year a meeting was held in Melbourne. It was attended by people affected by European wasps, local government representatives, CSIRO scientists working on the problem and members of the South Australian Research and Development Institute. Despite obtaining much worthwhile information it was indicated that we would be unlikely to fully control or exterminate the problem. All the advice was to be careful raising expectations about finding some solution to this introduced pest. A member for Gippsland Province in another place, the Honourable Phil Davis, brought together a group of experts from the CSIRO and the South Australian Research and Development Institute in an endeavour to address the problem.

The news is not good. A continuing briefing watch will be maintained on biological controls both in Australia and overseas, but it seems nothing will be available in the foreseeable future that will resolve the problem. A better monitoring and assessment process is being developed but the community must be educated on how to live with the problem. I commend the work of the

Honourable Phil Davis and his task force in tackling the problem.

We are presenting a report at the Agricultural and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand (ARMCANZ), which is currently meeting in Hobart, to advise Australian resource and agricultural ministers of the work being done in Victoria so that we can share the information with our counterparts. Data is now more widespread throughout the community. There is now an 1800 telephone number and an Internet site and brochures are available from the department and local government providing information about tracing and spraying nests as well as advice on the apparatus and chemicals available through local government.

Although I am sympathetic to and recognise the associated social problem, the one good thing is that there seems to be no loss in primary production because of the pests. This nasty social and cultural problem will continue to be monitored. Although the government will seek to resolve it, it cannot give any real hope of seriously controlling or eradicating the problem.

The honourable members for Williamstown and Niddrie and the Leader of the Opposition referred to casinos, dates and times, most of which came from today's *Australian Financial Review*. The matters were raised in the context of some conspiracy or cover-up and contained innuendos about personalities at the casino, in government and at the Victorian Casino and Gaming Authority. It is typical of the opposition to seek to take the lowest possible component of a debate and try to develop a conspiracy theory. I have had it happen to me in this place. During the week I was appalled to hear the honourable member for Albert Park casting aspersions on members of my staff, citing a conspiracy theory and allegations of criminality. He would not have the courage to say those things outside this place. He makes claims about my staff, who are not in a position to defend their reputations, good character and everything else they stand for. It is typical of members of the opposition frontbench. They reduce themselves to gutter politics in this place and people outside are unable to defend themselves.

The honourable member for Rodney raised for the attention of the Minister for Planning and Local Government the Salisbury report on the Shire of Moira. During question time this week the only question the shadow spokesperson on conservation and land management asked was, again, on personality politics. She referred to the role of Mr Gaylard, a former commissioner at the Shire of Moira. Her questions

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contained nothing about policy or natural resources; it was another effort to demean and implicate people such as Mr Gaylard who are serving this state admirably. Opposition members cast aspersions in this place where they have protection from legal action. They are not prepared to go outside this place and make such allegations. The honourable member for Rodney asked when the auditor's report into the Shire of Moira will be made available. I shall direct that matter to the attention of the Minister for Planning and Local Government.

The honourable member for Mordialloc directed to the Minister for Planning and Local Government the activities of a City of Bayside councillor who appears to be conducting a business in a residential area. The honourable member's description was that some of the business components were at the side, at the rear and at the front of the house. That is certainly not compatible with the high residential standard one would expect of a house on the Nepean Highway. As the honourable

member said, one would expect something better by way of community responsibility from a person representing a municipality. He asked the minister to investigate what action could be taken, and I am sure the minister will give the matter his attention.

The honourable member for Footscray directed to the attention of the Minister for Education the funding arrangements for computers in schools. He concluded his remarks by saying it was a matter of stinginess and maladministration. That is a curious arrangement of two nouns; I am not sure whether he sees the maladministration as being greater than the stinginess, or the stinginess having led to maladministration! However, I am sure the minister will listen to the honourable member, as he has always listened and, no doubt, will continue to listen.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 5.21 p.m. until Tuesday, 17 March.