

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Thursday, 1 June 2006

(Extract from book 6)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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Joint committees

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Cooper, Ms Marshall, Mr Maxfield, Dr Sykes and Mr Wells. (*Council*): The Honourable S. M. Nguyen and Mr Scheffer.

Economic Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Delahunty, Mr Jenkins, Ms Morand and Mr Robinson. (*Council*): The Honourables B. N. Atkinson and R. H. Bowden, and Mr Pullen.

Education and Training Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Eckstein, Mr Herbert, Mr Kotsiras, Ms Munt and Mr Perton. (*Council*): The Honourables H. E. Buckingham and P. R. Hall.

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Council — Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr W. R. Tunnecliffe

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Dr S. O'Kane

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FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Leader of The Nationals:

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Thursday, 1 June 2006

The SPEAKER (Hon. Judy Maddigan) took the chair at 9.32 a.m. and read the prayer.

PARLIAMENT HOUSE**Airconditioning**

The SPEAKER — Before we start proceedings, I wish to advise members that there have been a number of rumours about legionnaire's disease this morning. In fact the member for Gembrook is being tested for legionnaire's disease, and I believe some buildings in this area are being tested. We do not have cooling towers at Parliament, so Parliament is not one of those buildings being tested.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Notices of motion: removal**

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to advise the house that under standing order 144 notices of motion 333 to 343 will be removed from the notice paper on the next sitting day. A member who requires a notice standing in his or her name to be continued must advise the Clerk in writing before 6.00 p.m. today.

PETITION

Following petition presented to house:

Water: fluoridation

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 Victorian government has moved to mass medicate the entire populations of Wodonga and Wangaratta by way of adulterating our drinking water with fluoride. The full facts of related health issues and suspected health issues have been withheld from the population.

In view of rebutting evidence and the omission of vital information in the information booklet your petitioners pray that the Victorian government acknowledges our opposition to mass fluoridation and refrains from adding fluoride to our water supply pending a referendum of the citizens of Wodonga and Wangaratta to vote on whether or not fluoride is added. The government to be bound by the results of such referendum.

Mass medication is in direct contravention of the 1949 Nuremberg Court ruling relative to compulsory medication.

'The voluntary consent of the human subject is absolutely essential' (Nuremberg code).

By Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) (1958 signatures)

Tabled.

DOCUMENTS**Tabled by Clerk:**

Auditor-General — Performance Audit Report — Access to specialist medical outpatient care — Ordered to be printed

Mt Buller and Mt Stirling Alpine Resort Management Board — Report for the year ended 31 October 2005 (two documents)

Ombudsman Act 1973 — Report of the Ombudsman on a Review of the Freedom of Information Act — Ordered to be printed

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

Buloke Planning Scheme — No C6

Glenelg Planning Scheme — No C29

Golden Plains Planning Scheme — No C18

Hume Planning Scheme — No C68

Wellington Planning Scheme — Nos C24 Part 1, C31

Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme — No C42.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS**Brunswick City Soccer Club**

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) — There was great excitement at the Brunswick City Soccer Club last week as the club was chosen to be the mascot for the international football friendly between Australia and Greece. The club provided both mascots and flag wavers for the big game and was certainly excited. There was a frenzy of activity as parents and all the juniors firstly joined together to choose by ballot the children who would be part of this really important game. The children were outstanding in their little performance at the game, as were the Socceros.

I would like to thank the club president, Nic Koutoulis, and secretary, George Koutoulis. The club, which was founded by Spartan Greeks in the local area and is still known as Leonidas, nowadays is a microcosm of multicultural Brunswick. The juniors are from all sorts of different backgrounds. It is a terrific club, and the supervisors and juniors had a brilliant night. They will remember for their entire lives that they were there with their heroes before 95 000 people at the Melbourne

Cricket Ground to farewell the Socceroos before they headed off for Germany to play in the FIFA World Cup.

Andrew Gallacher

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — Andrew Gallacher was probably one of the most courageous people I have ever met. I recall him as a boisterous young boy, a very cool teenager and a sophisticated adult. He just loved good clothes, good food and very good company, always having a great time and ensuring that all those around him had a lot of fun.

Andrew, like an unexpectedly warm and sunny day in winter, would suddenly enter your life, brighten it and illuminate lifelong memories. He would then simply move on to his next exciting venture. While very popular, Andrew struggled through school but managed to scrape into Melbourne University. He obtained a first-class honours degree in science, and eventually graduated with a PhD in geology.

‘Dr Rocks’ was well travelled in both Australia and overseas, skiing extensively in Australia, America and Europe. Andrew drove his life to the full — he had to, because he was diagnosed as a tiny, tiny baby with cystic fibrosis. At birth his life expectancy was five years. Despite a constant threat, innumerable complications and significant time in hospital, Andrew refused to sacrifice himself to his fate. Never once did he succumb to self-pity or doubt. Never did he ask for, nor was he given, any special consideration. Nothing deterred him from bravely achieving a full life.

Andrew died on his 35th birthday. He was buried yesterday. My love and sincere condolences go to Annie, Barrie, Meggles, James and the rest of the Gallacher family.

Springdale neighbourhood centre

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine) — I was honoured and delighted to have the opportunity to officially open the redeveloped Springdale neighbourhood centre in Drysdale. This has special significance for me, having been the coordinator at the centre when we secured grant funding from the adult, community and further education body back in 2001. After being elected to this place I was pleased to assist in securing additional funding from Regional Development Victoria. All up the state government contributed \$367 000, with the City of Greater Geelong contributing \$580 000 towards the almost \$1 million project.

When I first commenced at the neighbourhood centre it was working out of a small ex-housing commission

house. It is now a centre with a new child-care facility, a computer room, new training rooms, a community hall, a state-of-the-art training kitchen and a new entrance and admin area. All up we now have a facility which has twice the space and is better able to serve the growing communities of Drysdale and Clifton Springs.

From its very humble beginnings as a playgroup, Springdale neighbourhood centre now plays a key role in supporting the social, educational and recreational needs of the community. Participation rates continue to grow, and the centre caters to people of all ages — from children using the child-care centre, to young people undertaking vocational training and older people learning computer skills. Neighbourhood houses are not just about adult education: they are places that bring communities together, whether through programs, through volunteers or as places to meet new people.

Congratulations to all those involved, particularly Adrian Mannix, Maureen Naughton, Dorothy Knights, Ted Chidzey, Dianne Farrimond, Dennis King as the new chair, and Ann Brackley as the current coordinator.

Aquatic centres: Heathcote

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — The small community of Heathcote in the electorate of Rodney is currently in the early stages of campaigning for an all-year-round swimming complex. The town’s existing pool was built in the 1960s and is open only during the summer months for 5 hours each day.

There has been very strong and growing community support for an indoor swimming facility at Heathcote, and in the past few months the pool project committee has received hundreds of letters of support from local individuals and organisations. There is already a real commitment from the community for both financial and practical contributions to this project. However, assistance is required from local and state government levels to fund an independent study to determine the social and financial feasibility aspects of this particular proposal.

The committee has made representations to the City of Greater Bendigo for assistance with the project but has been advised by the council that it cannot justify spending the required amount of money on a town that has a population the size of Heathcote. The people of Heathcote are not prepared to accept this argument and neither am I, because we want to get this pool going. The population of Heathcote is small, but its needs are great. The committee has recently made representations to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, and I will be supporting that. I am hopeful that the government will

be willing to assist the people of Heathcote to achieve this very desirable objective.

Road safety: roadside workers

Ms MORAND (Mount Waverley) — I take this opportunity to raise a concern about speeding drivers and the safety of roadside workers. Last week I was contacted by the contractor who was working on the project to widen Ferntree Gully Road in Wheelers Hill. The Minister for Transport, the member for Mulgrave and I recently attended the commencement of this important \$4.7 million project that will widen a 1.6-kilometre section of Ferntree Gully Road between Cootamundra Drive and Jells Road.

During the construction period of this road widening the traffic speed limit has been reduced to 40 kilometres an hour while the workmen are actually on the site. The problem being encountered by the contractor is that drivers continue to travel at speeds well above the reduced speed limit of 40 kilometres an hour. In fact, cars have been clocked at well over 100 kilometres an hour during times when the 40-kilometre-an-hour speed limit is in place. Some complete idiots are doing over 100 kilometres an hour through a construction area that has been reduced to one lane and where men are working on the side of the road. Some motorists do not seem to understand that the speed limit is not an advisory limit and that it is the law to slow down and observe the limit that is in place.

What also concerns me is the continual undermining by the Liberal Party of the road safety message. I am very disappointed that the new Leader of the Liberal Party has endorsed the appalling policy of a 10 per cent speed tolerance. This government and Victoria Police are doing their best to change driver behaviour by getting them to slow down — to Wipe Off 5 — and save lives. We are saying, ‘Wipe Off 5’, and the Liberals are saying, ‘Add 10 per cent’.

Mental health: crisis assessment and treatment teams

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — This statement condemns the Bracks government, particularly the Minister for Health, for failing to ensure that we have enough crisis assessment and treatment teams, or CATs, to adequately deal with Victorians who may require emergency mental health intervention, treatment and support. It is an indictment of the Bracks government that there are simply insufficient resources to deal with emergency call-outs to mentally ill Victorians and that Victoria Police members are being used as de facto mental health workers, despite, in the

majority, having no training or limited experience in dealing with the mentally ill.

The government must immediately address the dire shortage of mental health crisis assessment and treatment teams in Victoria, whose presence when mentally ill persons have an episode is absolutely crucial to the safety of police, the individuals themselves, their family members and the community. Families have contacted me frustrated and concerned that police members have become their only form of assistance because CATs are so under resourced. CATs should be at the front line of mental health care to assist police through negotiations and to administer medication. When a mentally ill person experiences an episode, police and family members are often put in violent and dangerous situations, especially if weapons are involved. But due to the shortages, CAT members have refused to attend violent incidents.

I was recently contacted by a mother who for over 20 years has cared for her mentally ill son, who suffers from tendencies of a schizophrenic type that cannot be officially diagnosed, because when he sees a psychiatrist he refuses to speak. The Bracks government must fund more CATs to operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Victorian Women’s Cricket Association: presentation night

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — It was with great pleasure that recently I was the guest speaker at the Victorian Women’s Cricket Association’s presentation night at the Whitehorse Centre. This night acknowledges some of the fantastic results from some of our state’s most accomplished sportswomen. The Victorian Women’s Cricket Association has been organising cricket for girls and women since 1905, although the first recorded match was played in 1874 in Bendigo between the Eleven Blues and the Eleven Reds. Since then membership of the VWCA has grown to more than 90 teams, including 22 junior teams competing in the metropolitan area and in Ballarat and Geelong. Matches are still played with an emphasis on participation and enjoyment.

Victoria is the largest cricket state in Australia. Now girls are learning to play the game at an earlier age and this is being reflected in the growth and interest in schoolgirl cricket. The night also recognised some of the trailblazers in women’s cricket and the role that they played in creating the positive environment that today’s women participate in.

Cricket Victoria employs just over 320 people, placing it in the top 12 per cent of employers in the state. Each year it has a minimum of 40 days of first-class cricket, which is 58 hours of international exposure of Victoria, compared with the 4 hours of grand final football each year. It provides education programs, more than 200 coaches clinics and visits to more than 1000 schools involving more than 65 000 schoolkids each year. I was very impressed with the way it provides participation opportunities in all-embracing programs for under-represented groups, including disability groups, indigenous groups, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, older adults and youth at risk. The women's league displays great sportsmanship and athletic talent, but most importantly camaraderie. It was a wonderful night and I wish the Victorian team a most successful year.

Public transport: Ringwood

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — Ringwood has always been well positioned for public transport. As a regional hub at the junction of the Belgrave and Lilydale rail lines, it services thousands of train commuters every day. Public transport users in my electorate travelling into the city not only have to bear the burden of high ticket costs due to travelling through all three metropolitan public transport zones but in addition are faced with an inadequate, slow and unreliable daily service.

In 1999 the Bracks government promised to improve this abysmal situation, by committing \$9.5 million to construct a third railway track between Blackburn and Mitcham. That would have allowed for the introduction of Belgrave and Lilydale flier trains, as the government named them in 1999, that would have run express from Ringwood to Box Hill and from Box Hill to Richmond. That would have significantly reduced travel times for those passengers travelling long distances from Ringwood and beyond, including, of course, when returning home during the evening peaks.

Once again, however, the Bracks government has turned its back on the people in the outer east, by breaking yet another promise — coming on top of the Scoresby freeway that became a tollway. No funding has been allocated in the new budget for the third Ringwood railway line, nor have any plans for it been noted in the recently released long-term transport and livability study. Dandenong, a Labor heartland, is getting everything. We are told by the member for Bayswater to be content with a so-called SmartBus travelling from Ringwood to Dandenong. My constituents want to go into the city, not to Dandenong.

Cr Alex Makin, a spokesman for the Public Transport Users Association, said that:

... the east, including Maroondah, had definitely missed out compared with other regions.

He also said that even simple and much-needed projects like the Ringwood station upgrade still lay in uncertainty.

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

Community cabinet: Macedon Ranges

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — On Tuesday, 23 May, the Macedon Ranges hosted the 66th community cabinet. When members of the government were in opposition we had Labor Listens, which was a program of shadow ministers visiting areas throughout Victoria. The government continues the program as the community cabinet. Far from being a government whose members sit only at Spring Street, this government's members get out there to see and hear directly for themselves what is going on.

There was a huge number of submissions from individuals and community groups showing great interest in working with the government. It was a great opportunity also for representatives of the council to present to the cabinet the great things council is doing and the challenges it faces. As I said, community groups also had the opportunity to put their ideas and issues directly to ministers and officers of their departments — to sit down and explain exactly what their submission is about. As a local member it is also gave me an opportunity to show ministers some of the things that are important to the local community.

Ministers can see the geography and get a better understanding, which is also invaluable. It also allows ministers to see the results of earlier announcements and the fruits of their endeavours — to see works completed — and to celebrate and congratulate groups and individuals for their enormous efforts that they also contribute to the projects. The new community facility at Woodend, which provides a new home for the State Emergency Service, is a classic example of that. The Minister for State and Regional Development was there to see the government contribution and the huge community contribution come together to produce this fantastic new facility. I congratulate the Macedon Ranges Shire Council and the government.

Snowy Hydro Ltd: sale

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I raise today the issue of the Snowy Hydro privatisation. A petition has been circulated and organised by Douglas Nicholas, who has sought signatures from dignitaries and leaders of the community from all around Australia. I have been asked to present this petition to Parliament. It has been signed by former governor-generals, former prime ministers, former state governors, the former Lieutenant Governor of Victoria, artists, actors and writers. It has been signed by poet Les Murray and the Honourable Malcolm Fraser, a former Prime Minister. It is signed by QCs, ex-Snowy Hydro commissioners and engineers. I ask the state Parliament and the government of Victoria to listen to these concerns of the people who have signed this letter. I seek leave to incorporate the letter into *Hansard*.

Leave granted; see letter page 1643.

Mr INGRAM — I thank the members of all the parties for supporting that. This is an incredibly important issue. The people who have signed this letter would like the parliaments of Australia to take consideration of this issue.

Sue Graham

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk) — I would like to congratulate Sue Graham of Monbulk Primary School on recently being awarded a Westfield Premier's Education Scholarship. It recognises not only Sue's excellence as an educator and community builder but also the school itself, which has a great vision for the future of Monbulk.

Sue has more than 20 years teaching experience, has run her own tourism business and has actively participated in many community-based projects. Sue's leading role as a member of the Monbulk community redevelopment reference group is at the heart of her scholarship. It began with a proposal by principal Ray Yates to develop a living and learning centre. This original proposal was supported by the government with funding of \$200 000 by the Community Facilities Fund, with matching funds by the school. The idea has taken on a life of its own. Through partnership with the local community and council, it has grown into the complete redevelopment of the community centre. This new facility would include space for playgroups and preschools, maternal child health services, community meeting spaces, a cafe, the shire's service centre and a permanent library.

This exciting project has been further supported by the government with a Living Libraries program grant of \$110 000. A Community Support Fund application for \$700 000 is currently being assessed. The Shire of Yarra Ranges is fully behind this project, committing more than \$1 million.

Sue has been instrumental in developing the proposal, particularly the future management of such a joint facility. This holistic concept is very new to Australia. The scholarship will allow Sue to study facilities in the UK, Canada and New Zealand, aiding the development of both the management and design models of this visionary proposal.

I wish Sue the very best on her scholarship and look forward to the results. Congratulations.

Caulfield General Medical Centre: redevelopment

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — This morning I raise the issue of funding for the redevelopment of the Caulfield General Medical Centre. The story of the redevelopment of this hospital, which is an integral part of the Caulfield community, started during the time of the previous Liberal government, which, prior to the 1999 election, made a commitment to the redevelopment of Caulfield as a hub for aged care. As the member for Caulfield I have always supported this redevelopment and have raised the issue many times in this place. The current government made a commitment to the hospital in 2001 with the launch of the master plan prior to the 2002 election. While the nursing home has been built, no further funding has been allocated until this budget in the year of an election.

On a recent visit I was informed that it was estimated that the completed project would cost in excess of \$160 million, and there was great hope for a substantial level of funding this year. While the allocated \$23.5 million over three years in this budget is welcomed, it is obvious that the size of the allocation is only about 14 per cent of the total cost, which is somewhat disappointing and will not see the replacement of any of the old wards. However, I call on the Minister for Health to commit to the timely completion of the remainder of this project and to inform the house exactly when the completion date will be.

Barry Jackson

Ms McTAGGART (Evelyn) — I rise to pay tribute to Barry Jackson, an outstanding leader in education. Last month Barry retired after 46.4 years in the

Victorian education system. Barry was principal of Rolling Hills Primary School in my electorate. He served that school for 20 years and was a founding principal.

I recently attended the 20th anniversary of the school. It was a wonderful day, with many past teachers, students and parents reflecting on the 20 years from 1986. They all paid tribute to this outstanding man. His vision and commitment to education, the local community and the students set him apart from many. Barry is a well-respected member of the Yarra Valley principals network within our region.

Barry's journey through education has seen him take up many roles, including head teacher in a rural school; primary and post-primary teacher in metropolitan schools and consultant-researcher in the curriculum and research branch. He also worked with the office of the director-general and was a special services liaison officer and first extension education liaison officer. He was the assistant principal at Montrose Primary School and, for the last 20 years, principal at Rolling Hills.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Barry for his support and friendship over the last three and a half years. I know that he will never lose his commitment to education, the environment and local communities, but I hope he takes time to enjoy more travel and some well-earned rest. Congratulations, Barry, on your outstanding service, and all the best for the future.

Shepparton electorate: awards

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — I am always proud to represent the Shepparton district, but I am particularly proud that four prestigious awards were won by people in my electorate in the month of May. The Australian Mother of the Year was won by Mrs Carmel Gordon, a proud and loving mother of six children and grandmother of eight. Last year Carmel donated one of her kidneys to her son Geoff. Carmel is a foster-mother to a 16-year-old girl who has Angelman syndrome, and she has also worked tirelessly in children's disability services for 14 years. I was proud to join Carmel and her family and friends to celebrate her award at the Shepparton RSL club.

Kim and Allan Turner won the Tattersalls Award for Enterprise and Achievement. They and their son Jaz have worked tirelessly to raise awareness about organ donation after their 7-year-old daughter Zaidee died in 2004 and became the only Victorian child under 16 years of age to donate her organs that year. It is reported that last year 15 Australian children aged under 16 years donated their organs.

Sharon Oxenbury from Congupna won the National Palliative Care Short Story Competition. Sharon wrote her inspiring story about her husband Gary's — or Gaz's — battle with cancer. Sharon wrote her story to promote the work of palliative care and to thank the Goulburn Valley Hospice Care nurses for supporting them through Gaz's illness and for supporting her after his death.

St Brendan's Primary School won the inaugural Channel 9 *Today* show's Super School Competition, beating over 300 schools. Principal Julie Cobbledick said she will use the \$20 000 prize to help needy families from the school.

I pay tribute to these wonderful people who inspire us all.

Swinburne TAFE: national centre for sustainability

Mr LOCKWOOD (Bayswater) — Last Thursday I had the pleasure of joining the Premier at the announcement of a \$10 million building project to position Victoria as a leader in sustainability and environmental design. A new building for Swinburne's national centre for sustainability will be built at Swinburne TAFE's Wantirna South campus, which is a great development. We were also joined by Swinburne's vice-chancellor, Professor Ian Young, deputy vice-chancellor of TAFE, Alistair Crozier, and a number of other Swinburne staff, including Joan Cashion, Diane Gould, Shane Healey Sharon Rice, Ian Hesse and quite a number of others.

The \$10 million development will create new and refurbished energy-efficient buildings catering for up to 850 full-time students. The project will also employ up to 250 people during the construction phase. We need to invest in the skills of current and future generations of workers if we are to meet the future challenges of an ageing population, skills shortages and increased global competition. By investing in the knowledge and abilities of our work force we are not only ensuring their ongoing career success but also building a strong state economy for everyone.

This project will build on the state government's already substantial investment in education and training and help deliver a highly skilled, adaptable and innovative work force into the future. When up and running the centre will develop land management and design practices that reduce impacts on the environment. We need to integrate environmental considerations into everything we do, including making sure the buildings we design and the technologies we

develop are sustainable and capable of minimising any impact on the environment. Right now businesses are looking for expertise and ideas to reduce their environmental impact. It makes both environmental and economic sense to ensure that Victoria has a strong skills base in this area.

The centre will provide high-quality training and create opportunities for students across the state — —

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

Multicultural affairs: interpreter card

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — In 1995 the Liberal government introduced the Victorian interpreter card — a great initiative by a Liberal government. For seven years this government has effectively abandoned this important service, and thousands of Victorians who speak only limited English have been isolated and left to fend for themselves. This is not simply about the card; it is about ensuring that we are not ignoring entire sections of the community simply because they are unable to communicate in English.

Had the Labor government not sat on its hands the interpreter card might well have gone national by now, bridging the communication gap for Victorians dealing with local, state and federal departments and agencies. A Liberal government will work together with all states and the federal government to ensure that the interpreter card will be a nationally accepted and recognised card.

In the past this card has allowed Victorians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to access free professional qualified and accredited interpreters when dealing with government departments and agencies. Seven years on the Labor government has only recently relaunched a decade-old initiative. Because of this government's inaction many Victorians who might have been helped have missed out, often unaware the service existed. Members of this lazy government should have taken the idea to the ministerial council, but unfortunately they have sat on their hands for the past seven years and done nothing at all for Victorians.

Ashburton community centre: 20th anniversary

Mr STENSCHOLT (Burwood) — I am delighted to celebrate in the Victorian Parliament the 20th anniversary of the Ashburton community centre, located at 160 High Street, Ashburton. I congratulate

Hilary Puche and the entire committee on this milestone, as well as everyone else who uses the centre.

Initial lobbying for the centre took place in the early 1980s, and council purchased the property — a former doctor's rooms — in December 1983. A steering committee was set up under the leadership of Cr Jean Christie. Shelagh Amor was appointed as manager of the centre in early 1986, and the centre opened in May that year.

Many people have been involved over the years, and I will but mention a few. Shelagh was the first manager, and she actually provided me with a lot of detail for this statement; Alex Threlfall is the current manager and has been since 1998; Natasha Landau, the French and German teacher; and Jenny Biggin, the fitness instructor. These people have been running classes for 20 years. The first special interest group formed 20 years ago was the hand spinners. They are still going strong twice a month, and Monnie Fenner is still the leader. Programs at the centre have expanded tremendously over 20 years, and include three languages, painting and drawing, bobbin lace classes, furniture restoration, computer training, interior design, bridge, and mah-jong.

I also want to thank the many volunteers and staff over the years, including Joyce Hall, Helen Barrand, Jan Rattray and Tricia Noonan, as well as Jean Christie and former councillor, Keith Walter.

It is a great centre, and I recently spoke up strongly for it in Parliament when it was threatened by a funding cut. I will continue to passionately support and advocate for the Ashburton community centre and the people of Ashburton and Glen Iris.

Mooroolbark East Primary School: reading challenge

Ms BEARD (Kilsyth) — I would like to share highlights of my visit to Mooroolbark East Primary School on 23 May. Students from grades 3, 4, 5 and 6 gathered in the multipurpose room, which I was fortunate enough to open two years ago, to hear author Carole Wilkinson. Carole told the students about how and when she started writing, how she researches her historic novels, and how much time she devotes to her writing. Students asked some fascinating questions, and I feel sure they are set to write some great stories themselves.

I was delighted to talk to the enthusiastic students about the 2006 Premier's reading challenge. It is wonderful news for literacy in this state, to know that 429 students

at Mooroolbark East are registered with the Premier's reading challenge. Many thanks to principal Graeme Whitby, and Pam Haysom, the English coordinator, for the opportunity to share in this interesting visit.

Montrose Primary School: The Sustainables performance

Ms BEARD — I also had a pleasant experience during my recent visit to Montrose Primary School on Monday, 22 May. The purpose of this visit was to welcome The Sustainables *Live Challenge* — a madcap play all about saving the environment. The play is a very funny look at a most unusual day in the life of The Sustainables. Sam and Lemony Sustainable and their children, Solaris and Hydra, are at home one day considering the state of the environment when they receive a letter from the Department of Sustainability and Environment. The letter congratulates the family for being the most sustainable in Victoria, and invites them to participate in a *Big Brother*-style TV documentary. It was a most innovative way of explaining the need to care for the environment.

As usual my visit to this lovely Montrose school at the foot of the Dandenongs was very pleasant, and I thank principal Peter Durkin, assistant principal Geoff Sperring, staff and students, and in particular Kristen Morrow for her appreciative comments to conclude the day.

Buddies Early Learning Centre

Mr HUDSON (Bentleigh) — Recently I had the pleasure of opening the Buddies Early Learning Centre in Bentleigh. Buddies is a preschool and long-day care centre with a Jewish twist, and integrates Jewish culture into its program of early learning. It is a place that provides a wonderful sensory and visual presentation of Jewish culture through music, food, arts and crafts, singing and dancing. The Hebrew language is even peppered through the vegetable and herb garden.

The centre's founder, Sam Feldman-Bihary, describes the centre's philosophy as cultural but not religious. It is a creative space where Jewish kids can be exposed to the customs and celebrations of Jewish life. It is a centre in which children can engage in creative play, and learn from a rich educational environment. It includes an oversized sandpit with an inbuilt stage, vegetable and herb gardens, a bangalow palm secret forest, a tree stump alcove, rooms flooded with natural light, a deliberate use of natural materials and earthy hues, and a tropical thatched hut.

The centre is the product of Jewish ingenuity. When Sam and Darren Bihary could not find the sort of centre they wanted for their son, they decided to build their own. The new centre has been so successful in catering for the growing Jewish community in Bentleigh it has enrolments through to 2009, with waiting lists even before it is opened.

I wish Buddies every success in the future. It will provide a real opportunity and choice for the growing Jewish community in my electorate.

Meeting Our Transport Challenges: Seymour electorate

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — I rise to highlight the flexible transport solutions program, which arose from the Meeting Our Transport Challenges policy announced last week. It is a program of around \$18 million. This project supports up to 30 local councils across Victoria who have transport-disadvantaged communities.

Travelling around the state and also in my own electorate, I see that a major issue in rural areas in particular is the ability for people to access affordable public transport. Communities across the Seymour electorate have been looking at solutions to this for a long time. I encourage local shires and groups to apply for this program, which will help to provide affordable and accessible transport for their residents.

Investing in a Skilled Victoria program

Mr HARDMAN — I would also like to highlight Investing in a Skilled Victoria, which is a program that has also picked up a major issue that exists right across rural Victoria, and certainly in the Seymour electorate — that is, skill shortages. These skill shortages seriously impact on businesses and families in rural and regional Victorian areas.

The \$36 million trade bonus for all first-year apprentices is going to help encourage them, through a \$500 payment in their first year, to stay in their trades. This is particularly important for less well-off people who cannot afford to have their families subsidise their incomes whilst they are earning such low wages. The \$25 overnight allowance will also help these people to stay in their trades.

DOCUMENT**Tabled by Clerk:***East Link Project Act 2004:*

Orders under s. 7 varying the project area and extended project area (two documents)

Variation Statement No 6.

The SPEAKER — Order! As this document was left off the list that was given into the hands of members this morning, I will ask the staff to put a copy on everyone's seat so that they are aware it has been tabled.

ACCIDENT COMPENSATION AND OTHER LEGISLATION (AMENDMENT) BILL*Second reading*

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Workplace safety and its regulation have gone through tremendous change in the last five years, and all Victorians are the better for it.

Most importantly we have seen significant and sustained decreases in the rate of workplace deaths and injuries during that period, with 2005 being the safest year in a generation.

Last year Victoria recorded the lowest number of workplace fatalities since records began, as well as the largest reduction in the number of injury claims since 1997–98.

Workers injured at work not only have been restored the right to seek common-law damages for serious injuries; they now access a much more responsive range of benefits than they had before.

It has not only been workers and their families that have benefited from the turnaround in the VWA scheme. Victorian businesses have been able to maintain their competitive edge with this government keeping downward pressure on insurance costs, taking average premium rates to historic lows.

A good measure of this success is down to the sound financial management and administration of the scheme by the VWA and its board of management.

Through their hard work and collaboration with employers, workers and legal groups, the VWA has

been lifted out of the red and into the black, making Victoria the envy of all other states in this country.

It is in stark contrast to 1999–2000 when the VWA faced \$1 billion in unfunded liabilities, without enough money to cover entitlements for injured workers in the long term.

While there is a lot more work to do to consolidate the recent gains we are also aware of growing community expectations about how people injured at work can be best supported.

The scheme's sound position has provided scope for the government to review current benefits to identify opportunities for change so that they remain responsive to injured workers and their families when they need it most. The result is a package of improved benefits which form the central focus of this bill.

The bill will:

increase the level of weekly benefits for injured workers who initially return to work part time, from 60 per cent to 75 per cent of their pre-injury salary;

provide quicker access to impairment benefits for seriously injured workers;

provide injured workers with up to an additional six months of benefits beyond the present 104 weeks to 130 weeks;

increase death benefits to affected families by 18 per cent to a total of \$250 000 and include overtime and shift allowances in weekly pensions for surviving family members;

provide counselling services to families of severely injured workers.

It is a package that delivers on all fronts. It tackles some of the systemic issues that can hamper a worker rejoining employment and community life, or see a family struggle with the legacy of a very serious workplace injury or death. It provides improved benefits to those workers already in the system and those unfortunate enough to be injured in the future.

For those injured workers who retain a capacity to work, the added incentives to get back to part-time work will help preserve the key relationships with the workplace.

History shows that this is key to sustaining a worker's own quality of life and that of their family.

Currently those long-term injured workers are given only four weeks notice of an intention to cease their weekly benefits, which often does not provide scope for renewed efforts to retrain and support the worker returning to work.

The move to extend weekly benefits beyond 104 weeks to 130 weeks, with a tripling in the notice period of termination to 90 days will help what are some of our most vulnerable Victorians. They deserve our support and encouragement to reintegrate themselves back into suitable employment and community life.

Everyone has a role to play in improving return-to-work options for injured workers. Finding the best way to support workplace partners and find new opportunities for injured workers is a challenge that every scheme faces.

To meet this challenge the benefits package will be complemented by a new \$10 million fund to support partnership programs involving employer and worker organisations that will focus on improving successful and sustainable return-to-work opportunities for injured workers.

Those workers suffering more serious injuries will be better catered for. Currently, many of those who seek damages at common law can face lengthy delays before receiving any payout. This can cause financial and emotional strain as the worker and their family come to terms with the devastating effects of a serious injury. Most of the delays are unnecessary and costly, caused by some of the current processes used to determine the eligibility of injured workers to seek damages.

This bill will provide the opportunity for seriously injured workers to access impairment benefits prior to them seeking damages from the courts. The new arrangements still ensure that only those most seriously injured workers continue to have access to common law but allow them access to much-needed funds soon after their injury. If the worker subsequently obtains common-law damages, the amount paid in impairment benefits would be deducted from any common-law damages.

This bill does not ignore those who lose a loved one at the workplace.

Fewer workers died at work last year than in any other in the last generation, highlighting how VWA is helping Victorians take workplace safety to a new level.

Despite this, statistics mean little to those families and communities that have experienced the grief and pain

following a very serious injury or the death of one of their own.

While the increased lump-sum payments for dependants of deceased workers may ease at least some of the pain felt by families, improvements in the way that VWA manages these cases may well help even more. Families affected by a workplace death will have more and better help from the VWA in dealing with the Coroners court and other agencies.

The package provides greater dignity and support for those who have suffered as a result of their employment and helps those families who lose the most important asset of all, a loved one.

The bill also provides a range of changes which protect the viability of the scheme, resolve anomalies or introduce new claims management methods to ensure injured workers are not disadvantaged.

A technical change involves an amendment to the Workers Compensation Act 1958 to adopt remaining operative provisions of the Workers Compensation Regulations 1995. This will ensure that workers who make claims for injuries sustained prior to 1985 for long onset diseases, such as asbestosis and silicosis, are not disadvantaged.

This bill is the culmination of five years of reform; five years of working together with the Victorian community to take safety to a new level.

We now have a responsive, proactive health and safety regulator that embraces consultation as the most effective tool in reducing the number of Victorian workers injured at work.

We also have a workers compensation scheme that delivers to those unfortunate enough to be injured at work fair and comprehensive benefits to help them back to work or maintain a high quality of life.

I commend this bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr McINTOSH (Kew).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 15 June.

DRUGS, POISONS AND CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

The Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances (Amendment) Bill 2006 demonstrates the government's commitment to:

reducing illicit drug supply and use within the community;

ensuring that the quantities and types of drugs prescribed in the act remain relevant to the current state of the illicit drug trade; and

supporting the effective and efficient investigation and prosecution of major drug offences in light of policing experience.

Illicit drug use in Victoria, and Australia as a whole, contributes significantly to violence and crime, and other social and health problems. The measures outlined in the bill are aimed at deterring and reducing the manufacture and supply of illicit drugs in Victoria, and consequently increasing community safety.

I turn now to the specific provisions of the bill.

Last year the government announced that it would create an offence of possession of a tablet press without a lawful excuse. Whilst tablet presses have a wide range of lawful uses in the pharmaceutical, chemical and food industries, they are increasingly being diverted to more sinister purposes — converting powdered ecstasy, amphetamines and methamphetamines into tablet form for sale on the streets.

The bill provides that possession of a tablet press without a lawful excuse will be a criminal offence, punishable by a maximum of 600 penalty units, or five years imprisonment, or both.

This will still allow possession of a tablet press for a lawful purpose, such as use in the legitimate pharmaceutical, chemical and food industries, but will clamp down on possession for illegal drug manufacture.

The bill also creates an offence of possession of a prescribed precursor chemical at or above the prescribed quantity without lawful excuse. This offence will have a penalty of 600 penalty units, or five years imprisonment or both.

Precursor chemicals are those which are used to create other drugs (such as amphetamine and ecstasy). As with tablet presses, it is recognised that there are a variety of lawful reasons to possess such chemicals (scientific research, manufacturing et cetera), and the inclusion of a 'lawful excuse' defence ensures that legitimate users will not be captured by this offence. The schedule of chemicals to be prescribed will be the subject of extensive consultation with industry and other key stakeholders during the development of the regulations.

The bill also extends the offence of trafficking involving children. It is currently an offence for an adult to supply a drug to a child for that child to use or to sell to another child, but not for that child to sell the drugs to an adult.

The bill criminalises the supply of drugs to a child for the purposes of that child trafficking the drugs to an adult.

This amendment enhances the objectives of this offence, which are to reduce the supply of drugs for use by children and deter and punish those who exploit and endanger children through their recruitment as street level drug dealers.

Schedule 11 of the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 prescribes the drugs and classes of drugs that are illegal, and lists quantities in which various drugs are deemed to be possessed for the purposes of personal use, trafficking and commercial and large commercial enterprises. The bill makes various amendments to schedule 11 to ensure that the drugs and quantities prescribed remain relevant to recent developments in the illicit drug trade and to promote consistency in the way that similar drugs are treated in the schedule.

A key driver for these amendments is the increase in the sale of 'party drugs' such as amphetamine and ecstasy in tablet form, often heavily diluted with other substances.

In particular the bill adds a new class of 'designer drugs' to schedule 11. It also prescribes 'large commercial' quantities for a range of drugs whose prevalence in the illegal market has increased.

The bill lowers the threshold possession quantity for pseudoephedrine from 20 to 10 grams. The new lower threshold equates to 14 packets of over-the-counter cold and flu medication.

The bill also provides for numbers of plants to be used as an alternative to weight when quantifying the

amount of opium poppies an offender has in his or her possession. This method is already used in quantifying cannabis plants. The bill ensures that various amphetamine type substances such as ecstasy are treated consistently in schedule 11 of the act.

The bill also allows for multiple quantities of drugs of dependence in a dilute form to be aggregated for the purpose of deeming an offender to be in possession of a commercial or large commercial quantity of drugs, to better reflect the scale of the commercial enterprise that they may be engaged in (this is already available for drugs in a 'pure' form).

These amendments are aimed at ensuring that the drugs listed in schedule 11 and the various quantities at which they are deemed to be for personal use, trafficking or commercial and large commercial enterprises, remain relevant to and effective in targeting the illicit drug market in Victoria.

Finally the bill proposes a number of amendments aimed at enhancing the effective and efficient prosecution of drug offences.

Reflecting the increase in the use of hydroponic technology to cultivate cannabis, the bill amends the definition of 'cultivate' to include propagation of cuttings and the definition of 'narcotic plant' to include cuttings, with or without roots.

The bill also enables unsworn police personnel to be authorised to possess drugs in the course of their duties, for purposes such as transport, storage, examination, analysis and destruction of drugs. This will free up sworn police time, whilst ensuring that the handling of drugs during the prosecution process remains strictly controlled.

The bill extends the circumstances in which illegal drugs may be destroyed in situ. These amendments will enable Victoria Police to destroy volatile and potentially explosive substances used in illicit drug manufacture that pose a health and safety risk, without court authorisation.

According to the Australian Crime Commission's *Illicit Drug Data Report 2004–05*, detections of clandestine laboratories in Australia, the majority of which produce amphetamines, have continued to increase since 1996. In Victoria, between 1996 and mid-2005, a total of 157 clandestine laboratories were detected with a general increase in the number of detections annually.

The manufacture of amphetamines involves the use of highly toxic, flammable and explosive materials. Clandestine amphetamine laboratories detected by

police may pose a serious and immediate health risk to the community. It is imperative that police have the capacity to swiftly destroy the drugs and equipment in these laboratories where it poses a health and safety risk.

The bill enables the chief commissioner, or delegate (being a member of Victoria Police not less than the rank of superintendent), to authorise destruction or disposal of drugs and related material seized without warrant, expeditiously and, in situ, subject to appropriate safeguards, where an analyst or botanist certifies that this is required in the interests of health and safety. The chief commissioner will be required to keep statistics on the use of this power and report annually upon its use to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, who in turn will table that report in Parliament.

The analyst or botanist's certificate and the chief commissioner's or delegate's report on the destruction of the drugs and related material, will also be available to the owner or occupier of the land from which the items were seized and destroyed, and to any person charged in connection with the items seized or destroyed, to ensure procedural fairness in the prosecution process.

Currently all parts of the opium poppy, including the seeds, are classified as drugs of dependence. In practice, police are reluctant to enforce the prohibition on possession of poppy seeds, owing to their widespread culinary use. In recognition of this, the bill decriminalises the possession of poppy seeds.

Finally, the bill makes a technical amendment to the prescribed form of the search warrant set out in schedule 10 of the act to remove apparent inconsistencies between this form and the requirements of section 81 of the act.

The package of measures introduced in the bill implement a range of reforms designed to ensure that the legislative framework continues to provide the best possible support for the effective, efficient and proper investigation of major drug offences.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr WELLS (Scoresby).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 15 June.

NATIONAL PARKS AND CROWN LAND (RESERVES) ACTS (AMENDMENT) BILL*Second reading*

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Environment) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I am pleased to introduce this bill to further enhance Victoria's parks and reserves system. It complements other significant initiatives of the Bracks government in developing the system, notably the creation of the state's outstanding marine national parks and marine sanctuaries and the expansion of parks in the box-ironbark region in 2002, the additions to the parks and reserves system in 2004, and the creation of Point Nepean National Park and the Great Otway National Park in 2005.

The main features of the bill are:

amendments to the National Parks Act 1975 to add areas to six existing parks and to improve the provisions relating to offences in marine national parks and marine sanctuaries; and

amendments to the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 to create Bendigo, Kurth Kiln and Macedon regional parks, several associated water reserves at Macedon, four nature conservation reserves in the Otway region and a recreation reserve at Aireys Inlet.

There are also amendments to the definition of 'restricted Crown land' under the Mineral Resources Development Act 1990 and several other, mostly technical, amendments to the National Parks Act, the Crown Land (Reserves) Act and the Heritage Rivers Act 1992.

Changes to the parks system under the National Parks Act

The bill adds approximately 400 hectares to four national parks, one state park and a national heritage park under the National Parks Act.

Of particular note is the addition of Ironbark Basin to the Great Otway National Park. This significant area of remnant bushland is located close to Anglesea and adjacent to Point Addis Marine National Park. Surf Coast shire has generously agreed to surrender the land to the state at no cost for inclusion in the national park. A generously donated area containing part of the walking track at Sabine Falls, and three small

allotments currently owned by Wannon Water, will also be added to the park.

Small areas, mostly land acquisitions, will be added to French Island, Grampians and Mornington Peninsula national parks, Broken-Boosey State Park and Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park.

The bill excises sections of roads from Steiglitz Historic Park and Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park and a small area from the national heritage park that is not required for park purposes. It also corrects the plans of Grampians and Great Otway national parks and Beechworth Historic Park to exclude areas of freehold and associated roads. The excisions are minor and have minimal impact on the relevant parks. In accordance with section 11 of the National Parks Act, the National Parks Advisory Council has provided advice for tabling in Parliament. The council does not oppose the excisions, additional details of which are attached to the advice.

Marine national park and marine sanctuaries — offence provisions

Victoria's representative system of marine national parks and marine sanctuaries was created under the National Parks Act in November 2002. Fishing was prohibited in most of the parks and sanctuaries at that time, and in the remaining four marine national parks and part of one marine sanctuary in April 2004. An important aspect of managing these areas is the protection of all marine life, including high-value commercial species such as abalone and the deterrence of illegal activity.

The experience gained since 2002 from enforcing the 'no fishing' provisions of the National Parks Act and from prosecuting in the courts has contributed to several proposed amendments to those provisions. The amendments contained in clauses 5, 6 and 7 of the bill do not alter the fundamental position in law that fishing is prohibited in marine national parks and marine sanctuaries. Rather, they are intended to improve the ability to enforce the prohibition and to encourage compliance with it.

The amendments include several relating to the existing provisions in section 45A of the National Parks Act in order to improve their effectiveness. There are also three new offences created relating to the use of recreational fishing equipment in a marine national park or marine sanctuary, the liability for offences committed on board a boat, and the possession while in the water of priority species (abalone and rock lobster)

in a marine national park or marine sanctuary, for example, while diving or wading.

Regional parks

A feature of the bill is the reservation of Bendigo, Kurth Kiln and Macedon regional parks under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act. These parks arise from recommendations of the former Environment Conservation Council (ECC) or Land Conservation Council (LCC), the predecessors of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC).

Regional parks provide opportunities for informal recreation in natural or semi-natural surroundings. They are readily accessible from urban centres or major tourist routes, and they often cater for relatively large numbers of visitors. While the primary emphasis is recreation, regional parks may also have important conservation and water catchment values, and there may also be some minor resource use. Management plans for the parks will be prepared in consultation with the community.

Bendigo Regional Park

Bendigo Regional Park comprises nearly 8900 hectares of public land in and around Bendigo. The park, with its distinctive box-ironbark vegetation, will complement the existing Greater Bendigo National Park and the proposed public park based on the Crusoe Reservoir. The permanent reservation of the regional park will reinforce Bendigo's reputation as a 'city within a forest'.

The park is highly significant to Bendigo residents. It is used on a daily basis for many activities, including use of the Bendigo bushland trail, walking, bike riding, horseriding, jogging, nature observation, orienteering, prospecting and walking dogs. The park's values also include threatened flora and fauna, seasonal wildflower displays, Aboriginal cultural values and many historic features associated with past goldmining.

The bill provides for the ongoing authorisation of particular water supply infrastructure located in the park. By agreement, Coliban Water will be able to control, manage and construct specified water-related structures and installations such as channels. There is also provision for the granting of authorities for private water distribution works and pre-existing dams located in the park.

Kurth Kiln Regional Park

Kurth Kiln Regional Park covers more than 3400 hectares north-east of Gembrook and adjacent to

Bunyip State Park. The new park includes Egg Rock, waterfalls, the unique Kurth Kiln, and evidence of pre-1939 sawmills and associated tramways. There is also a rich flora, including several rare species. Ewart Park, which has been managed by the Shire of Yarra Ranges, commemorates the association of former local identity and past shire president, Mr Henry Ewart; this association will continue to be recognised in the new park.

Picnicking, walking, bike riding, camping, horseriding, dog walking, orienteering and visiting historic sites are among the activities enjoyed here. Valuable community support to the park is provided by the Friends of Kurth Kiln and the Gembrook Flora and Fauna Group.

In accordance with the recommendations of the former LCC and the Central Highlands Regional Forest Agreement, the bill provides for low-intensity timber harvesting to continue in the eastern section of the park. For this purpose, the bill deems part of the park to be protected forest within the meaning of the Forests Act 1958. Any harvesting would be on a small scale and would aim to minimise impacts on the park's recreation and conservation values.

Macedon Regional Park

Macedon Regional Park comprises most of the forested Crown land on the prominent Macedon Ranges. The park is a very popular day-visitor area readily accessible from Melbourne and nearby towns. Picnicking, walking (including along the Macedon Ranges walking trail), scenic driving, bike riding, nature observation and horseriding are popular activities. The park also has significant water supply, conservation and landscape values.

The bill provides for nearly 300 hectares of forested land currently owned by Western Water to be included in the park after its transfer to the state. I wish to thank Western Water for this significant contribution to this important park. These additional areas, which will continue to be managed to protect catchment values, will consolidate the park considerably and increase its size to more than 2200 hectares. As with Coliban Water, the bill enables Western Water, by agreement, to continue to control, manage and construct specified structures and installations in the park.

The bill also takes the opportunity to permanently reserve for water supply purposes eight areas that contain reservoirs and a tank that Western Water operates to provide water to adjacent towns. The reserves, which abut or are surrounded by the regional park, will include Crown land as well as land to be

transferred by Western Water. Also excluded from the park is the Mount Macedon memorial cross, which, in recognition of its special significance, will continue as a separate reservation with its own trustees and committee of management. Several pine plantations leased to Hancock Victorian Plantations are also excluded from the park.

Macedon Regional Park has significant community involvement and support, including from the Macedon Ranges Park Advisory Committee, which has played an important role in raising the profile of the park, the Shire of Macedon Ranges, the Friends of Macedon Ranges and the Barringo Reserve committee of management. The contributions of the community groups, like those of the groups at Kurth Kiln, are typical of those made by many committed individuals across the state in support of our parks and reserves.

Nature conservation reserves in the Otway region

VEAC's Angahook-Otway investigation recommended five nature conservation reserves in the Otway region, one of which is already fully reserved. These areas contain significant remnant vegetation and threatened species and are important in ensuring that the reserve system is representative of the natural environments occurring on public land in the Otway region.

The bill creates the remaining four reserves, totalling some 5000 hectares, under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act. The Bungador Stony Rises Nature Conservation Reserve comprises three remnants of public land in the stony rises region. Jancourt Nature Conservation Reserve contains the largest remnant of the once-extensive Heytesbury Forest and is complemented by the Coradjil Nature Conservation Reserve. The Marengo Nature Conservation Reserve extends and consolidates protection of the remnant coastal heath lands at Marengo. In accordance with VEAC's recommendations, the bill enables firewood to continue to be harvested from parts of the Jancourt reserve until 2010.

Other Crown land reserves

There are also several other reserves under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act covered by the bill. The bill re-reserves Aireys Inlet Natural Features Reserve for recreation purposes. This reflects the Aireys Inlet community's long-held desire for a sporting oval in the town and follows consultation with the local community.

The bill also amends the plans for the Nathalia, Numurkah and Wattville natural features reserves on the northern plains. The amendments incorporate the

results of surveys of roads excluded from the reserves that have been carried out since the reserves were established in 2002.

Restricted Crown land

Restricted Crown land is defined in schedule 3 to the Mineral Resources Development Act. Mineral exploration and mining works on restricted Crown land require the consent of the minister responsible for either the Crown Land (Reserves) Act or the Forests Act.

The bill amends the definition of 'restricted Crown land' by amending the descriptions of several reserves referred to in schedule 3 and by including an explicit reference to Castlemaine Diggings National Heritage Park. This is because the park includes some former freehold areas that would otherwise not be restricted Crown land under the general definition. The bill also excludes from the definition particular land at Carshalton near Bendigo that would otherwise be restricted Crown land but which will now be used as part of Bendigo Mining's operations.

Conclusion

The bill will enhance Victoria's magnificent parks and reserves system and the management of its marine national parks and marine sanctuaries. Permanently protected, the additions to existing parks and the new regional parks and other reserves will contribute to the long-term conservation of our natural and cultural heritage, as well as to the public's enjoyment of a wide variety of recreational activities.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast).

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Environment) — I move:

That the debate be adjourned for two weeks.

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — Acting Speaker, this is not actually on the matter of time, but I ask the minister if he would make available maps of the changes that are being proposed in this bill. There are a number of complex changes, and I ask whether he will make maps available in the library so all members are able to peruse the proposed changes as outlined in the bill.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Environment) — I am not aware of what maps are available. I will make inquiries as to what is available.

Motion agreed to and debate adjourned until Thursday, 15 June.

APPROPRIATION (2006/2007) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 30 May; motion of Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer).

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — On this side of the house we have a duty in representing the people of Victoria to hold the government to account for its financial and economic management — and with good reason. Labor has had seven years of healthy economic activity; seven budgets to strengthen our global competitiveness and secure our future prosperity; and seven budgets to build a network of high-standard services for Victorian families and to make the life of every Victorian neighbourhood the pride of Australia. Such an opportunity!

But once again Labor has wheeled out the selective leaks. Once more the initiatives have been overplayed. And yet still this budget is stuck in the same old groove: new taxes, record revenues, poor services, smoke and mirrors, and spruikers. We have heard it all before, and we have been let down before. Why should anyone believe them now?

When Victorians wake up tomorrow the trains will still be late, the roads will still be jammed, hospital beds will still be in short supply and basic standards in schools will still be faltering. Along with the rest of Australia we have experienced some of the most buoyant economic conditions in our history, and Labor has reaped the benefits, but Victorians have not been so well served. We can only imagine what could have been achieved in these times. Here we are, in budget week in Victoria, and after all the hype, all the leaks and all the spin, what have we got for it?

If there is one message from this budget it is this: \$7.1 billion of debt. The budget depends on debt, with total state debt ballooning from \$1.5 billion in June last year to \$7.1 billion by 2010. Just as it has in the past, Labor has turned to debt. There is only one reason for that: Labor has squandered its opportunities over the past seven years.

What do Victorians know of this Labor government? What have they learnt after nearly seven years? They know Labor will take a lot of their money; they know Labor will waste a lot of their money; they know Labor's projects will always run late; they know that everything Labor undertakes will end up over budget;

they know Labor breaks promises, even the biggest of the big; and they know the services they receive in return will be less than the best — less than they expect, less than they deserve and of course less than they paid for. Now Victorians know the consequences.

Labor has again resorted to debt to keep the wheels turning. It has done so because it has blown seven years of prosperity; it has done so because it is the easy option. Debt of itself is not necessarily an issue, but debt in the hands of those with a track record of reckless spending and poor financial control is a major concern.

Mismanagement and waste define this Labor government. There are so many examples. The Seal Rocks debacle cost taxpayers over \$50 million and is still unresolved. The cost of the regional fast rail links is \$670 million over budget, and we are still counting; they are at least four years overdue and have so far failed to deliver any significant reductions in travel times. The mobile data network for emergency services was scheduled as a \$100 million project and was to start in 2003; but it went \$71 million over budget and was completed two years late, by which time the technology was out of date and unworkable. The Spencer Street station redevelopment has run massively over budget and over time. And every Victorian has watched in horror as \$80 million of state government advertising has swamped their TV screens.

Now Labor is asking us to trust that its management of debt and spending will somehow be more prudent in the future. It is a big call and a cause for understandable concern among all Victorians. Victorians see a government that abrogates leadership and decision making, deferring it to committees, studies, analyses, investigations, performance tracking exercises and working groups — you name it. Yet it still never makes a decision. Victorians see a government that never takes people into its confidence or works closely with them and never gives an answer to a straight question — and a Premier who never levels with Victorians. Instead it relies on spin and multimillion-dollar advertising campaigns backed by more than 800 staff to doctor its messages to Victorians. Victorians deserve higher standards than this, and they deserve better services.

Before looking more closely at the budget itself, I want to take this opportunity to describe again the Victoria we want to see.

We want to see Victoria at its best. We want to see a vital state where excellence is the goal. We want the best possible services, especially in health, education, transport and infrastructure. We want to see schools

with the best possible teachers where the students come first; a health system where the patients come first; and trains, trams and buses where the passengers come first. We want to see a flourishing and flexible economy. We want to see a diverse and multicultural community that is outward looking and embracing. We want to see a secure and safe Victoria. We want to see government helping, not hindering. We want to see our extraordinary environment protected and nurtured.

Where do our expectations begin? They begin with the education of our children — Victoria's future. By way of illustrating our approach to a more vibrant Victoria, allow me to make some specific comments about education in particular. Education will be a centrepiece of a Liberal government. Education is a key to Victoria's future, a key to peace of mind for families and a key to opportunity for all our young people who are hard at work trying to stake their claim to a fulfilling life. Education needs to be focused on performance. We will ensure that it is.

Firstly, we want all Victorian students to have the opportunity to achieve the best they can. We want them to aspire, and we want them to excel.

Secondly, we want passionate teachers to guide the course of education in Victoria. A great deal is expected of teachers today. People are working harder and longer just to make ends meet and to educate their children. Often teachers have to fill the gap. They are having to play a bigger role in instilling values in young people and are becoming part of the extended home front. This is a growing challenge for them, and it needs to be recognised. Teachers need more support for the increasing demands imposed on them.

Thirdly, according to *Australian Literacy Levels*, a Program for International Student Assessment report of 2003, Victoria is currently at the bottom of the national literacy and numeracy table. Children have a desire to learn and expand their horizons, but instead of allowing them to drift aimlessly in an unresponsive system, we need to kindle their appetite for knowledge.

For a start in life, children need a high level of proficiency in literacy, mathematics, basic science and problem solving. This is an issue for the entire community. A Liberal government will lead Victoria to the top of the tables. Literacy and numeracy will be the no. 1 focus of primary school education. Schools and individual students who need help will be given every support to raise their performance. This should not be an extra burden on our already overstretched teachers. Their place is leading the classroom, and there they will stay.

I can advise today that a Liberal government will invite retired and semi-retired principals and teachers to form a supplementary resource to devote their passion and skills to a broader literacy and numeracy program. Many former teachers have been legends in the classroom. They have strong community connections. They understand the subtleties of the literacy challenge. We want to use the talents of these people who have a wealth of education experience to mentor and support students. We should be using their connections to their schools and their talents. We will fund mentors to work part time — not to do the work of teachers but to support and guide students, to lend their wisdom.

Fourth, a Liberal government will direct funding within the existing education budget to encourage a high level of community engagement in our schools. We want families to be more actively involved in their children's education. We want them to take on greater responsibility within school communities and for the way their children behave and perform. We will support a broader community engagement program to put former students back in touch with their old schools and serve as role models for today's students.

In addition to mentors, we will provide the pathways for volunteers who want to be involved with their local schools and local businesses and community organisations willing to make a strategic contribution in education. A Liberal government will provide a funding boost to schools, which will benefit from a more prominent role in attracting community involvement in schools. Fostering community engagement will create more focused communities of learning around schools and bring about a progressive improvement in overall standards.

Fifth, a Liberal government will support and foster the specific expertise of each school to provide the best education for each child. We will allow schools to develop specialist and selective entry programs within mainstream government schools. Talented students from surrounding schools will be able to attend specialised programs in curriculum areas in which the schools believe there is a demand. The demand may arise from school community interests, in particular the interests of students themselves, or it may be related to the local economy and the provision of jobs for young people close to their homes. A number of specialist schools will be established in each region of the state, and schools will have autonomy over determining entrance to the courses and their staffing.

Sixth, a Liberal government will also implement an integrated approach to build the state's skills base. Victorian industry is losing out because of the dire

shortage of skills. Firms find themselves having to pay for the cost of bringing in skilled overseas workers to fill the gap, and Australians are being denied opportunities because the infrastructure for their training is non-existent.

We will re-establish technical education opportunities that were lost under the Kirner government's social experiment. This will cater for students in years 7 to 12. Within the first term we will establish five new technical colleges, with the long-term intention of reversing the systematic closure of technical education. We will also recognise the valuable contribution of the adult and community education sector and private education and training providers. We will involve these organisations more closely in our skills-building strategy.

Nothing is more important in a state of excellence than a high standard of education. Nothing is more important for a government than making a genuine contribution to creating an educated nation. One of the keys is to have motivated teachers. The second is to motivate students, to give them the best education in the country. The third is to engage families and local communities actively in the education of their children. These are just some of a suite of education initiatives we will be releasing in detail over the weeks ahead.

I turn now to some of the specifics of the budget. Victorians have every reason to believe Labor has let them down. On six previous occasions we have heard Labor crowing about surpluses and promises. Yet on each occasion the claims have not stood the test of time. Tax relief has been nothing more than an illusion. In fact, the government will collect record revenue from its own taxes and charges over the next year. Mismanagement continues, and Victorians are left to suffer the shortfall in services.

Labor inherited a golden legacy when it came to office seven years ago — a state in a strong financial position, with a strong, growing economy and a strong, performance-oriented administration. It is now looking by the end of the term to siphon direct taxes of \$10.8 billion from Victorians and Victorian businesses, in a revenue stream totalling \$34.5 billion — almost double the amount of seven years ago.

Victorians — around 5 050 000 of them — will be slugged \$900 a head more in state taxes than they were when Labor came to office. The claimed tax cuts are an illusion. It is tax tears, not tax cuts, that are hurting. There are no meaningful reductions in land tax. In fact five in every six taxpayers will pay more land tax next year, and total receipts will rise over the next four years.

Land tax under this government has more than doubled. Under the previous government land tax receipts actually shrank, from approximately \$500 million to less than \$400 million.

Mr Brumby — The economy was in recession!

Mr BAILLIEU — Your recession!

Mr Stensholt — Stay with the script!

Mr BAILLIEU — Thank you — good to have your support.

The changes to land tax indexation and valuation objections are welcome, but the hypocrisy is breathtaking. These were Liberal policies, rejected by the government when proposed in this house. Bracket creep will also mean an increase in payroll tax receipts over four years.

There are no reductions in stamp duty. Stamp duty scales in Victoria have not changed since 1998. Stamp duty on the typical Melbourne home has increased by more than 80 per cent since the Bracks government came to office. On a \$350 000 home Victorian first home buyers are paying \$16 660 in stamp duty, compared with just \$3250 in Queensland and nothing at all in New South Wales. The first home owners bonus, now \$3000, is to be scrapped. Housing will be less affordable.

Gaming and gambling taxes continue to soar. Adding back GST diversions, total taxation receipts from Victorian gamblers are around \$2 billion. Needless to say, revenue from speed cameras is up a projected 31 per cent — to \$416 million, compared with some \$100 million six years ago.

Debt is spiralling and in 2010 will be 373 per cent higher than it was last June. Victorians old enough to remember the Cain and Kirner governments do not need to be reminded of the dangers — but perhaps a younger generation does.

Three things put this budget into realistic context. They illustrate that once again Labor has turned to one-off and dodgy deals.

First, the windfall gain from the sale of Snowy Hydro is propping up the budget. The proceeds Labor has decided will be used to fund school capital works — in this budget only \$100 million of more than \$600 million — have been allocated. Perhaps it is no surprise, but the traditional rolling capital works budget for schools has actually been reduced.

Second, Labor has stripped \$600 million of motorists' funds from the Transport Accident Commission — in addition to the usual dividends it takes each year.

Third, Labor has cashed in \$2.9 billion in future payments due from Transurban for a quick return of \$609 million. That is like borrowing the money at an interest rate of 9.7 per cent when it could have been obtained in the market for around 6 per cent. Independent commentators have slammed the Transurban deal. The share market has cast its judgment on whether this was a good deal for Transurban or for taxpayers — the market added some \$220 million to the value of Transurban in just a few days.

This shows a reckless Labor, a Labor prepared to do deals, a Labor prepared to put its short-term political interests ahead of the state's interests and a Labor that has not explained how borrowing hundreds of millions of dollars above the market rate can possibly give taxpayers a good deal.

Any deals involving precious taxpayer dollars warrant careful scrutiny. Potentially, they carry a high level of risk for Victoria. The Liberal Party commits to holding the government to public account on this critical issue. But with the other hand the government has tossed in a cash-for-kids bonus — \$300 to each prep and grade 7 starter to help with clothes and books, it is said. Pity the kids who were asked preferred toys; they are not silly. In case no-one was paying attention, a \$150 cash payment in July this year; sure, no-one starts school in July, but it would not be because the election is in November, would it?

The cynicism of this exercise was quickly revealed when neither the Premier nor the Treasurer could tell the media who would get it or how they would get it. Under pressure, the Treasurer then suggested some parents might like to send it back. Clearly this one was cobbled together at the last minute to sweeten the pie and divert attention from more critical issues. How telling it is of Labor's approach to government that coloured ads promoting this handout appeared in this morning's papers even though the government does not know how it works yet. Ads first, answers second and taxpayers last — the Labor way!

After seven budgets the consequence of Labor's failure has become critical. A government that is, in reality, the most powerful in Victoria's history has squandered a golden opportunity. It inherited a huge and growing surplus. It has enjoyed massive majorities in both houses, and it has had the support of mates in the other states and territories, the union movement and local

government. There is little this government could not have done, but there is so little it has.

We need to consider the situation that now confronts us all. Victoria has derived significant benefit from Australia's historically high growth, but the state's economy is performing below the national average and unprecedented challenges lie ahead for Victoria. The resources boom in the west and north of the country is part of the reason — only a part. Throughout its history Victoria has benefited from having a distinctive and growing economy. Yes, there have been times of great uncertainty and hardship — in the Depression, the two world wars and a Labor government or two — but these have usually been adversities shared around the nation and, indeed, the rest of the world. Victoria has always had a sound, dynamic economic base that Victorians understood and to which we could turn for recovery and continuing success.

Our state first shone in the 1850s on the back of the gold rush. This building is our daily reminder of that, and the legacy is still evident in the extraordinary civic infrastructure that era vested in Melbourne and almost every country city and town. But the drivers of our economy have shifted over the years. In turn, the state has looked to agriculture, mining, manufacturing, resources, financial services and, of course, tourism and lifestyle — and technology, education services and medical research have been a focus.

But in the great periods of economic prosperity, Victorians have always understood the fundamental calling of the state. Our best governments have joined industry to drive the economy, to grow our prosperity and to provide employment. But today we are beginning to feel the pressure. Victoria's economy is underperforming and lagging behind the rest of the nation. Our growth has been below the national average. This year's forecast makes it five years out of seven where this state has lagged behind the rest of Australia.

There is much greater uncertainty as to our future direction and the nature of our future economic drivers. Victorians have an acute sense of this uncertainty and are looking for leadership, vision and decisiveness. The rise of the Asian giants, China and India, is the dominant influence on the outlook for our region. Their staggering economic growth has fuelled Australia's resources boom. To visit Shanghai is to understand the future.

While the boom is welcome and has brought prosperity, there are some harsh realities accompanying it. In particular, it has lifted exchange rates and favoured the

resource-rich states of Western Australia and Queensland. Rising exchange rates are putting pressure on Australia's export manufacturing sector because our goods are becoming more expensive in overseas markets and the fast-growing states are drawing activity from Victoria.

In the face of these challenges the government has slumbered on and failed to detect that the national economy is undergoing a structural change that counts against Victoria because of its large manufacturing and service industry base. Unlike Western Australia and the Northern Territory, we cannot just dig our way out of it; we have to be smarter. Victoria has to show initiative and commonsense in shaping our industry policy. We have to define the drivers of tomorrow. We have to reinvent Victoria in changing economic circumstances to re-establish our credentials in a different, tougher marketplace. We have to work with the people in industry and business, not against them, to support them in research and development programs, to upgrade technical skills training, and build the infrastructure that streamlines their operation and cuts their cost base.

The Treasury recently released the findings of a study identifying the nature and scale of a dual economy, in which Victoria is on the wrong side of the tracks. But it seems the government has not been listening to its key budget adviser. The Treasurer's speech on Tuesday referred briefly to these pressures on the economy. He acknowledged, in just a few words, that the 'manufacturing sector is under pressure' — that is all there was on manufacturing.

Let us look at what he did not say. Manufacturing investment in Victoria is the same now as it was seven years ago while investment across the rest of Australia has risen nearly 74 per cent. Look at our exports. Our share of total national exports has fallen to the lowest levels on record, just 12.8 per cent in the last 12 months compared with 19.1 per cent in the 12 months to October 1999.

The Treasurer then attempted to define 'Victoria's industry base for the future', covering biotech, medical research and life sciences, film, television, digital media and financial services. Modest sums have been assigned to support these sectors. These are noble pursuits, but the question remains as to whether they are the drivers of the future. Does Victoria have significant enough advantage in these areas to attract major investments? It remains a key question. Even if successful, will there be enough growth in jobs in these sectors to sustain economic growth for the state as a whole?

On these issues the budget papers are far from clear. Financial services are by definition mobile; they travel lightly, and in this area we face stiff competition from other states and Asia. Film and television, again, are highly competitive industries that require low-cost locations. Our outstanding record in medical sciences derives in the main from research in our public institutions, and private sector research depends on access to large investment pools and venture capital. For these you have to look to America and Europe. No doubt that is why the Premier and Treasurer make their annual trips to the international bioconferences and expo in North America. But by way of caution, in the two years to 2005 Victoria's share of venture capital investment in Australia in sectors such as biotech, high tech and communications fell from almost 37 per cent to below 28 per cent. It underlines that, while the Treasurer talks of making Victoria the best place to do business, there is much, much more to do.

This should have been a budget of reform. It presented Labor with the opportunity to set the necessary solutions in place to create a more certain future for young people seeking their place in the world. It was the opportunity to create a more competitive and supportive environment for the businesses whose enterprise and innovation underpin the state's prosperity. The best that can be said of the budget is that it is an opportunity gone begging.

A Liberal government will be committed to an economic management strategy that fosters and exploits our natural competitive advantages as the key to Victoria's future economic growth. We have low-cost power and abundant natural gas. We are leaders in freight handling and logistics. We have a creative culture and an environment and lifestyle that are envied around the world. Victoria is the heartland of industry sectors capable of winning back a competitive lead given the right conditions. We must also support value-added manufacturing, agriculture, mining and mining services, energy, tourism and events, community service sectors, such as health and education, and IT, multimedia and communications.

For Victoria to compete in these areas and for these to be the drivers of our continuing prosperity and job opportunities, we need to be smarter and to leverage the critical mass of innovation in the Victorian economy in Victorian workplaces, but the budget was silent on most of these areas. In fact the government's rhetoric in and outside this house suggests quite the opposite in some instances. The government talks of energy schemes that will inevitably make our power more expensive. Despite his public rhetoric and the urgings of business, the Treasurer has provided no funding for the port of

Melbourne channel deepening project, nor is there any funding for the provision of alternative port facilities, and there is still no indication that rail standardisation is any closer, despite all Labor's promises.

The government has also turned its back on country Victoria. No matter how the government might like to spin it, spending in the primary industry department is set to fall by \$28 million. Ballarat and Geelong get nothing to ease their water supply issues. The promised Bendigo pipeline project has been so quickly cobbled together following a recent Liberal Party announcement that the funding details, timing and route are still to be determined. There is still no initiative to address the rural doctor shortage, and hospitals in the south-west and south-east have missed out on funding. No financial support has been offered to country councils, and for many towns there is still no sign of reticulated natural gas which was promised to many of them in 2002.

Over the course of the last seven years Labor has also raised expectations in a whole range of other areas that remain unaddressed by this budget or by other recent announcements. The communities affected have every right to feel disappointed and let down. These projects include new rail lines to South Morang and to Rowville, passenger rail to Leongatha, new tramline extensions, the Frankston and Dingley bypasses, the Eastern and Tullamarine freeway connections and a new hospital in Warrnambool.

The message Labor is sending is that projects such as these will not be funded by the budget and that Labor will not address waste and mismanagement issues. Service issues, such as carers and increasing dementia concerns, have also missed out. Once again Labor has demonstrated its own lack of faith in its metropolitan strategy plan, Melbourne 2030, with funding limited to support for five transit cities out of the 1000 designated activity centres. And the public transport targets underpinning Melbourne 2030 have now been all but officially abandoned.

But irrespective of Labor's smug satisfaction at the increased allocation for infrastructure, much of this spending is in the out years and so effectively on the never-never. Only a small part of the allocation will be spent in the next year.

Some of Victoria's basic infrastructure is antiquated, inadequate and in need of repair, and the program the government has outlined is really only a hesitant and sketchy beginning. The imperative of a more competitive economy is not on Labor's radar. Where is the strategy, the sense of urgency to make Victoria's

economic heart beat faster? There is no strategic plan for the development of infrastructure — the transport, energy, water and communications assets and networks that give business the means to be competitive and are the foundation of both urban and rural communities. The state's infrastructure assets are under the most extreme pressure.

We commit to long-term infrastructure renewal — a forward plan to upgrade existing assets and build new infrastructure over the next 20 years to meet Victoria's future needs. This will be combined with reform of infrastructure management to ensure it serves us with maximum efficiency. We will establish a Victorian infrastructure fund. This will allow us to better manage funds used for infrastructure and other capital works. In that way we can make sure departments and public bodies are properly funded for the repair and replacement of the state's infrastructure.

We also commit a Liberal government to basic, honest financial management. This budget is an unsustainable pre-election splurge. It is an indictment of Labor's seven years of waste and mismanagement that, despite record taxes, the government has been forced to rely on debt, asset sales and asset stripping to put its budget together. Without the one-off windfalls our debt would be even higher. And to make matters worse, Labor has no proper plans for how the money will be spent and has made little attempt to show that taxpayers will get value for money. We are not opposed to borrowings at a sustainable level based on sound forward planning and evaluation of the costs and benefits; however, the rush back to big borrowings in this budget is not based on a careful consideration of needs, costs and benefits. It is driven by crass political expediency.

We guarantee Victorians financial accountability and transparency and an end to the waste of the past seven years. A Liberal government will set performance milestones for financial accounting and report against them. We will construct a fair tax regime — taxes that are fair to families and allow businesses to compete and focus on innovation. A Liberal government will specify the level and quality of services Victorians can expect and will report progressively on service performance standards and outcomes. You will not get mere numbers that Labor portrays as an end in themselves, but measurable results.

Victoria must change direction to avoid ending up a basket case like New South Wales. We must break away from drift and mediocrity. A Liberal government will deliver on the following goals: services that are assured and reliable; infrastructure that is properly planned and delivered; fair, stable and affordable taxes;

borrowings only for projects that will deliver genuine benefits greater than the cost; simple and efficient regulation and timely government decision making; and honest reporting and accountability to citizens about the things government is doing on their behalf.

Victorians expect a more effective and accountable government — one that is disciplined when it comes to the management of the state's finances, one that will deliver value for money in the taxes Victorians pay, one that will do the hard work behind the scenes to deliver projects on time and on budget and one that will encourage and grow real enterprising businesses and jobs here in Victoria.

Victorians want to see genuine accountability, transparency and outcomes, and this is what a Liberal government will deliver. The problems we have outlined and the approach we are proposing underline the extent of Victoria's leadership vacuum. The budget typifies Labor's core priority, which is to survive by sleight of hand, to foster the illusion of an eternal comfort zone where we need not be concerned because she'll be right and near enough will be good enough.

Over seven years the fundamental culture of our state has slipped. Gone is the culture of success, the culture of excellence, the culture of action, the culture of achievement, the culture of pride and the drive to the top. In their place Victorians have been conditioned to expect and accept lower standards. We get a message that it is okay to tolerate poor performance and mediocrity, to be unconcerned with delays and indifferent to blow-outs. It is a message that comes right from the top.

This budget tells the story of a government that has had it too easy; a government that has, in the face of pressing needs, simply nodded off. We say Victoria can no longer afford the slumber party. Today we want to draw the line between Labor's go slow and what a passionate Liberal government will do. We will not be timid in providing the leadership and the conviction in driving cultural change throughout our great state. We want higher standards, we want better services, we want an end to the mismanagement and to the waste, and we want better value for money. We want Victoria to shine.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — Labor cannot manage money. Some things never change, and one of them is that Labor cannot manage money, and the figures as produced in the budget papers and as appear in past budget papers are absolutely compelling. I seek leave of the house to have incorporated in *Hansard* a table, which I have distributed to all

members. It is on the basis of that table that I make the case that Labor cannot manage money.

Leave granted; see table page 1644.

Mr RYAN — When you look at the figures that are extrapolated from the budget papers and incorporated in the table you see they tell a story which is reflective of the position that prevails in Victoria. What they show is a series of events, and I might say that the actual expenditure and revenue data that is shown in the table I have now placed before the house differs to some degree from the historical series set out in table A.3 of budget paper 4, and that may well be because of the changes in accounting standards over a period of time. But what is involved in the data in this table is fundamentally derived from the individual annual financial reports, where both the budgeted and the actual revenue and expenditure are presented in comparable terms.

What the data tells you is two principal things. The first thing the table tells you is that budget expenditure in each of the seven years that government by Labor has occurred in Victoria has invariably gone over the top. The table shows that the expenditure has exceeded the budgeted figures by a total of \$8.374 billion over that period of seven years. What the table also shows is that in the same time, fortunately, the revenue figures have also exceeded the budget that the government had allowed. Over that seven years the income has been \$10.613 billion over and above that which the government budgeted for.

What does that tell you? What it says is that by the good grace of the performance of the economy, particularly at a federal level, we have been able to fortuitously have in Victoria revenues which have exceeded this government's capacity to blow the budget to the tune of about \$2.3 billion over that seven-year period. You cannot help but wonder how would households in Victoria survive under the same process. How would people who are expected to run their own households according to their budgets ever be able to do it if they ran their economies in the way this government has run the Victorian economy in the last seven years?

They could not run a chook raffle, this crew, and when you look at the government's own figures derived from its own budget papers, they tell the story — and they do tell the facts. The budget speech by the Treasurer recites, he says, the facts of the situation. These figures derived from the government's own budget papers tell the facts, and what we have in the budget speech is the three Rs — we have got rubbish, we have got rhetoric

and we have got ramblings — and the only line in it that can really carry any credibility is that which appears on page 2 of the Treasurer's budget speech, where the Treasurer says:

It is true that we inherited a strong financial position.

How true it is! That is the one accurate line.

The comparisons with 1992, when the former government assumed government in the state, are very interesting and are pertinent to this whole discussion about the incapacity of Labor to manage money. With regard to the Victorian Commission of Audit, volume 1 of the report at page 17 sets out some interesting figures. In 1992 the total debt faced by the Victorian government across all sectors was \$68 billion. This year it is \$27 billion. The interest commitment by the Victorian government in 1992 was \$1.644 billion. This year it is \$135 million. Interest as a percentage of revenue in 1992 was 14 per cent. Fourteen per cent of the revenues coming to the state of Victoria were dedicated to paying the interest on the debt. This year it is 0.4 per cent. And bear in mind that the income in 1992 was about one-third of what it now is. If you had the same sort of percentages applying now as applied in 1992 it would cost about \$4.5 billion to service the debt, and that equates to around the cost of running our education and health systems.

The comparisons are absolutely stark, but they do not finish there. If you have a look at the forward estimates for 1992–93 you see that what Labor was going to do was run a recurrent deficit of another \$1.9 billion. What it was going to do in 1993–94 was have a recurrent deficit of \$3.3 billion. These are Labor's own figures. In 1994–95 it was going to be \$3.75 billion, and these people talk about running an economy! It is a joke. The fact is they cannot manage now. You need only to look at the table. They cannot manage now, so how would they have managed then? One cannot help but contemplate — for not too long — how ever they would have managed then. The worst feature of it is that they are borrowing again. They are borrowing money. When you go out there and talk to Victorians, and I find this particularly as I roam around the state talking to country Victorians, this is the Achilles heel of Labor parties and Labor governments.

People understand, particularly in a country Victorian context, that Labor cannot manage money. It is true that when we came to government in 1992 things were tough. For all the reasons I have set out, things were tough. This government has never known it tough, and the trouble is the time is coming when it is going to know it tough, and the issue is: how will it stand up to

the pressure? To say, as the Treasurer said, that they inherited a strong financial position is in fact the case, whereas we tend to hear from them the big mantra that 350 schools were closed. Interestingly, the Minister for Education Services is sitting here at the table. I ask her rhetorically, of course, Acting Speaker, because I do not seek interjections, 'How many did they reopen?'. Three hundred and fifty schools were closed, they say. How many did they reopen? And how many have closed since they have been the government? Is it up to 70? Is it up to 80? How many is it now?

It is more of the rhetoric and the rubbish that we hear from them all the time. It is just par for the course. The fact is changes had to be made because this state had been absolutely streeeted by a Labor government which could not manage money and still cannot manage money. That, of course, is the thing that worries country Victorians most.

Changes were made back in 1992 and subsequently because the government of the day had the courage to make them in the face of the need to do it. The pity of it all now is that this government cannot run the state properly. It is in a state of unparalleled good fortune and it has no vision; it is introspective; it is navel-gazing; and to add to it all, it is borrowing money. Can you believe it is borrowing money!

Let us look at some of the revenue streams it has available to it that have only filtered through to the public eye as this last couple of days has gone past. Let us look, for example, at the Transport Accident Commission. The government snipped the TAC for \$600 million. Don't worry about Wipe Off 5, they have wiped the TAC off for \$600 million! Crikey wrote an article over the last couple of days saying, quite rightly, that something of the order of \$7 billion has gone out of the TAC over the years. I remember that the former Treasurer, Alan Stockdale, snipped the TAC for about \$1 million in about 1993 or something of that order. But the huge difference is we did not have any money.

We had a revenue stream that was about 35 per cent of the revenue stream available to this government. It was all hands to the pumps. But this bunch has knocked the TAC off for another \$600 million. How many roads would that have funded? How many campaigns would we have been able to deliver to get better outcomes for Victorians if that \$600 million were available? What an absolute disgrace! Of course, instead of, as they could do and as they should do, reducing registration fees for people, instead of giving back to poor pensioners and card-holders the \$82 that was knocked off from them by the government in the budget two years ago, here the government is snipping the TAC for another

\$600 million. Instead of doing constructive things in the use of that money, they have pocketed the \$600 million and put it into the till.

What about the Snowy? They are selling off Victoria's interest in Snowy Hydro of about \$600 million. This is the government that swore blind it would not sell publicly owned bodies that had control of water assets in Victoria. They changed the constitution to achieve it. They told Victorians they would never do it. What do they do at the first turn? They sell us out for \$600 million, and it may well be \$800 million. It is an appalling state of affairs on their part.

Ms Allan interjected.

Mr RYAN — The minister asks me what I say about Mark Vaile's position? I say, as I have said to Mark Vaile, 'You shouldn't sell. Victoria should not sell. It has a 29 per cent share in this entity, and it should keep it. It pays us a handsome dividend. It would make us the major shareholder in a privatised entity, and Victoria shouldn't sell'. It is a disgrace to be selling it — not only on the merits, but because the members of the government promised the people of Victoria they would not be selling water-based assets, and they have gone and done it. It is another measure of them, I might say.

What about the Transurban deal? This is a little ripper. They have traded in \$2.9 billion worth of future entitlements for \$600 million. What a great deal this has been! Some of the commentary on this has been terrific. I am sorry the Treasurer is not here, because I have the clippings here. I brought in the clippings, and there are some rippers. There are some terrific clippings here — there are pages of them. There is an article published in the *Australian Financial Review* under the name of James Hall. He has an article headed 'Transurban takes road to riches'. Isn't that a commentary! In his article he said:

Earlier this month Melbourne's Transurban group was a major beneficiary of the Victorian government's \$10.5 billion plan to overhaul its transport network.

He then said:

In the deal struck this month, Transurban will pay \$609 million over four years in exchange for the cancellation of \$2.9 billion of debt, in the form of concession notes ...

He went on to outline what they are. He then continued:

Transurban will also jointly fund with the government a \$903 million upgrade to 75 kilometres of road on the West Gate–CityLink–Monash Freeway corridor.

Transurban —

do you mind! —

will provide \$166 million of the funding, for the section of the upgrade relating to the CityLink, which it owns and operates.

That is one of those classic statements. A bit further on he said:

Overall this is a deal that makes sense for Transurban. UBS analyst Craig Stafford said in a note to clients —

wait for it —

'We believe that both legs of it, particularly the concession note arbitrage, are value accretive'.

That is what he said. What is he really saying? That is code for his saying, 'We cannot believe our luck'. That is code for his saying, 'We deadset saw them coming, and we absolutely cleaned them up'. That is code for his saying, 'How long has this been going on? How lucky are we?'. They have just been snipped, absolutely snipped, and here are members of the government out celebrating — \$600 million — and they have been had; they have been utterly taken for a ride. They have all been out there. I have all the clippings here. I am sorry the Treasurer is not here. I will give them to him later. Ken Davidson has given them a bit of a working over, and Terry McCrann wrote a superb article in relation to it all — \$600 million in exchange for \$2.9 billion. What an absolute classic — yet another!

Then we have the land tax take — money going up. They have been termed by the Leader of the Opposition as Clayton's cuts, and they are. When you look at the forward estimates, you see that the amount the government takes is going up. Payroll tax is going up; stamp duty is going up. We have commentary from the Real Estate Institute of Victoria quite rightly saying it is purchasers of homes in Victoria, particularly young people, who are funding the government's current budgetary surplus because the stamp duty is nothing less than obscene, and here they are floating in this sea of cash and they are still out there borrowing money.

As for speeding fines, I wonder if we are going to see a bit more of what happened last year. Remember that last year it was put to the government that it should contribute the money collected from the speeding fines, which was then going to be about \$300 million, to roads programs. It eventually agreed. About \$800 million a year is spent by this government on roads programs, and the government agreed to put the speeding fines in, except that what it forgot to tell everybody was that it dropped \$300 million out of the bottom and sent it back into Treasury. The net figure was the same.

This is the sort of stuff that people have become used to with this government: speeding fines, gambling taxes — \$1.5 billion I think the total estimates are for all sources, but about \$1 billion out of electronic gaming machines in the course of this coming year. Remember the commentary? Government members were going to play merry hell with a big stick in relation to gambling issues. They were going to do all sorts of things. The figures continue to go up. This is them to a tee — all on the revenue side of it. Even at this early stage, a couple of days after the budget, these are the figures that have been distilled.

What about the other side of the ledger? Let us have a look at some of the expenditure items. The \$600 million from the Snowy is going into education. Educational infrastructure is a laudable aim and governments of all persuasions should commit to it, but it is just completely wrong for this \$600 million in its totality to be devoted entirely to education-related assets. Some of this money at least should be going to our water infrastructure. This government is selling off part of our water heritage. It should at least return some of it to our water future. It is appalling to think that the water assets of this state are being sacrificed in part by this sale, yet none of that money is coming back into our water assets. It is a dreadful mistake on the part of government.

What about the so-called School Start bonus, the \$180 million package that has been promoted by the government? I say 'promoted by the government' in the loosest sense, because no-one can quite work out how it is supposed to operate. We have had versions of it from the Treasurer, we have had versions of it from the Premier, and we have had versions of it from the Minister for Education Services, who sadly has just left the chamber. No-one seems to know how this is going to work.

Dr Sykes interjected.

Mr RYAN — Is a cheque going to be sent in the mail, as the member for Benalla observes? Or are people going to have to fill in a form and send it in to get it? No-one really knows. In the end it misses the point, and people out there recognise this. They will take the \$300, of course, but when you listen to the subtext of their commentary people are saying, 'Fix the actual problem'. That is what this government will not do.

As I roam about around the state and talk to various kindergarten groups, I find they are saying something that is recognised by the Australian Education Union, and yesterday in a question to the Premier I referred to

some commentary by Mary Bluett. All those people are saying to me, 'Take the kindergarten sector out of the Department of Human Services and shift it across to the Department of Education and Training'. To do that you would need to import into the education department an early learning component around the kindergarten sector. You would not just take it out of one and plonk it into the other, you would have to support it — and that is what you should do.

Kinders should go across to the education sector, because if you do that it relieves young parents of the enormous problems associated with having to form a new committee each year and worry about kindergarten administration. It also relieves parents of the problem of having to raise the money for attendance fees, and it relieves the parents of having to fund the ever-growing demands of infrastructure. You take away all those issues in one hit if they go across to education. They are the reasons why people want the kindergarten sector to go into the education sector. What is this government going to do instead? It is going to try and buy votes with this half-baked scheme, the School Start bonus. People see it for what it is.

I was with the member for Lowan for a couple of days last week talking to representatives of one of the clusters of seven kindergartens in the Hamilton region. The parents of those students are paying \$120 a term for each of four terms this year, so that is about \$480 in fees just to go there — never mind the extra money that they need. They were saying to us that if the sector went across to education, it would solve those sorts of problems.

I was in Wangaratta recently with the member for Murray Valley. He would not get in the sandpit and play with me, I might say. I was in there with those kids having a play in the sandpit, but the member for Murray Valley, the wuss, would not do it. But I was talking to those kiddies and then to their parents, and they were saying the same thing to me. A few weeks ago I was with the member for Benalla doing the same thing. There is a unanimous view, I believe, amongst the parents of kindergarten kiddies that they want this problem fixed. But you do not fix this problem by throwing this enormous amount of money against the wall in a vain endeavour to attract votes in the election in November.

On a third aspect of the expenditure, the government should tell the truth about the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF), because at the moment it is not. Another example of its activity appears in budget paper 3, which reports the target expenditure from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund for the

coming budget year. It also records the estimated expenditure in the year just past and the actual expenditures for the previous financial year. We have had a good look at some of the figures over the period from 2000–01 through to 2004–05. If you concentrate on the figures for 2004–05, you see that in those budget papers the government advised that its target for RIDF expenditure was \$78.7 million. In the 2005–06 budget paper that was released in May 2005, the government advised that the expected outcome for 2004–05 was \$76.7 million — in other words, the figures roughly equated.

But the 2006–07 budget papers released this week reveal that the actual expenditure for 2004–05 was \$36.4 million. So the government started with an estimate of \$78.7 million, it revised that to \$76.7 million, but in fact it spent \$36.4 million. That is what the government's own budget papers tell us.

If you translate that process through the five years from 2000–01 to 2004–05, it tells you that the expenditure targets for the coming years that were announced by the government totalled \$446.7 million — an admirable figure. When it was revisited so that you had the expected expenditures for each year announced in the following budgets, the total figure was \$300.7 million. But the actual expenditure reported in the budget papers for those five years was \$150.4 million, so there is \$300 million not accounted for.

The government needs to tell us the truth about how the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund is operating. Indeed I am writing to our newly appointed Auditor-General to seek his assistance on this issue. It will be an interesting task for him.

The government should tell the truth about education. The commonwealth government tests children in all states and publishes the percentages of students meeting national benchmarks for reading, writing and numeracy. While children's performances have improved over the years, Victoria's position relative to other states has fallen. For example in 1999 the percentage of year 3 Victorian students reaching the national reading benchmark was the third highest behind children in the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales. In 2004, which is the latest year for which the statistics are available, Victoria fell to seventh amongst all jurisdictions, ahead only of the Northern Territory. That is a terrific performance.

The government should tell the truth about the performance of the rail sector. Despite the apparent spending on V/Line over the course of the last six or seven years, the performance of country trains has

deteriorated. We have gone from between 93 and 95 per cent arriving on time to only 80.6 per cent arriving on time in the first quarter of 2006. This is all drawn out of the budget papers. Even more alarming, while the total number of passengers carried on V/Line in 1999–2000 was 8.4 million, the total number of passengers expected to be carried in 2005–06 is 6.8 million. So there has been a 19 per cent drop in patronage on V/Line. This has been sourced from budget paper 3, comparing figures for 2001–02 through to 2006–07. The subsidy per passenger has absolutely exploded. On the best figures we can find, it has gone from about \$7.61 per passenger trip to \$26.28 per passenger trip. The government should tell the truth about these issues.

The government should tell the truth about health issues. In 1999–2000 the waiting time for semi-urgent patients was 35 days; from July to December last year, it was 42 days. In 1999–2000 the waiting times for non-urgent patients was 52 days; from July to December last year, it was 65 days. The government should tell the truth about these sorts of things to the people of Victoria. Throw into the bargain the Rural Ambulance Victoria inquiry that is now being undertaken. This is the inquiry which the government was never going to have and which RAV said was unnecessary. Now we have it. It is not being done in a judicial form, but at least the State Services Authority is actually having a look at it. These are the sorts of things the government should tell the truth about to the people of Victoria.

There is an even better measure of this government. If you want a benchmark of absolute incompetence, have a look at its performance in major projects. We have the toxic waste dump saga, and what a disgrace it has been and continues to be. This government has lurched from one option to another over a period of years. A couple of ministers have come and gone, having been sacked from the important role of Minister for Major Projects. That should be the most eagerly sought-after role around the cabinet table. This lot deals with it like a game of pass the parcel. It is a case of who happens to be in the place at the time. You could not see a better example of that than the toxic waste dump saga.

Remember how the government started off with the whole business about being inclusive and having the people of Victoria involved. That went out the window. Then we got to the point where it took that on internally and established a specific cabinet subcommittee under the cloak of government, along with all the commentary about commercial in confidence, budget papers and the like — all variations on the same theme.

The government went about Victoria secretly seeking to find a site to locate the dump. It even went through the ignominious process of saying the dump would be located in country Victoria on one of three privately owned properties. It threatened the people concerned by subterfuge, saying that if after an environment effects statement was done their particular property was going to be the one, then that property would be compulsorily acquired. What a dreadful disgrace, with people turning up at the door of these poor folk, delivering the message from this open, honest and accountable government that if all the circumstances suited Labor, their property would be taken from them.

When that fell over, as it was inevitably going to, the government lurched to its current option at Hattah Nowingi. I understand that the chair of the panel that is hearing issues at the moment in Mildura has used the expression 'the importance of natural justice'. There has been no natural justice for the people of the Sunraysia, there has been no natural justice up at Hattah Nowingi, and there has been no natural justice up around Mildura. The government is trying to pin these people with a responsibility that it has never been able to accommodate. It has lurched from one option to another, and now it has fallen onto the wrong one again.

The fact remains that it is utter stupidity to be transporting material, about 80 per cent of which is produced in Melbourne, over a distance of about 500 kilometres across the state so it can be treated in the facility it is looking to establish at Hattah Nowingi. This apparently benign entity, which is not supposed to represent a threat to anybody, is going to be parked adjacent to the Murray River, close to the furthest corner of the state of Victoria — and by some means or other, yet to be revealed, the materials will be transported there ever after. How stupid it is! Talking about natural justice, we will see how that plays out in the course of time. It is a benchmark of incompetence and stupidity.

I want to talk about the fast rail — or farce rail — program. I want to read from a document that is instructive in relation to the question of the so-called fast rail program. The document, which was prepared by ACIL Consulting, says in part:

... however, ACIL has serious doubts about the overall benefits of the FRLP —

fast rail links project —

to regional and rural Victoria.

The time-savings in actual minutes between the four regional centres (Ballarat, Bendigo, Traralgon and Geelong) and Melbourne are not particularly large

...

Only a minor percentage of the existing train users in the four corridors would actually benefit from even these faster times

...

For these reasons the government's consultants' estimates of the increases in population, employment and consumer expenditure as a direct result of the FRLP appear to be seriously overstated.

Similarly, the estimates of the increase in passenger travel as a direct result of the faster (express) rail times also appear to be seriously overstated.

...

Whilst the FRLP would provide only minimal, if any, benefit to people living in the four regional centres to which the faster services would apply, it would provide no benefit at all to the rest of the population of regional and rural Victoria ...

The amount of public funds to be devoted to the FRLP finally is unclear —

boom, boom, do you mind!

It will be a minimum of \$550 million. It could be \$250 million more if the private sector investment envisaged does not eventuate. And it could be more than that again if the cost blow-outs common to major public sector infrastructure projects occur.

What is the most compelling feature of the documentation? The most compelling feature is that it was written in November 2001! Almost five years ago ACIL Consulting accurately forewarned this government of exactly that which has now occurred. This ridiculously flawed concept was never going to work, and this government tagged on to it because it thought it was a smart idea at the time. Of course, it was never going to work. Why wouldn't it work; why won't it work now; and why won't it ever work? Because essentially you can shave a few minutes off the system in the country and you might save 5 minutes, but the problem is if the system is linked into the Met, then you immediately put the so-called fast rail back into the Met operation. You have to have a dedicated line as happens in Europe and in other parts of the world. If you do not have the train running on its own dedicated line, you will never save time in the way this failed, ridiculous concept was supposed to be achieving.

We will get the new trains, and that will be terrific. We have always applauded that. We should have had a proper investment of this vast amount of money, which started at \$80 million but is now \$800 million and rising to who knows where. We should have had the benefit of this money being invested in so many other

ways. The fast rail exercise has been a benchmark example of the incompetence of this government.

You can go through them. Spencer Street station, or Southern Cross station, as it is now called for some reason — it is described by a Labor insider as the billion-dollar roof — is over time and over budget. The synchrotron does not seem to get much of a mention these days. I do not know what has quite happened to that, but then again not many people do. The rail standardisation issue where \$96 million was committed in 2001 and not a cracker of it spent. It has gone off into the ether somewhere. Now supposedly \$53 million is being spent as long as the federal government is prepared to put up \$20 million to get us a second-rate upgrade of the system to at least give some sort of freight movement on that line.

Then there is the channel deepening saga. What a disaster that has been. I have another clipping for the Treasurer. It is an article from the *Age* yesterday by Philip Hopkins. He refers to commentary from the shipping industry. It states:

The shipping industry has condemned the state government's failure to commit any money in the budget to Melbourne's channel deepening project.

'We are very disappointed', shipping chairman Michael Phillips said. 'We thought they would have put something in the budget'.

How hopeless is it that the stated intention to build this magnificent project is because it is so essential, yet nothing has been committed in the budget. The article continues with further comments from Michael Phillips:

He said a process involving a revised environmental effects statement was in place, but that even if the project was approved next year, there would be a big time-lag before the work could begin.

He goes on to describe the almost, one fears, inevitable outcome that we are going to be bypassed. He states:

... shipping lines were now using smaller, traditional containerships, but would eventually switch to bigger vessels that can be handled at Adelaide, Sydney and Brisbane — but not Melbourne.

'When that happens, it will be the end of Melbourne's days as Australia's number one container port', he said.

What have they got in the budget to accommodate this extraordinarily important project? Nothing. What sort of measure is it? It is again the benchmark of the absolute incompetence of this government.

What about all of this from the perspective of country Victorians. In fairness, because I do try to be balanced

about these things, there are elements of the budget that we welcome. We welcome the fact there is a payroll cut, albeit a small cut. It is 25 basis points in financial terms, or a quarter of a per cent, but if there was proper budget management, there should be more of it. I welcome the fact there are some WorkCover cuts, but there should be more. I welcome the rolling funding that comes in all budgets in relation to schools, health and education, but the government has an obligation to tell the truth in relation to these things.

I take the opportunity to warn government that people are awake to and are increasingly concerned about the pea and thimble trick that is epitomised again in this budget. I welcome the appointment of a board for the Central Gippsland Health Service, which is in my electorate. I think the eight people who will constitute the board will do a wonderful job in the future governance of what is a magnificent health service and a great asset for Gippsland. I am disappointed that there is no health funding in the budget for the expected \$9 million which was to be the first part of the rebuild of the hospital at Leongatha, which is also in my electorate. I have written to the Minister for Health about that and I continue to seek an assurance.

I am very pleased to see money in the budget for the rebuild of the Rochester hospital. What a great job the member for Rodney has done — a terrific job. When all about him people were losing their heads, he kept his. He was the commonsense voice throughout this saga. I am delighted to see that the money has been provided. I pay credit to the government for doing it and credit to the health minister for making the money available. Rochester, which is very near my own hometown of Lockington, and the region will be the beneficiary of that investment. I say again credit should be given where due, and it is a credit to the member for Rodney, whose absence after November this year will be noted. He will be sadly missed in this place. That is another example of the many great legacies of his service to his electorate.

From the perspective of country Victoria, all we want the government to do is to give us a go. That is all we want. This is not the poor-boy-me argument. All we want is for the government to give us a go, because country Victoria, given the opportunity, will make an even greater contribution than it now does to the fortunes of this state. It would be a win for everyone if the government gives us a go.

I refer again to the funding queries around the operation of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. It was a good idea and we always supported it, but the truth has to be told about its operations. The

government needs to come clean about it. Our need for infrastructure is paramount. These things which are taken for granted in a metropolitan environment are not on the ground in so much of country Victoria. Here in Melbourne you take for granted that you drive down paved roads, that the gutters are made, that the footpaths are made, that you can flick the light switch and power is available, that you can turn on the stove and there will be gas, that your water systems will operate properly. Unfortunately that is not the case throughout the country.

At a time when we did not have money in this state, the former government provided \$1.2 billion to get our water and waste water facilities up to date, and \$400 million of that was spent throughout country Victoria. This government is not supporting country Victoria with initiatives of that magnitude. We have country Victorian communities which are grappling with the reality of competing with global economies. That is particularly so in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, which do an absolutely magnificent job.

When you stop and contemplate the fact that, with New Zealand, the Australian economy now produces through its dairy industry about 5 per cent of the global production of milk yet represents about 65 per cent of the global trade in milk products, you see it is an extraordinary record of achievement by people who run their dairy farms and do so competing in a global economy without any form of assistance, subsidies or otherwise. They are so efficient in the way they operate. They deserve to be supported by the government of the day. We do not see that in this budget. The funding for the Department of Primary Industries has been cut again. Where is the Minister for Agriculture in these things?

I refer to comments from the Victorian Farmers Federation in its press release headed 'Big spend misses the mark for farmers', which states:

Farmers will be disappointed that the biggest infrastructure spend in Victoria's history has ignored the top priorities of farming communities.

The government is not supporting the farming communities of Victoria. I instanced the dairy industry, but the same can be said of the way in which our grains industries compete internationally. Our horticultural enterprises are growing all the time. In our wine sector, this very night I will be speaking at a forum where Gippsland will be celebrating the magnificence of the wines it produces — a concept that 10, 20, or 30 years ago would never even have been thought of. These are the things that are happening throughout country

Victoria — these and more — but we have to be given a fair go by the government, and we are simply not getting it through the agency of this budget.

There are more major things that the government should be doing through country Victoria. We need another base load power generation facility to be built in Victoria — and we need it urgently. The first level of commitment to this is one of political philosophy. The government has got to stop dancing around the edges. The government must say to the industry that it is prepared to support the electricity industry in the development of another base load generator.

We have about 500 years worth of brown coal in the Latrobe Valley, and that is an extraordinary competitive edge. The issue is not to leave it in the ground, as the mads in the Greens would have it. The issue is how you get it out of the ground in a responsible way, paying appropriate heed to all the environmental criteria that quite properly apply today, making certain that you take the best advantage of this extraordinary asset in a manner which will give the best opportunity to Victorians generally but particularly those who live in the Latrobe Valley. The government must make a commitment to the development of another base load power generator. These are projects of a dimension that requires 6, 8 or 10 years of lead time. It will never start unless the government makes a clear commitment to it, and I call upon the government to do so.

We need to build more dams in Victoria south of the Ranges. I am afraid we cannot build them north of the Ranges, because we have commitments under the Murray–Darling Basin arrangements. That is just a fact of life. But south of the Ranges we can, and we should do it. We should at least explore it. The last time this was looked at was about 25 or 30 years ago, when about 70-odd sites were earmarked for further investigation. The government should look at building more dams south of the Ranges. Just think what we could do, for example, in East Gippsland if we had more water available. We could do this now in a manner which would provide win-win outcomes — a win for the environment by preserving and enhancing the future of the Gippsland Lakes and a win by making sure that water is available for further horticultural and general agricultural development.

These things can be done. It has just been done in Queensland. A new 300-gigalitre dam, which was opened by Premier Peter Beattie last year, has been built there. As I have recently read, the way that dam operates provides enormous benefits. We do not need to shy away. Modern technologies and techniques can be used — in a manner that was not contemplated 10 or

20 years ago when the last dam was built in Victoria — to build them in a very responsible way, paying heed to what this government has come to popularly term the ‘triple bottom line’.

We should use the money from the sale of the Snowy Hydro, in part at least, for the development of more of our water assets. I have already made reference to that issue. We should support our agricultural communities and the manufacturing sectors which are based around them. In that regard I refer to the Gippsland Lakes rescue package, which to its credit this government has operated over the past four years. It is a \$12.8 million package devoted to the notion of reducing nutrient flows into the Gippsland Lakes. But the package will run out in about the next six weeks. I have called upon the government to renew the program and to put in about \$10 million to ensure that this excellent program is continued and to support our agricultural communities, which are taking terrific initiatives to do their part in contributing to the reduction of nutrients going into the water systems and finally into the Gippsland Lakes. The government cannot expect that the agricultural communities will continue to shoulder the burden for this on their own. That is an unfair expectation. The program the government has been running is a very good one and it should be re-funded, but it has not been in this budget.

The issue of rail — freight and passenger — is crying out for attention from this government. Labor has no vision, absolutely none, for the movement of freight on rail in Victoria. It has abrogated its responsibilities. It has staggered into this budget with the \$53 million, as I have said, but ignored what was to happen with the \$96 million announced in 2001 for work to be done on the line to Mildura, supposedly for standardisation. Money is needed for upgrades, and the government should provide it. That is done under the structure that applies in New South Wales; it can be done here in Victoria, and it should be being done.

Similarly, before the 1999 election the government made commitments to return passenger trains to Mildura and to Leongatha. Nothing has happened with those two lines. A study was supposedly undertaken on the Leongatha line with \$3 million from last year’s budget. What has happened to the study? Why can that not be released, at least? Can we not see what should have been, presumably, 12 months worth of work? The government needs to honour that commitment.

I refer to the issue of encouraging port development in Victoria. I have spoken about channel deepening and its significance and about our agricultural and manufacturing enterprises being dependent to a large

degree on that occurring, but it does not stop there. The port of Portland should be the focus of attention by the government. In saying that I acknowledge that the port runs as a privatised entity, but that does not preclude the government from working with the organisation for the purpose of enabling Portland to be an increasingly important aspect of our — —

Mr Delahunty — Shipping capacity.

Mr RYAN — Yes, our shipping capacity in Victoria. Similarly at Barry Point in South Gippsland a terrific project is being undertaken to build a new port around from Barry Beach immediately adjacent to the existing Esso terminal. The government should lend positive assistance to the developer of that enterprise, because in the final analysis it is in the state’s interest that that development occur. It would provide port access to Gippsland in a manner that is simply not available at the moment.

I refer to the issue of roads and bridges. The government’s dedication of funds in this budget to this important infrastructure is woeful. The Nationals have said that the government should be doing something in the nature of what the federal government has done through its excellent Roads to Recovery program. What a magnificent success that has been. Conceived in the first instance by John Anderson in his role as the then federal Leader of The Nationals, it has delivered countless benefits. Money goes straight to local government, which enables people on the ground in country communities to decide where the money would best be spent, and then devote it accordingly. The state government should do likewise.

The Nationals have proposed that 1 per cent of GST payments to Victoria should go to local government and that a component of that money should be directed straight to roads and bridges. We would like to see that 1 per cent grow to 3 per cent over a period of time. Local government, understandably, has welcomed that initiative, as it would ensure that more funds are available to councils from the state government to maintain the all-important roads and bridges.

I have referred to channel deepening. In agriculture the cuts in the budget to the Department of Primary Industries are absolutely reprehensible. What about the fox bounty? Where is the money for the fox bounty? During the fox bounty 170 000 foxes were bowled over, yet the government has cut out the bounty. It has never yet properly explained why it has done that.

Only a couple of Fridays ago I was out at the property of a fellow named Tim Bowman. He and his wife Julie

own a property near Rosedale not far out of town. They have shot 46 foxes on their property in a 22-day period since Anzac Day. In the 22 days subsequent to Anzac Day 46 foxes were shot on their property. These are very competent and capable landowners who pay due regard to the issues associated with controlling vermin on their land. They tell me — and it is said to me anecdotally as I roam around the state — that fox numbers are prolific and approaching plague proportions and that there is no comparison of the numbers now with those in the year the fox bounty was in operation.

The numbers of foxes out there is extraordinary, and the government should reintroduce the fox bounty — not to operate on its own, but in conjunction with baiting programs and the other mechanisms that are necessary to control these pests. It should bring the fox bounty back in. Apart from anything else, it might get the foxtails off the radio aerial of the car of the member for Benalla, which many would say would be a darn good thing.

They are but some of the things that country Victoria is crying out for. I emphasise this is not a poor-boy-me argument. Rather this is country Victoria simply saying to the government that everybody in Victoria is going to be a beneficiary if country Victoria is able to be supported in a way that is appropriate to its needs and aspirations.

A lot of promises have been made by the government, and most of them have not been kept. I suppose the most outstanding is the promise of natural gas connections. About 10 or 15 of the towns that were told by the Treasurer — who is also the Minister for State and Regional Development — before the last election in 2002 that they would be the beneficiaries of those gas extensions are still waiting. Again, it is testimony to the incompetence of the government that it cannot run these programs properly.

There are other issues which are preying upon the minds of country Victorians in particular. Country Victorians want this government to govern with integrity and honesty, because people see those features lacking in the present governance. I will quickly refer to material which was produced by the Premier. I have with me the ALP response to the Independents charter of 12 October 1999, which was directed to the member for Mildura. In the course of many pages the Premier said various things. He said his government was committed to:

1. Promoting open and accountable government.

I would suggest that that has sunk all hands. The Premier also committed to:

- 1.2 Rebuild the Freedom of Information Act.

I suggest that if that were not so serious, it would be the height of absolute farce. You, Acting Speaker, can read through them. The Premier also said:

As Premier in the Bracks Labor government, I personally commit to the following:

Instructing all ministers to answer questions directly and in a manner that does not waste the time of the Parliament; and

Lead by example by answering all questions specifically with the required detail to fully inform members of the Parliament of the issue raised.

I do not know where that commitment has gone, but it is well out in the ether. There is plenty more of these, but time is against me. Amongst his other commitments are:

Upgrade key regional rail links ...

We are still waiting. He also said:

Inject \$120 million to fix accident black spots in country Victoria from —

wait for it —

a once off special dividend from the TAC ...

Today we have talked about the government snipping \$600 million out of the Transport Accident Commission. 'Let us not worry about the detail', is what this government would say.

What people want the government to do is to govern with honesty and integrity. It has failed miserably to live up to the terms of this famous Independents charter. It is interesting to now reflect that of those Independent members, at least one has had the good grace to declare her colours by formally returning to the Labor Party and then subsequently standing as a Labor Party candidate in the federal election. We will say no more about the other two Independents, except for the fact that you can tell a hell of a lot about a bloke by the company he keeps.

I believe the government should establish a standing committee on crime and corruption, because the propositions the government has advanced in Victoria have been convoluted and have not worked. The Ombudsman of this state should not be filling a role within the Office of Police Integrity. It was always a bad mix and so it continues to be. We should have a

standing commission on crime and corruption in the state of Victoria.

Seven years ago the government undertook to govern for all Victorians. I believe that it has failed miserably in that task. The business interests in this state are so important to its future — in fact, absolutely vital. As I have acknowledged in this chamber, there are some snippets for business in this budget. But there is a lot more downside than upside, particularly in relation to ongoing taxation and increases to taxation that our business communities will face over the coming years as set out in the forward estimates in the budget papers.

But in governing for all Victorians, the government also has an obligation to govern for our families, which provide the cornerstone to our communities. The government has a particular obligation to look after those who are disadvantaged in our communities, those who do not have access to the benefits that so many of us do. In those respects the government has failed miserably to live up to its own acknowledged obligation to govern for all Victorians.

Last week, in the company of the member for Lowan, I was at the neighbourhood house in Nhill. The day before I had been at the neighbourhood house in Hamilton. The ladies and guys there told me about the sorts of imposts which they now face through the operations, fees and the like, which have been imposed on them by the government. To its credit, the government has put \$28 million into this budget over four years to assist neighbourhood houses.

Mind you, that is in the face of a budget submission from the neighbourhood house network for \$85.5 million over five years — but it is something. It is about 40 per cent of their ask, and I commend the government for doing it. But on the other side of the coin, the people in these neighbourhood houses tell me and write to me about the sorts of imposts which are taking money out even as the money is apparently being put in. The government has an obligation to look after these people. It is another necessary element of our society.

Above all, this government has to lift its game. Mediocrity will not be accepted by the citizens of Victoria. We are in a state of good fortune, the like of which we have not seen since the years of the gold rush. It is being squandered by the Labor Party. Labor has never been able to manage money, and it still cannot; and it is to the detriment of the citizens of the state of Victoria.

It is an awesome responsibility to be the government of the day. I remember it well. I enjoyed my time while I was in it. When sitting on this side of the house I worry about the way in which the Labor Party is wasting the chance which was provided to it in 1999. It has an obligation to govern for all Victorians. But to do that and do that properly, the government has to lift its game. We in this state are entitled to excellence, not the second-hand sort of delivery that we are getting from Labor at the moment.

Above all else, if members of the government do look after the people of Victoria in the way that they should — and very particularly if they look after the people of country Victoria in the way that they should — this state will be all the richer and all the better for the fact. We do live in a great state in a great nation but the members of the Labor Party government in Victoria are wasting a once-in-a-generation, once-in-a-lifetime chance — and shame upon them.

Mr STENS Holt (Burwood) — I rise to support the state budget for 2006–07. It is a great budget that meets the challenges facing Victoria and squarely delivers for Victorian families and all Victorians.

The hallmarks of the 2006–07 budget include financial stability and fiscal responsibility, with a strong operating surplus of \$317 million and a surplus going forward over the next four years at about that level. It includes a forward vision of making Victoria the best place in Australia to do business by driving jobs and investment. Indeed, since 1999 the government has created more than 300 000 jobs in Victoria. The budget hallmarks include support for families by taking the results of our continued strong economic growth and delivering continued benefits for those families. Of course, the hallmarks include service delivery through continued strong investment in health, education, community safety, job creation and delivery of high-quality aged care, hospitals and medical research here in Victoria.

The budget also includes the building of Victoria's future now through continued and increased massive investment in infrastructure, which includes roads, public transport, schools, technical and further education colleges, and public housing. We have in this budget the second instalment of *A Fairer Victoria*, with an additional \$818 million over five years for 82 new initiatives. Members of the government are actually saying something here. I listened to the Leader of the Opposition's speech. He said nothing. He mentioned about one thing — it was all just flummery.

This budget retains Victoria's AAA rating. We are responsibly managing Victoria's finances and the AAA rating has been reaffirmed by the rating agencies. Under the Bracks government we have a proud record of prudent fiscal management and financial policies.

This is a budget which contains \$4.9 billion for investment in capital works. Going forward, we have approximately \$3.2 billion — that is, \$3200 million — worth of infrastructure per year, with \$12.6 billion to be spent over the next four years. What did we have in the last years of the Kennett government? One billion dollars a year! This is really investing in Victoria.

This is a budget that over the next four years provides \$1.4 billion in savings to Victorian businesses and taxpayers, with cuts to payroll and land taxes and WorkCover premiums. That is \$1400 million in savings to Victorian businesses and taxpayers. This is not an illusion; these tax cuts are real — and I will come back to that later. A cut is a cut is a cut. The budget is reducing taxes for businesses.

This is a budget that provides \$1.2 billion for schools and skills; \$2.5 billion for health, hospitals, community services, aged care and medical research; and \$3.3 billion for roads and public transport.

This is a budget that delivers for all of Victoria. It provides \$766 million to improve the environment and enhance our lives here in Victoria. The Bracks government has invested more in parks — whether they are marine parks, metropolitan parks or parks out there in rural and regional Victoria — than any other government in history.

The government's budget provides \$444 million for the fight against crime, in support of the justice system and emergency services. Members of the government are very proud of our emergency services and our police here in Victoria. Rather than cutting police numbers and destroying the morale of the police force, we have actually built them up again. We have restored the competency and the morale of the police force here in Victoria — and crime is down, of course, by 22 per cent over the past four or five years.

Once again, this is a budget that demonstrates that the Bracks government governs for all Victorians, with \$1100 million for projects and programs across provincial Victoria. We heard the Leader of The Nationals — or is it the National Party, the Country Party or the VicNats or maybe the New Liberals?

Mr Haermeyer — The NikNats!

Mr STENSHOLT — Or the NikNats. We heard his usual claptrap about how we will all be ruined and heard him say that there is nothing for country Victoria. I just mentioned that there is \$1100 million in the budget for provincial Victoria. We have rebuilt provincial Victoria. Labor is the party for rural and regional Victoria. Indeed, we heard virtually the same speech as last time from the Leader of The Nationals. Let me tell you that the people of Victoria trust us and they trust the Labor Party. They trust the Bracks government to govern wisely and effectively. They trust us — that is, they trust Premier Steve Bracks and Treasurer John Brumby — to be fiscally responsible and to maintain the strong surplus.

As I have mentioned, we are going to maintain a surplus averaging \$316 million over the next three years, while at the same time investing in Victoria. This is where federal Treasurer Peter Costello made the big mistake. He lacks vision. We in Victoria are investing in infrastructure, looking at building productivity, and making productivity gains through investment in skills. There is the vision and the future.

I notice that the Leader of the Opposition said that there is no vision. I do not think he read the budget papers. I refer him to chapters 5 and 7 of budget paper 2. I am sure the member for Box Hill has read them but I am pretty sure that the Leader of the Opposition has not read those two chapters about leadership and vision.

The people of Victoria trust us, of course, to deliver quality education services and the best hospitals in Australia. That has been checked out. Which state does the Productivity Commission say has the best hospital service in Australia? Victoria. Which government more than any other is investing in hospitals in Australia? It is not the federal government, which is providing just over 40 per cent of the funding for Victoria's hospitals. We are providing close to 58 or 59 per cent of the funds. We are actually investing in those hospitals. We have 250 000 more people being treated in our hospitals each year and the funding in the budget allows for a further 37 000 more people to be treated in our hospitals per year. We are delivering that quality here in Victoria.

The people of Victoria trust the Bracks government, of course, to keep our streets safe. I have already mentioned the fact that now we are much safer than we have been in the past, with crime rates down 22 per cent.

Today we heard the Leader of the Opposition seeking to give a top-down speech on fiscal matters. Never has so much been said by someone who said so little. What

a shallow contribution without substance was made by the Leader of the Opposition! What a contrast with our 2006–07 budget, which is wide, deep and long in its investment for Victorian families, in jobs for all Victorians, in infrastructure and in looking after the disadvantaged and those in our society who need a helping hand.

The Leader of the Opposition asked members to feel the quality. He might well ask about quality, but what about delivering services for ordinary hardworking Victorians and their families? Does he understand that? He is the bloke who cannot even ask a straight question about a budget. He cannot even use a calculator. Yesterday he asked three questions and really was struggling. In his presentation he talked a lot and practically promised nothing. He is the bloke who talks about quality services, yet when he was first elected he refused to move into his electorate office because he had no airconditioning! That is what he thinks about quality. The office was not good enough for him. How can he possibly understand the needs and the lives of ordinary Victorian families?

The Leader of the Opposition talked about excellence in education in terms of our schools. Actions speak louder than cheap words about quality. The budget provides \$1.2 billion for education and training, for many new and refurbished schools, including the Glen Iris Primary School in my electorate. We fought really hard to get that. We worked with the school again and again and we worked with the community for that. That also includes over \$4 million for the final stage of the redevelopment of the Swinburne Senior Secondary College in Hawthorn. I hope the member for Hawthorn has actually visited that school, because nothing was done about it under the previous member — namely, Phil Gude.

The Bracks government has rebuilt or improved not just a few but 700 schools across Victoria. We have transformed state education here in Victoria, including several schools in Hawthorn — where, I have to say, the member for Hawthorn has shown very little leadership. Instead, he has been a follower. I was out there first, supporting those schools, including Camberwell South Primary School and Camberwell High School. Where was the member for Hawthorn? He was following — he was not showing any leadership. He found it difficult as the new member even to cross the road to visit Camberwell Primary School. He followed rather than led. He does not understand what quality is about. He does not understand what the lives of ordinary Victorian children in our state schools are like in order to support them.

He has limited credibility when it comes to initiating support for local schools. What credibility can he possibly have when talking about state schools across Victoria when he lacks credibility in his own area? What credibility can he have in talking about teachers when the last Liberal government sacked so many and destroyed morale and performance? Is he going to bring back all those teachers that were sacked? He has no credibility in that regard.

This budget delivers all our election promises. I doubt that the opposition has read it, but page 1 of chapter 1 of budget paper 2 says:

All of the government's election output and asset commitments have now been funded, with the remaining \$112 million of funding provided in this budget.

It also finances the policies in a number of leading statements we have put forward. We have policies and we have vision. For example, there is *Moving Forward — Making Provincial Victoria the Best Place to Live, Work and Invest* and *Maintaining the Advantage — Skilled Victorians*, which is about investing in our training system. We understand that the future of Victoria is a skilled Victoria. We understand the productivity gains that need to be made through skilling Victorians. We have delivered more apprentices here in Victoria than have been delivered in New South Wales — and you can look at the graph on that to see how many more apprentices there are. We have put money in to try and get even more apprentices here in Victoria.

There has been some talk about taxation here in Victoria. Total revenue in Victoria has grown less than the growth in the Victorian economy and increased much less than commonwealth revenue. The figures show a 36.8 per cent increase in total revenue versus a growth of 40.7 per cent in the Victorian economy. What have we done in terms of tax? We have an outstanding record on tax reform, and the opposition has an extraordinarily poor record. We have cut payroll tax again in this budget. We have cut land tax several times, and we have cut it again here in this budget. The other taxes that have been abolished are the duty on non-residential leases, the financial institutions duty, the duty on quoted and unquoted marketable securities, the duty on mortgages and the bank account debits tax. Business rental duty will be abolished from 1 January 2007, and the payroll tax maternity leave exemption was effective from 1 January 2003.

In terms of tax cut packages, *Better Business Taxes* in 2001 cut \$774 million over four years; *Building Tomorrow's Businesses Today* in 2002 delivered tax cuts of \$262 million; *Victoria — Leading the Way* in

2004 cut \$1 billion over five years; the 2005–06 budget cut \$823 million over five years; and this budget will cut \$1.4 billion, including the WorkCover cuts, over five years. These cuts are cuts. They are not an illusion; they are an actuality. If you look at the budget papers, you will see that we are forgoing twice as much in terms of land tax concessions as we actually collect.

Payroll tax cuts are a great thing, and over 20 000 businesses in Victoria will benefit from this tax cut. The budget is going to reduce payroll tax from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent over a couple of years. This means that a business with a payroll of \$5 million will save \$4450 next year. When it goes down to 5 per cent, it will mean a \$11 125 yearly saving for that particular business. In terms of payroll tax, this budget delivers the tax cut straight to the businesses. It is where businesses really want it, and that is what they asked for — and that is what we are delivering here in Victoria.

We are also delivering in terms of WorkCover premiums. For the third time in a row we have delivered cuts in WorkCover premiums. The government is actually managing WorkCover far better than it was managed under the Liberal and National parties. They really could not manage WorkCover. We are delivering for business here in Victoria, just as the whole budget delivers for the whole of Victoria. This is another great budget that delivers for all Victoria, and it is one which Victorians should be proud of, as this Parliament is.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr CLARK (Box Hill).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

TRANSPORT LEGISLATION (FURTHER AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

An important goal of this government is to create a fairer society. One crucial aspect of this goal is ensuring that vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the community are given the opportunity to participate in society in a meaningful way.

The government is determined to ensure that we strive to achieve this goal in the administration of Victoria's public transport system. The three major proposals

contained in this bill represent an important step in this process.

1. The bill introduces a new accreditation scheme for drivers of commercial passenger vehicles (buses, taxis and hire cars) and private bus services.
2. It introduces a strengthened scheme for the accreditation of public transport companies who employ or engage their own authorised officers.
3. It introduces a new sentencing option for the court when dealing with certain public transport offenders — for example, where that person suffers from mental illness or a disability.

These amendments make very specific changes to the Transport Act. It is worth noting that, in the recent transport and livability statement, the government announced that we would be conducting a comprehensive review of the transport legislation, with the aim of continuing the reform of policy and legislation to ensure it supports Victoria's current and future needs.

Accreditation of drivers of commercial passenger vehicles and private bus services

Currently, the Transport Act contains a scheme for the certification of drivers of commercial passenger vehicles — that is, buses, taxis and hire cars, and also private bus services. It is necessary to amend this scheme to better reflect the increasing concern of the community to protect its more vulnerable members.

Accreditation for drivers of commercial passenger vehicles and private bus services enables controls to be imposed in order to regulate who is permitted to carry out this important task. Drivers of these vehicles have important responsibilities and are often in positions of significant trust. For example, drivers of school buses might have only one or two very young passengers on board at the end of the afternoon run. In addition, there are many people in our community, such as many elderly or disabled people, who cannot conveniently drive a car and who are therefore highly dependent on public transport for their mobility and access within the community. Also, it is a striking but often overlooked feature of a taxicab that it is the one car one will, without question, enter and ride in with a stranger at the wheel.

A more robust process for accrediting persons who can be allowed to carry out these functions reminds all

drivers of the importance of doing their job responsibly. And it should give more vulnerable people, as well as the community generally, additional confidence in using public transport.

This bill will introduce a new driver accreditation scheme which will make substantial improvements to the existing scheme.

First of all, the current provisions do not describe the purpose of this accreditation and do not insist that this purpose govern the accreditation process. The bill will address this issue by ensuring that a clear public care objective is established as the guiding principle that underpins the new scheme. The public care objective makes it explicit that this new scheme is primarily focused on —

the safety of the travelling public, especially children and other vulnerable members of the community such as the aged and disabled;

the comfort, amenity and convenience of these persons; and

the protection of the public purse from theft and fraud by some drivers.

The new provisions will ensure that this focus is maintained throughout the accreditation cycle — that is, for initial issue of accreditation, for its subsequent renewal and for any disciplinary decision that could result in a range of consequences, from a reprimand to cancellation.

Second, the current provisions have been in place since 1983 and have been amended many times and have become difficult to follow as a result. The new provisions are to be in a self-contained division and will be a lot easier to access and follow.

Third, and of most concern, the current scheme does not provide sufficient protection for the public — especially the most vulnerable members of our community — from the intrusion into this industry of the most unsuitable people. At present, persons who are unsuitable can be rejected by the exercise of a simple discretion, where the onus lies on the regulator to justify a negative decision.

The bill will handle this in a more robust fashion. In particular, persons with the worst criminal history, such as predatory sexual offences against children and persons in care, and crimes such as murder, rape and terrorism will be automatically refused accreditation. This sends an important message to the community,

that government will act to protect those who most need protection when using public transport.

Accreditation of public transport companies with their own authorised officers

The current scheme accredits public transport companies (rail and bus) who employ or engage their own authorised officers to perform law enforcement duties on public transport. However, the purpose of the scheme is not clearly stated and so does not effectively govern decisions about the companies' accreditation. Further, the provisions that enable the regulator to monitor the performance of the company's management of its authorised officers are inadequate.

Most public transport laws affecting the public concern the obligations on passengers to hold a valid ticket and requirements that they behave safely and courteously towards other persons on the public transport network. These laws are enforced by members of the police force or by authorised officers appointed by the Department of Infrastructure. The privatisation of the public transport system has made it necessary to enable public transport companies to employ or engage their own authorised officers. Without this ability, it is unreasonable to expect them to discharge their responsibilities.

On the other hand, it is not appropriate to have law enforcement officers exercising powers in the public domain without appropriate government regulation of their behaviour. This is the purpose of the accreditation scheme established by division 4A of part VII of the Transport Act. The scheme requires public transport companies to demonstrate the adequacy of their management of the authorised officers they employ or engage.

The amendments in the bill will strengthen this scheme in a number of respects, including —

first, by stating the purpose of the scheme, namely, to require public transport companies to ensure that their authorised officers conduct themselves in a way that promotes the safety and also the comfort, amenity and convenience of the travelling public, especially children and other vulnerable members of the community;

second, by ensuring that this purpose governs the entire scheme: the authorised officer management system of the companies will have mandatory content, and the effectiveness of that management system will be critical throughout the accreditation cycle;

third, by strengthening the monitoring of the effectiveness of the companies' management of their authorised officers.

Public transport education programs for certain disadvantaged offenders

The government is committed to protecting rights and addressing disadvantage. The Attorney-General's justice statement of May 2004 contains a determination to adopt 'a multidisciplinary approach to address the offending behaviours of people who may be mentally ill, have an intellectual disability, are dependent on drugs or who are homeless, and are caught up in a cycle of offending and punishment'.

The Infringements Act 2006 takes a giant step in addressing this cycle. In the second-reading speech for that bill, the Attorney-General outlined a number of strategies, including the taking of 'measures at various stages, including internal review stage, to filter people out of the system who cannot understand or control their offending behaviour (for example, people with mental or intellectual disabilities, the homeless, people with serious addictions)'.

This bill contains a proposal that applies this thinking to public transport. The vast majority of public transport offences (ticketing offences and behaviour offences) result in a fine. However, it is necessary to address situations of low culpability and other circumstances where a punitive approach is unlikely to be fair or to increase the level of compliance. There are many people in the community — including persons with a mental illness or a disability, persons from diverse cultural backgrounds, persons with limited English and persons with a substance dependency — who find the system difficult to use and feel alienated from it as a result. What then follows is either that they do not use the system, or they use the system wrongly. Of course, neither of these outcomes is acceptable, as the government wants people throughout the community to use the public transport system and to feel confident doing so.

In many cases, the person who has committed the offence would benefit from a better understanding of the public transport system and their obligations when using it. This bill will provide the court with the opportunity of directing appropriate offenders to participate in an education program designed to promote this understanding.

The course will be developed and funded by the Department of Infrastructure and approved by the

director of public transport. It is expected that the course will canvass such matters as:

the ticketing system, including concession tickets, ticket zones and alternative means of purchasing;

the fact that the public transport system is a community asset and that people have the right to travel on public transport safely and comfortably;

the fact that the vast majority of passengers pay their full fare and are entitled to feel aggrieved by people who travel without paying;

the serious revenue impact of fare evasion;

the role of authorised officers.

The proposal will not restrict the court's discretion but will give it a further alternative. It is likely that the court will avail itself of this new alternative in relation to two existing programs, namely, the diversion program and the enforcement review program. The existence of an appropriate public transport education program will greatly enhance the court's handling of public transport offenders.

It is proposed that the Department of Infrastructure will itself use these education programs when processing infringement notices at the administrative level. If an offender for whom the course is appropriate is identified early in that process, it is intended that the infringement notice will be withdrawn and the offender requested to participate voluntarily in the program. If the offender is not identified early, the matter will proceed to court.

It is proposed to use a similar course for the purpose of preventative education in community sectors where it is considered appropriate. Resort to the education program at the administrative level does not require any legislative amendment.

A pilot of the education program is expected to be ready in the second half of this year. It will then be adjusted, on the basis of what is learned from the pilot, with a view to being fully operational early in 2007. Depending on the success of the program, consideration may also be given to expanding it in the future to include other public transport offenders.

Other proposals

In addition, this bill contains a proposal to amend section 218B of the Transport Act to enable name and address information obtained from passengers by police officers to be entered onto Victoria Police's database

and also compared with the database at the sheriff's office. This will benefit law enforcement considerably by ensuring that information held on offenders is accurate.

The opportunity has also been taken in the bill to make a number of largely minor and machinery amendments to public transport legislation. The bill will:

enable VicTrack to enter land for the purpose of installing underground cables that support the signalling system without the need to obtain and register an easement. This power is identical to the statutory power given to utilities under relevant legislation. DSE and DPI have been consulted about this proposal;

enable the director of public transport to be registered on title of land held by the director;

identify the director of public transport, rather than the Secretary to the Department of Infrastructure, throughout the legislation as the regulator and overarching administrator of public transport.

Overall, the bill continues the government's reform of public transport legislation and the necessary transition to better, clearer and more streamlined performance — and process-based regulation that is targeted at the reflection of clear policy and principles. This is a direction which is being pursued on an ongoing basis for public transport legislation generally.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr CLARK (Box Hill).

Debate adjourned until Thursday, 15 June.

Sitting suspended 12.58 p.m. until 2.02 p.m.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Stamp duty: first home buyers

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why first home buyers in Victoria are slugged \$16 660 in stamp duty on a \$350 000 home while in Queensland they pay \$3250 and in New South Wales they pay nothing?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the opposition leader for his question. We were waiting in anticipation

today with the pre-announcement that there would be stamp duty relief. We were waiting for the quantum and amount of that. We have had nothing committed by the opposition in its budget reply.

If you look at the affordability index in relation to home affordability, Victoria rates as more affordable than both New South Wales and Queensland. If you look also at the number of first home buyers, we have more first home buyers in Victoria than any other state in Australia. We represent less in population than New South Wales, yet we have more first home buyers. Our first home owners grant is working and it is working effectively. More people are taking up their first home in Victoria than any other state in Australia. House affordability is better and first home ownership is better; and that is because we have the right policies for the future.

A Fairer Victoria: benefits

Ms BUCHANAN (Hastings) — My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to this government's commitment to making Victoria a great place to live and raise a family and ask the Premier to detail to the house how the government's investments in family and social programs are leading to better outcomes for Victorian children and families.

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the member for Hastings for her question. I am very proud of the fact that for the second budget in a row we are able to provide a significant package to assist those who are disadvantaged to get access to services and also to address disadvantage more broadly in this community.

Last year we produced the first of the Fairer Victoria packages — a \$788 million package which had 75 separate actions, a lot of which have been implemented already as part of that package. This year, in the Fairer Victoria II package, we had a further \$818 million which has been committed for 82 separate actions that will focus primarily on the outer suburbs and the regions of Victoria, and in particular on vulnerable children to make sure there is support and assistance as part of those packages.

These Fairer Victoria initiatives have been part of what we have tried to achieve over the last six and a half years. Government is about choices. We have made choices to manage the economy well, to have a robust budget and to be able to distribute the proceeds of that robust budget into supporting families and, in particular, as part of these packages, supporting families that find themselves at some disadvantage. That is why

I am very pleased that we were able to commit so much in A Fairer Victoria II towards this commitment.

One of the initiatives in the Fairer Victoria package II is a further commitment of \$27 million towards neighbourhood houses and their improvement. That has been a strong policy emphasis of our government and means that neighbourhood houses can open longer, it means that coordinators of neighbourhood houses can be paid more and it means that the viability of neighbourhood houses is increased as well. I want to pay tribute in this house to the great work that neighbourhood houses do on behalf of their communities. This contribution of an extra \$27 million will assist and support them in the work they undertake in the future as well.

I am proud that A Fairer Victoria is included as part of our budget. It will be a regular feature of our commitments as a government and as a party in the future. We believe this is important as part of addressing disadvantage. We want to improve universal services — and they are improving — but having more people gain access to those services is very important. That is why these initiatives are crucial and are embedded as part of our budget.

Abortion: decriminalisation

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. Is the government intending to decriminalise abortion?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — It is not on the government's legislative agenda. I have indicated that clearly. The Labor Party platform has a policy in relation to this matter, and it is up to the parliamentary party to determine the timing and whether that matter is presented before the Parliament. I have indicated that we do not have plans for that to be presented for consideration in this house.

A Fairer Victoria: benefits

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine) — My question is to the Minister for Victorian Communities. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to making Victoria a great place to live and raise a family for all Victorians, and I ask the minister to detail for the house how the government's latest Fairer Victoria initiatives will strengthen communities and provide opportunities.

Mr THWAITES (Minister for Victorian Communities) — I thank the member for Bellarine for her question. Last year, as members know, the Bracks government launched A Fairer Victoria. This was a \$788 million commitment to addressing disadvantage

and providing opportunities for all Victorians. This year we have delivered a second instalment. This is an \$851 million package of services and facilities to strengthen communities across the state. This was described today by the executive director of the Brotherhood of St Laurence as 'an unprecedented effort to make Victoria a fairer society'.

As the Premier said, and as the Treasurer said in delivering the budget, governments are defined by the choices they make. We are a government that is choosing to build services, not cut them. We are a government that is choosing to support working families, not cut their conditions. We are a government that is choosing to invest in communities, not divide them. We are seeing the results, with better outcomes in terms of kindergartens, retention rates at schools and a 21 per cent reduction in crime across the state.

Today I announced a further package of community development initiatives totalling some \$33 million as part of the second instalment of A Fairer Victoria. I am pleased to advise the member for Bellarine that part of that package was a new community renewal project in Whittington. That is a project she has worked very hard on, and it will join other projects around the state and be based on our very successful neighbourhood renewal program. I also announced a new partnership to restore RSL halls and Country Fire Authority facilities. We will work in partnership with the RSL and the CFA to improve some of the under-utilised facilities and make them more available for community use.

This year A Fairer Victoria has put a priority on regional areas and on the growth suburbs of Melbourne. One example is the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. As part of A Fairer Victoria we will establish new children's hubs in Casey and Cardinia. We will set up Best Start projects and improve children's services in Cardinia, Casey and the Mornington Peninsula. We will employ youth transition workers to help young people who are at risk of dropping out, and we will provide more funds for community transport. The reaction from those communities and the councils in those areas has been very positive. The *Cranbourne Leader* reports:

Children and families in Casey will share a \$25 million windfall from this week's state budget.

It is not just in the south-east. On the other side of Melbourne in Melton kids get — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Will the minister resume his seat? I ask the minister not to hold the papers up in

that manner. He may quote from them but he is not to display them around the chamber.

Mr THWAITES — Thank you, Speaker. On the other side of Melbourne, in Melton kids will get a \$25 million boost to increase the maternal and child health services and other programs. This just demonstrates the choice our government has made. We are supporting communities. It has been welcomed by everyone, except perhaps the opposition which has only one policy on communities —

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, I draw your attention again to the two rulings you have made with regard to the length of answers. The minister has now been speaking for close on 5 minutes. He is obviously giving a ministerial statement. I would suggest that if he wanted to make a ministerial statement we would be happy to oblige him and debate the issue.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to conclude his answer.

Mr THWAITES — Thank you, Speaker. There is so much good news in this package, but I will conclude by saying we have a clear policy to support communities. The only policy on communities that we have heard from the other side is to abolish the Department for Victorian Communities.

Gaming: revenue

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. I ask: given that poker machines generate tax revenue of more than \$1 billion, what action will the Premier take to end Labor's addiction to poker machine taxes?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. I refer the opposition leader to the gaming revenue receipts which were going up on average at about 15 per cent when we came to government. That was the legacy of the Kennett government.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask members on both sides to cease interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — Gaming receipts are now going up in accord with the growth in the economy of around 4 to 4½ per cent. We have contained the growth of gaming revenue proportionally. I believe with the Community Support Fund and the problem gaming

funds that we have, we have brought gaming into balance as it should be in the state.

A Fairer Victoria: children

Mr LUPTON (Pahran) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Children. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to making Victoria a great place to live and raise a family and ask the minister to detail for the house how the government's latest children's services initiatives in A Fairer Victoria demonstrate that commitment.

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Children) — I thank the member for Pahran for his question. He is absolutely committed to our children and our children's future. We know that what we do for our children now is going to shape their future and shape our future and our community's future as well. That is why we have invested a record funding boost in children's services through A Fairer Victoria. We have committed an extra \$268 million over the next five years to improve children's services, to support their families and to care for them.

We are fundamentally changing the way we support young children and their families. We are investing first in better universal services that help children and their families from day one. We are investing in more services to help vulnerable children and their families. We want to do that before they get into crisis with the emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

Today's announcement of A Fairer Victoria is great news for Victoria's children and their families. It includes \$25 million over four years for better early childhood services, including more of the children's hubs that the Deputy Premier has referred to and more help for schools and other community groups to help set up outside school hours care services, which are desperately needed. There are more places for early intervention services for children with disabilities and with developmental delay.

There is \$151 million to boost the child protection system. That will mean earlier interventions for families that are struggling and greater stability for children who are in foster care.

We will be putting over \$35 million extra into our family support innovation projects. These are great early intervention projects that are keeping children out of the child protection system, because they are supporting families before they get into crisis. Offering family support certainly can resolve their problems and issues.

We will be funding an extra 40 child protection workers, on top of the 60 that we announced in December last year. We are putting \$7.2 million towards a new statewide family support community intake service. When people want help they will not have to go to child protection. The support services will be there and available in the community, so they will get help quickly.

We are putting in over \$14 million to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system as well. That is great to see.

We are building on a very strong record in government. We have already put a lot of effort into giving our children the very best possible start in life. This really is about making Victoria a great place to live and raise a family.

Snowy Hydro Ltd: sale

Mr SAVAGE (Mildura) — My question without notice is directed to the Premier. Given that Snowy Hydro Ltd is the east coast's largest generator of renewable energy, is the largest source of clean water, is built on land which was compulsorily acquired, cost \$850 million, which at today's value is \$27 billion, and returns \$1 billion every seven years to the taxpayers of Australia, I ask: why is Victoria selling its share of 7 power stations, 145 kilometres of tunnels, 16 dams and energy assets for a mere \$600 million?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the member for Mildura for his question. We of course do not know the full sale price of Snowy Hydro. That is a matter which is before the stock exchange for consideration. In relation to why Victoria is selling its 29 per cent share of the Snowy Hydro scheme, I have indicated to this house before that we are selling it as a result of action which was taken by the New South Wales government, initially supported by the commonwealth government, to unilaterally sell their shares in the Snowy Hydro irrespective of whether Victoria would also sell its share.

We made a judgment, following the decision which was made by New South Wales and the commonwealth, that in order to protect irrigators and the existing rights of irrigators and in order to protect the environment and the 28 per cent flow which we have proposed for the Snowy River, we wanted contractual obligations to ensure that if we participated, we would have protection for irrigators and for environmental flows. On subsequently receiving those assurances, we then participated in the sale. That was a reasonable position to take on behalf of all taxpayers in

Victoria. To have done otherwise would have meant an uncertain future for irrigators and an uncertain future for the Snowy River itself.

The New South Wales and commonwealth governments made it clear that if Victoria had not participated they would have established a holding company and sold the shares totally in that company. That would have left Victoria with a 29 per cent share in a new privatised company. This was not in Victoria's long-term interest, not in the interests of irrigators and not in the interests of the environment. We acted in respect of supporting our primary industries sector in Victoria, supporting the environment and making sure that taxpayers got the right value for money in these arrangements as well.

A Fairer Victoria: mental health

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave) — My question is directed to the Minister for Health. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to making Victoria a great place to live and raise a family, and I ask her to detail for the house how the government's latest A Fairer Victoria initiatives in mental health services will benefit Victorians.

Ms PIKE (Minister for Health) — I thank the member for Mulgrave for his question. The Bracks government is committed to better meeting the needs of Victorians with a mental illness. We know that is an ongoing challenge. It is important to remember that this state has actually been identified in many national reports as having one of the most advanced and robust systems in mental health.

Mrs Shardey interjected.

Ms PIKE — In fact the most recent Senate committee report into mental health again identified many areas in which Victoria leads the country. But we have to continue our work and our national leadership in the mental health field in service delivery and reforms. The latest budget builds a further \$170 million into our system so we can continue that very important work.

Mrs Shardey interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Caulfield will cease interjecting in that continual manner.

Ms PIKE — Our priorities for extra work and resources — —

Mr Andrews interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Mulgrave!

Ms PIKE — Our priorities are in the key areas of prevention and early intervention programs, in community-based and hospital-based services, and of course in housing and community education. One in five Victorians will experience an episode of mental illness at some time in their life. This is something that really does touch the lives of many individuals and families. We know that that mental illness will have a huge impact on that person, their family and the community as a whole. That is why we think it is so important that we continue to invest. As part of our A Fairer Victoria package we know that mental health issues often affect disadvantaged Victorians disproportionately. That is another reason why this investment is so significant.

I refer to some of the highlights of the expenditure in this year's budget in the mental health area. There is \$21.4 million for early intervention programs, and there is funding for postnatal depression services. We have been told by councils, particularly the interface councils, that this is a very important issue for them. Some young families are suffering with issues of postnatal depression, so there is money for that. There is support for families where a parent has a mental illness. There is a new centre for women's mental health at the Royal Women's Hospital. There is extra counselling through community health centres and a new early psychosis service, particularly for young people.

We are also providing extra funding for capital works, with \$9 million being allocated to start work on a new extended care facility at the Heidelberg repatriation hospital site. As part of that we are also including a new Kokoda gym for the veterans community and a hydrotherapy pool as part of the veterans rehabilitation centre.

I was at the Austin Hospital earlier today and representatives of the veterans community spoke to me personally about how important this initiative is for them and how much they welcomed it, but also the fact that we are securing the repatriation site as a health precinct into the future. Just as we secured the Austin Hospital and made sure that would be a public hospital, so there will be ongoing use of the repatriation site for public health services.

We are also enhancing hospital-based services in the mental health area with \$21.1 million being allocated to expand the Thomas Embling Hospital by 18 beds; \$9.2 million to put more specialist mental health teams

in our emergency departments; and extra funding to redevelop the Shepparton mental health service and the Bouverie Centre.

It is a lot of extra resourcing and a big and challenging area. Last year's budget provided extra funding and this year's budget provides extra funding. Victoria is leading the country in innovative programs to assist mental health issues, but it remains a challenge — a challenge we are committed to. It is a challenge that we are dealing with, and that is a mark of this government. It recognises that, if we want to make Victoria a great place to live, work and raise a family, we have to care for some of the most vulnerable members of our community in the process.

Crime: violent assaults

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Why in Labor's budget papers is it shown that violent assaults increased by 6 per cent when the target set by the minister was a reduction of 2 per cent?

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I thank the member for Scoresby for his question, but he actually knows the answer because it is contained in the budget papers. They explain that as part of the Victoria Police family violence code of practice it was always expected that violent crime statistics, in particular assaults, would be increasing. It is a sign of success — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HOLDING — What I said to the member for Scoresby on Tuesday was that Victorians were less likely to be assaulted than people in any other state or territory in Australia. That is what the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show. What the budget also shows is that the Victoria Police family violence code of practice is working. It is working because there are more reports to police of family violence; there are more court orders and intervention orders being sought; and there are more charges being laid against violent husbands and partners in Victoria than there have been in the past. This shows that the Victoria Police code of practice is working. It shows that Victoria Police is taking seriously the challenge that Victorians face in relation to domestic violence and family violence. It shows for the first time that not only Victoria Police but the whole-of-government strategy of responding to family violence is producing results.

We are very pleased about these results because they show that Victoria Police is taking seriously the

challenge that family violence and domestic violence pose, and that is a consequence of additional training provided to over 6000 Victoria Police personnel to implement the code of practice and make sure it works effectively. We know that family violence is a real challenge, and we are pleased that Victoria Police is taking it seriously.

Budget: business initiatives

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer advise the house of recent measures to improve Victorian competitiveness and drive business and export growth?

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — I thank the member for Ballarat West for her question. In the budget I released on Tuesday a number of measures were included to improve the competitiveness of Victorian business. It was so well received that the Australian Industry Group said of the business cost reductions announced on Tuesday that these reforms are ‘putting out the welcome mat for investors’. They do. The Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry said:

The state government ... has announced a trifecta of business costs relief.

There are many other endorsements of the business tax relief that we provided. What we announced on Tuesday was a reduction in payroll tax from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent and a further reduction in the land tax rate from 3.5 per cent to 3 per cent. As I pointed out previously, these changes mean that small businesses with land valued at between \$400 000 and \$3.4 million will pay the lowest land tax in Australia. Businesses with a payroll of between \$2 million and \$11 million will pay lower payroll taxes than businesses in Queensland.

Today I was expecting to hear some alternative proposals to those we announced on Tuesday. We have a plan to reduce business costs and we announced it on Tuesday. Today I opened up the paper, which has the headline ‘Baillieu to offer payroll cut’, and I came in here today expecting to hear a plan, but I heard nothing — nothing! We have been busy reducing business costs, and what we got was a do-nothing, say-nothing response. It was not just do nothing, it was a lazy response. They just will not do the work!

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Treasurer will return to his response to the question.

Mr BRUMBY — At lunchtime today, with more than 100 people representing trade and investment groups from around Australia, many of the consul generals based in Melbourne and other industry groups, I released further information that will take Victorian exports to the world and support business growth. Two of those announcements were the \$900 000 contract with the Australia, New Zealand, America Technology Network to deliver what is called the Fast Track program to take more than 90 Victorian companies over the next three years to export markets, particularly in the USA, and secondly, the new Australian Urban Systems Cluster with a grant of \$800 000 in partnership with a number of Victorian-based companies, including Erbus, HJD and others. This is really about capitalising on the extraordinary investment in China. Over the next 20 years China will be constructing as much urban fabric as currently exists in the whole of Western Europe. This is about working with Victorian companies in areas of design, architectural services, project management and environmental planning to take Victorian companies to the world to win those service contracts.

In the budget on Tuesday we also announced additional funding for the expansion of our Victorian government business offices. We have recently established new offices in Bangalore and Shanghai. We have a great story to tell on foreign investment. We have a great story to tell in terms of business competitiveness. We have very strong endorsement of our budget by a very large range of business groups. We are cutting business taxes, payroll taxes and the costs for businesses in land tax, and we are cutting WorkCover premiums. It is a good story to tell, and combined with the initiatives I announced today it will help more Victorian businesses grow, invest and create jobs.

PRIMARY INDUSTRIES ACTS (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 31 May; motion of Mr CAMERON (Minister for Agriculture).

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the honourable members for Bass, Swan Hill, Ballarat East, South-West Coast, Mitcham, Lowan, Clayton, Benalla, Ripon, Preston, Gippsland East, Pascoe Vale, Seymour and Geelong for their contributions to the debate on the Primary Industries Acts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. The bill is relatively straightforward. It relates to the sale of pet food in butchers shops and also to offshore

constitutional settlements, and there has been very broad support across the Parliament for those initiatives.

I have to say congratulations to the honourable member for Bass. I think this is the first time he has led on a bill relating to fisheries in this house. Despite all the rhetoric we have heard over the years from the honourable member for Bass, when it came to the crunch he had to endorse this bill from Labor in glowing terms. I thank the honourable member for Bass very much for that glowing endorsement and broad support.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

APPROPRIATION (2006/2007) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer).

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — As the Leader of the Opposition said earlier today, Tuesday's state budget is an unsustainable pre-election splurge. The budget proposes a massive \$5.5 billion of new spending, \$1906.6 million of additional recurrent spending and \$3572.6 million of additional capital spending. However, the budget's big spending is not spending made sustainable by prosperity and sound economic management. Instead, it is big spending paid for by a short-term and unsustainable surge in borrowings, by one-off asset sales and asset stripping, and by taxes. After the next election Victorians will have to cope with the hangover of this latest Labor binge.

It shows how bad Labor's seven years of waste and mismanagement have been that while Victorians are suffering record taxation levels the government has still been forced to rely on debt, asset sales and asset stripping to put its budget together. As has been pointed out previously, Victoria's debt is set to rise from \$1.5 billion in June 2005 to \$7.1 billion by June 2010 — a 373 per cent increase in just five years.

If there is one document that demonstrates graphically the reversal in Victoria's fortunes when it comes to debt it is chart 4.7, which is set out at page 69 of budget paper 2. Of course in this house we do not have the

opportunity to use PowerPoint or other aids in our presentations, and it is disorderly to wave around pieces of paper, so I simply commend honourable members and other interested persons to look at the chart.

It shows, in effect, a reverse J in terms of rapidly falling debt between 1995 and 1999, as the Kennett government paid down debt, and a more gradual decline in the first years of this decade, as strong stock market growth and strong growth in tax revenue enabled some further reductions. But now we see debt on the upward path again, both in nominal dollar terms and as a percentage of gross state product. If we keep on increasing our debt at the speed this budget does, it will not be too long before we are back in serious financial strife.

The Labor Party has form on that score. It does not like to be reminded about the Cain and Kirner era, but let me further remind it that even Rob Jolly, a former Labor Treasurer, started off small with his borrowings, which quickly compounded once the Labor Party got on the bottle of ever-increasing amounts of debt. There is nothing wrong with borrowing at a sustainable level, as long as the borrowings are based on proper forward planning, weighing up the costs and benefits, and are invested in sustainable and long-term benefits for the state. However, if you look at Labor's record on capital formation and on infrastructure, it is a far cry from what the Treasurer repeatedly boasts about.

I refer in particular to the latest Australian Bureau of Statistics data catalogue 5512.0 in table 232OS, which sets out the Victoria state general government operating statement. That shows that in 1998–99 gross fixed capital formation in Victoria amounted to \$1559 million, whereas in 2004–05, the latest reported year, it was only \$1471 million. In other words, despite all of the Treasurer's boasting, over the period from 1998–99 to 2004–05 there was actually a fall in gross fixed capital formation by the general government sector in Victoria. Gross fixed capital formation is the extent to which the government's investment program contributes in gross terms to production and adds to the nation's accumulated capital stock of resources.

But the situation is even more stark when one deducts depreciation, because of course as the capital stock rises, depreciation rises. If you look at the net addition to the capital stock through net fixed capital formation, you see that in 1998–99 it was \$783 million and that by 2004–05 it had fallen to \$332 million. So rather than going forwards we have been going backwards in terms of the net capital formation by the Victorian general government sector. Labor's rush back into big borrowings in this budget is not based on carefully

assessing the needs, costs and benefits; it is driven by a catch-up on the lagging to date and by pre-election political expediency.

On top of this debt, as has been remarked on earlier in the debate, the Treasurer has cashed in \$2.9 billion of payments due to subsequent generations of Victorians from Transurban for just \$609 million. It is a deal that the respected commentator Terry McCrann has labelled an 'awful, thoroughly inept and totally unacceptable' transaction. It is equivalent to borrowing money at 9.7 per cent interest when the government could have used conventional public borrowings at around 6 per cent interest. Transurban has boasted to the stock exchange that it is getting an internal rate of return of 11.1 per cent on its part of the upgrade project — which is close to the return, as I am advised, that could be expected on a risky and unproven toll road project rather than on simply the upgraded part of an existing toll road. The Treasurer has been well and truly taken to the cleaners by Transurban over this deal.

On top of that the Treasurer has taken \$600 million of motorists funds out of the Transport Accident Commission — that is in addition to the usual dividends that the government takes each year — and it is also counting on receiving \$600 million or more from the proceeds of the sale of Snowy Hydro Ltd. To make matters worse, the government has no proper plan as to how the money will be spent and has made little attempt to ensure that taxpayers will get value for money.

It is deplorable that the government, back in 2002, rejected the recommendation of its own Infrastructure Planning Council that Victoria should have a comprehensive, whole-of-government forward strategy plan for infrastructure delivery. The government spends months preparing statements like the recent transport statement full of piecemeal measures and promises of more studies on top of all the studies it has already carried out. When we get to the actual delivery of projects we see projects like the regional fast rail project, which has, as has been commonly said, gone from a budgeted estimate of \$80 million to quickly blow out to around \$750 million under Labor's version of good financial management.

The budget delivered on Tuesday revealed further evidence of blow-outs on other projects. The budget and other news in recent days show, amongst other things, delays in the Flinders Street West precinct; a \$28 million blow-out and two-year delay in the taxpayer-funded component of the Melbourne Recital Centre; and a \$13 million blow-out in the Dynon port rail link project.

We have high taxing, we have record commonwealth grants, we have high spending and we have rapidly increasing debt. When it comes to taxes, in the next 12 months Victorians are going to be hit with \$900 a head more in state taxes than they were when the Labor government came to office. Victorian home buyers are the biggest losers in the budget. Stamp duty scales in Victoria have not been changed since 1998. Stamp duty on the typical Melbourne house has increased by more than 80 per cent since the Bracks government came to office. There has been a 15 per cent upward revision in the estimates for stamp duty receipts in this forthcoming financial year. Across almost all value ranges home buyers in Victoria — first home buyers and other home buyers — pay the highest rates of stamp duty of any state. Tuesday's budget still failed to make any changes to the scale. To make matters worse, the government is set to scrap the \$3000 first home buyer bonus in June next year.

Land tax payers have been duded for the third year in a row — land tax has doubled since Labor came to office and is set to keep rising. The so-called cuts that were announced in the budget are only for properties worth more than \$900 000. They will apply to barely one taxpayer in six. Even for taxpayers with higher value properties, bracket creep and rising property valuations will wipe out most, if not all, of the increases. As far as payroll tax is concerned, the Kennett government cut more payroll tax in three years than the Bracks government will have provided over 10 years. This latest quarter of a per cent cut has been eked out over a three-year period.

For all the extra taxing and spending, services are continuing to deteriorate. Hospital waiting lists are longer, the school maintenance backlog is larger and public transport is less reliable. The budget has increased spending on services, but it barely keeps up with demand growth over time, while service levels decline. In terms of health, this year's funding will increase in-patient treatment numbers — the weighted inlier equivalent separations or WEIS — by only 1.3 per cent, which is hardly enough to keep up with population growth and ageing. There are no new hospital beds.

The punctuality and reliability of public transport, which originally rose under the private operators, has been falling steadily since the Minister for Transport renegotiated the contracts in 2002. In my own electorate of Box Hill, the status of Box Hill as a transit city has been relegated so that it is now alongside second-tier transit cities. This means it has to compete for funding for further studies or minor works out of a \$1 million or \$2 million allocation in future years. Box

Hill High School and Surrey Hills Primary School are amongst schools which have been waiting for a long time for substantial modernisation and extensions to their existing cramped facilities. There is no word in the budget as to what funding, if any, those schools are going to receive.

Tram 109 has not been mentioned in the recent transport and livability statement or in the budget. The local community is still left in the dark as to whether the Labor Party's so-called kerb access stops, which narrow Whitehorse Road to a single lane in each direction, are going to be extended through to Kew. The fear is that the government has said nothing about tram 109 in the budget because it plans, if it is re-elected, to extend these wretched stops all the way through to Kew and make Whitehorse Road virtually impassable.

Right across the board, including in social welfare, disability support for carers and other areas which have badly lagged, this budget has failed to actually deliver results for all the extra spending, and there is certainly no sign that the Bracks government is going to be less wasteful with public money in the future than it has been in the past. We did not see any promises in the budget papers to reduce the 196 ministerial advisers that Labor now has on the public payroll, to dispense with any of the 200 extra bureaucrats the government has added to the payroll of the Department of Premier and Cabinet or to end any of its political advertising that bombards our TV screens during prime time viewing. The government is committing a massive \$42 million in an effort to cut red tape. I would have thought that throwing \$42 million at that issue is hardly the way to go.

Victoria needs a government that is going to stick to its budgets, is going to reduce the tax burden, is going to have a proper forward plan for infrastructure and is going to be truthful with citizens about what it does with their money. The Bracks government has felt free to give gratuitous advice to the commonwealth government about a further wave of reform, but it has failed to actually walk the talk. It is very easy to tell other people what they should be doing — it is a lot harder to deliver yourself.

It is not possible to get better services for less cost without a more effective use of resources in the setting of priorities, in the planning of implementation and in the delivery of services and infrastructure. If we are going to stop the constant deterioration in the standard of services, we have got to set in place far better measures for management and accountability. Otherwise we are going to get repeats of what we have

seen under the Bracks government in recent years. Despite all of its professed commitment to public housing we find, for example, that in 2004–05 the Bracks government increased the stock of public housing in Victoria by only 59 additional units whereas in contrast the Kennett government, which has been pilloried as having been made up of hard-hearted, uncaring money grabbers, in 1998–99 increased the public housing stock by 1600 units.

We need those major reforms to management and accountability, such as focusing on what has actually been achieved rather than just on how many dollars have been spent, such as having a detailed multi-year strategy plan for services and infrastructure and such as a dedicated infrastructure fund that would maximise available funding in the most cost-effective way.

These are all initiatives that would be introduced into Victoria by a Liberal government. We would respond to the calls by the Bracks government's Infrastructure Planning Council, by Engineers Australia and by anyone else who turns their minds to how you properly manage and deliver a multibillion dollar infrastructure program in future years. We would establish such a plan across the whole of government through an open process and establish a plan that is renewed year after year, rather than the sudden flash in the pan that we get from the Bracks government, a glossy document that soon gathers dust on the shelves. An infrastructure plan needs to be a living document that is carried forward, revised and updated.

In short, for all these reasons, if it is to improve services, raise standards and achieve value for money, what Victoria needs is a change of culture from the top. In other words, Victoria needs a Liberal government.

Mr HAERMAYER (Minister for Manufacturing and Export) — What a dreary dirge we have just heard! I listened with interest to the member for Box Hill and I listened with even more interest to the new Leader of the Opposition. I was waiting particularly to hear some new idea, some original piece of detailed policy, something novel or some alternative plan. All I heard was a tidal wave of negativity from the member for Box Hill and what I heard from the Leader of the Opposition was a lot of talk about leadership, vision and decisiveness. What we got was a plethora of pious platitudes — not a single novel thought and not a single fresh idea — and instead of vision he gave us hallucination.

Members of the opposition certainly need to do a darned sight more than what we have heard from them today. It is one thing to go around whingeing about

what they think members of the government are not doing or doing wrong — they have certainly got their facts wrong on that — but it is incumbent upon members of a party who wish to be not just an opposition but an alternative government to present an alternative vision.

I welcome this budget. Victoria is now part of a fiercely competitive global economy — there is no doubting that. Globalisation and the emergence of economies such as China, India, Russia and Brazil have certainly led to a boon for the mining industry and the resource states. They have created what members have heard a few times before and even the Leader of the Opposition referred to it — the dual economy. The rise in the terms of trade has put our economy under challenge, particularly by the economies I just mentioned.

This development poses a challenge for all developed economies. This budget is about addressing what the members of the government think needs to be done. It is an investment in our future prosperity, it is an investment in the future of our businesses, it is an investment in the future of Victorian industries and it is an investment in the imagination, ingenuity, skill and enterprise of our businesses and our greatest asset — our people. To compete with China, we need to do a little bit more than just have an industrial relations bunfight. Nobody honestly believes that having the industrial relations bunfight that the federal government is provoking will somehow make us suddenly competitive with China.

We need to focus on the high-value-added end of the chain and we need to be doing more than just trying to compete on price. We need to focus on things like innovation, quality, service, design and agility — we need to differentiate our product and find our niches. That is what enables Australian and Victorian industry to compete at the high end. Some countries are already doing that. The United Kingdom, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, Ireland, Finland and Israel have well-developed industry policies. Unfortunately we here in Victoria seem to be doing it alone because we are not getting a lot of support out of Canberra on industry policies. Those countries invest between 2.5 and 5 per cent of their gross domestic product in research and development and innovation. Australia is lagging at 1.6 per cent, and private sector development is even more appalling. We need investment in R & D, innovation, knowledge, imagination and enterprise. This government has been doing it and through this budget will continue to do it.

I mentioned the dual economy. A real dichotomy is developing between the resource states and the other

states. We need to focus on manufacturing, our service industries and agriculture. We do not have the wealth of resources that Western Australia and Queensland have, so we need to work doubly hard to ensure that those industries can not just survive but thrive in the new cutthroat global economic environment.

I was hoping that the federal government might offer some assistance on that front. Instead I get a very clear indication of where the federal government stands from a speech that the federal Secretary to the Treasury gave in May to the Australian Business Economists. I take it that he would not say something that was not official policy of the federal government. He said:

A key component of the reform effort was the progressive dismantling of industry plans and other forms of industry policy intervention. Yet, despite that record, and despite the fact that the Australian economy is now operating at close to full capacity, with few idle resources, many people think that industry policy should be doing something in response to higher terms of trade.

Dr Henry went on to say that industry policy is effectively all a load of bunkum and that we ought to just be putting all our eggs into the resource basket and Australia ought to be nothing but just the world's quarry.

I think it is more than that and certainly I think the people of Victoria would agree with me. That is what industry is about. Unfortunately, members of the Liberal Party do not believe in industry policy.

Ms Asher interjected.

Mr HAERMEYER — I will come to your media release in a minute. I think that has made the position of the federal government and members of the Liberal Party in general very clear.

However, Victoria has led the way. Members of the government believe that there needs to be a team Australia approach to industry policy, so we called together representatives of industry and all governments. Representatives of all state and territory governments turned up. The federal government sent a senior bureaucrat but we are still trying to get the federal government to engage in that team Australia approach. We want to develop a unified Australian approach to industry policy that can help our manufacturing industry to cope with the challenges that arise out of this global economy. Again, we are not getting any support from the federal government on that front.

The Leader of the Opposition said that we need to show initiative and commonsense in defining industry

policies. I have yet to hear one from someone in either his federal or state party. I looked on the Internet where I found two media releases that deal with manufacturing that were put out over four years — not a single policy, but two media releases. Just to give you an indication, I have here one from the member for Brighton, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, with nineteen-twentieths of the page — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will not hold that up and he will also refer to members in the third person, not address his comments to ‘you’.

Mr HAERMEYER — Nineteen-twentieths of the page is dedicated to denigrating Victoria’s great manufacturing industry. It finishes with this constructive contribution:

The Labor government is letting down Victorians. It needs to take action to generate business growth and confidence in Victoria ...

What action? I would like to hear just one novel thought, one new idea or one alternative policy, because we have not heard anything at all from the opposition. What we have heard from them is a lot of rhetoric, and that is absolutely no substitute for substance.

The Leader of the Opposition made some passing reference to financial services. I looked on the Internet and found there was no Liberal Party media release dealing with financial services. In fact, I do not think that members of the opposition think it exists, because the opposition has absorbed it into the consumer affairs portfolio. When the former Premier was asked he said, as reported in the *Age*: ‘We effectively said that could go up to Sydney’. I really want to hear from the opposition — I understand that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition will be speaking shortly — some ideas about service industries and manufacturing industry for this state.

As I said, this government has invested in those industries. If you look at our investment support program, you can see that we have provided some \$7.5 billion worth of new investment, which has created some 17 000 new jobs in the manufacturing sector alone. Just to give an indication of that, there is the \$1.8 billion recent investment in Ford Australia, the \$395 million investment in the General Motors engine plant, and the \$90 million in Hawker de Havilland, which is making 787 wing components. I could go on at great length.

This government has invested very heavily in facilitating investment in industry, particularly in

manufacturing. Last week the government opened the GE Asia-Pacific headquarters and training centre at Burnley at which there are 1500 new jobs in the financial services sector, which is growing enormously. Melbourne and Victoria are becoming an Asia-Pacific regional hub, particularly for the funds management area and associated services.

This budget delivers \$1.4 billion worth of tax cuts, particularly cuts to payroll tax, land tax and WorkCover. All this is doing an enormous amount to assist business to get on with what it does best — that is, doing business. Our red tape reduction program, worth \$42 million, has a target of 15 per cent reduction over the first three years and 25 per cent over five years.

We have allocated \$21 million to design, a vibrant sector that enables us to help differentiate our products on something other than price. We have invested in skills. I have not heard a single word about skills from either the Liberal Party here in Victoria or from the Liberal Party in Canberra. We have already poured \$240 million into it, plus \$36 million in the \$500 trade bonus announced in this budget.

We are investing in education. Again, that is an investment in knowledge, in creativity, in skills and in excellence. We are doing it; we are not just talking about it. The Leader of the Opposition started talking about education. The opposition’s record is one of closures, sacking teachers, gagging teachers and principals. That is sure to make teachers passionate.

This budget delivers to families and it delivers to businesses. It got a very strong endorsement from both the Australian Industry Group and the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, but, I have to say, the opposition needs to do a darn sight more than whinge. It needs to do a darn sight more than trying to talk down Victoria or talking down our industries and businesses. Sprinkling a lot of hollow rhetoric about leadership, excellence and vision will not cut it. They need substance — that is what is needed if they really want to be an alternative government. They need new ideas, detailed plans and policies. Then they have to tell us how much it costs and how they are going to pay for it.

The Leader of the Opposition spent four years undermining his former leader. He was not prepared to challenge. He ultimately got the leadership on a platter, like he has got everything in life on a platter. That is not leadership; it is receivership. Clearly, the Leader of the Opposition was not prepared to take over the leadership. He had a plan to undermine his predecessor

but no plan for what he would do when he got there. He thinks that he can win government the same way. Victorians are not mugs. The average Victorian is smarter than the average Victorian Liberal MP. The Leader of the Opposition is not ready to lead, and his party is not ready to govern.

This government has taken on the challenges before it. This budget delivers for the future of Victorian industry and the future of Victoria. What I want to now hear from the opposition members is what their alternative plan is. They are all lined up with a mountain of whinges and moans and gripes.

Ms Asher — We don't have resources in opposition.

The SPEAKER — Order! Through the Chair, without the assistance of the member for Brighton.

Mr HAERMEYER — I have 1 minute and 14 seconds left, but it is over to you.

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I wish to make some comments initially on my portfolio areas. This budget is similar to every other budget we have seen under this administration — that is, in the major project areas we have more delays and blow-outs, which are of course becoming a hallmark of the government.

Let us go through what this budget reveals, on top of everything else that has occurred which has led to the situation where every single major project is either late, over budget or both. Spencer Street station, now renamed Southern Cross station, was going to open on 27 April 2005. In this budget we see that it is now not going to open until the first quarter of 2006, so it could be as late as September this year.

When the Flinders Street West precinct was first announced, the original opening date was going to be before the Commonwealth Games. That now will not be concluded until June 2007.

The toxic waste dump is an interesting little project. The date for statutory approval, according to the budget papers, is September 2006, just prior to the election. Let us see if that one actually happens. The point I want to make is that this is four years behind schedule. It is a key industry project. The expression of interests were meant to have commenced in late 2002, and the member for Footscray, who was in charge of that process in the first term of this government, knows that for a fact. The Dynon port rail link, which is a vital infrastructure project singled out by industry groups, has increased in cost by \$13 million. We have had a

reannouncement, I think about four times since 2002, of the redevelopment of the Royal Children's Hospital.

We also see in this budget a reiteration of the advertising figures that were revealed in the budget update, which was tabled out of session prior to the end of last year. What we have seen in the major projects area is \$5 million for spin in the election year. Again, that is a reiteration of the update in the budget. Ads first, answers second, taxpayers last — that is the Labor way. Their budget update last year had more bureaucrats for VicUrban — in fact, \$700 000 worth, per annum, over four years. In terms of wanting to deliver projects in regional Victoria, the government, under the administration of the Minister for Major Projects in the other place, has its usual solution. What does it do when it has more money? It spends it on more bureaucrats.

I note that the government has a target of selecting five transit cities. The cute thing about this is that when you look at the fine print of the budget you see the government has a target of five, but five have already been selected. That is in a note on page 144 of budget paper 3.

The Melbourne recital centre is an interesting little project. The Minister for Major Projects gave an exclusive to the *Age* on the Saturday before budget day on that particular blow-out. We now have a \$28 million taxpayer-funded blow-out in relation to the Melbourne recital centre. This project was announced in February 2002 at an estimated total cost of \$61 million. The taxpayer contribution was set at \$54 million, with the project to be completed by 2007. However, on Saturday, 27 May, the Minister for Major Projects indicated that the budget had been increased to a total cost of \$120 million, with the taxpayer contribution to rise to \$82 million — and the project is now facing a two-year delay, not being finalised until 2009.

Then there is the channel deepening project in Port Phillip Bay. The Minister for Manufacturing and Export would be aware that both the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Australian Industry Group have channel deepening as their no. 1 infrastructure project to allow the port of Melbourne to continue to play its role with exports. Again, there is not a word about it in the budget. There is a bill on the notice paper which has not been debated, and there is nothing in the budget — not a word, not a dollar — about channel deepening, a vital project to Victoria.

I will move on to investment facilitation and attraction. I am particularly pleased that the Minister for

Manufacturing and Export made reference to this subject, indicating that he thought it was an area in which the government is performing well. The first observation I would make about this area is that the government persists in giving industry grants to companies which reduce employment and investment in Victoria. I can instance Kraft, Saizeriya, Kodak and Rocklea Spinning Mills, and there are more. The first thing the government needs to do to up its performance in this area is to ensure that it gives grants to companies that will actually increase investment and employment opportunities in Victoria.

The second matter I wish to raise in direct response to the Minister for Manufacturing and Export in relation to investments facilitated and jobs created is that the government has lowered its targets in this particular area. In 2003–04 the government facilitated \$2460 million worth of new investment, and that is the proper role for that particular department. Under this government that new investment in 2003–04 created 7995 jobs. However, in 2004–05 that dropped to \$2117 million of new investment facilitation, creating 5866 jobs. Again I make the observation that the expected outcome for this financial year is new investment facilitation of \$1600 million, creating 5000 jobs, and in 2006–07 the same low targets have again been set.

It is all very well for the minister to come into this chamber and argue that the government has performed well in this particular area. The government's own budget papers indicated that it has lowered its targets — lowered the workload of the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development and lowered its targets in terms of getting jobs and investment into the state of Victoria. I would have thought that at a time of economic buoyancy the government would increase its targets in this area.

I note also that the government has a new performance measure called 'investments facilitated'. It used to be 'investments facilitated and announced', but of course that has been changed as a direct result of a case brought by me against the government at the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. I would also make the observation that the documents I was able to secure show that, as part of this particular performance indicator of 'new investments facilitated', what the government has done is list jobs where zero jobs have been created. Manildra Mills is an interesting example, given the Labor Party's views on that company. There is an amount set aside for investments facilitated — it is part of the total — but there are zero jobs created.

I note also that the government has claimed investment facilitation success with Empire Rubber — we have all seen that company part-exit Bendigo — and likewise with Simplot Australia Pty Ltd. They are part of the government's previous investment facilitation performance measures in the budget, and zero jobs have been created as a consequence. I think the government needs to up its performance in this area.

The minister also referred to the money set aside — \$41.5 million — for reducing the regulatory burden on businesses. Again, I find it quite odd that the government needs to spend \$42 million in part to remove regulations that it put in place. I refer to an article by Mike Nahan which appeared in the *Age* of 31 May, because I think his commentary best expresses the situation. I quote:

Another systemic weakness of the Bracks government and this budget is its reliance on bureaucratic solutions. The budget provides a long list of initiatives — most of which provide expensive bureaucratic solutions rather than rely on personal choice and markets.

Even red tape initiatives will cost \$42 million in more bureaucratic oversight and incentives to bureaucrats to act in our interest. This is why the bureaucracy has increased in size by 29 per cent under the Bracks Government. The 2006 budget continues this growth.

I want to make a couple of overall comments about the government's performance in managing its budget since it has come to office. Basically every year the government has blown its budget by around about \$1 billion, give or take a few hundred million dollars in certain years. The reason is the increases it has received in taxation revenue. I want to refer to the tax changes the government has introduced in this budget. In regard to land tax, the change is very small. Again I note that at page 134 of budget paper 4 the government says it intends its overall tax take from 2005–06 to 2006–07 to be reduced by just 3.1 per cent. That is not real tax relief. Again, what the government needs to do is hear some of the personal examples of hardship incurred by paying land tax. The government may call this a cut, but it is not genuine tax relief. The government needs to adjust the rates of land tax to wash out the increases in property values. That would be genuine land tax reform.

I congratulate the government for adopting Liberal policy, which will allow land tax objections to be lodged at the time of the receipt of land tax bills and the abolition of indexation. They are good moves forward, and I am very pleased to see the government adopt policies that we have been proposing for some years.

Likewise with payroll tax, the government has a new payroll tax regime to put us in the second lowest position in Australia, with the rate to drop to 5.15 per cent by 1 July 2006, 5.05 per cent by 1 July 2007 and 5 per cent by 1 July 2008 — but I note at page 134 of budget paper 4 that collections overall will increase.

Stamp duty is unchanged. I would remind members that median prices pop around, but in general the stamp duty on a median-value house in Brighton is \$56 000. In Brighton East it is \$38 000, and in Hampton it is likewise. In the case of the Brighton example, that is equal to an average yearly income — and this is on a median-value property in my electorate. Again, the government has made it very clear that it is prepared to grab and grab and grab as a consequence of the property boom. I note that the \$3000 first home bonus will finish in June 2007. No concession has been given to home owners, who I would have thought are a very important part of our society.

I again want to touch on the issue of debt. I think it is clear that the fiscal delinquents are back in town, because net debt will increase from \$1.5 billion in June 2005 to \$7.1 billion in June 2010. Those of us who are aged over 30 will remember the previous Cain-Kirner governments.

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Ms ASHER — ‘Just’, my colleague the member for Bulleen said. I think there is cause for concern about this particular measure in the budget.

I want to conclude with a couple of local matters. I am disappointed that no money has been set aside in this budget for a Brighton police station upgrade. It is a very old police station.

Ms McTaggart interjected.

Ms ASHER — Yes, there are many new ones everywhere. We are not asking for a new one in Brighton, just retention of the current stand-alone, 24-hour police station and a bit of a refurbishment to help our hardworking police. I also note that the government has only allocated part of the Snowy Hydro \$600 million for a schools upgrade in the area. There are very old schools in the Brighton electorate; all of them have significant needs, and I have detailed all of those needs on many occasions in this place. I would hope that the government would look at these areas.

In terms of issues within my own electorate, there is a clear need for stamp duty relief. The government has a view that if you are lucky enough to purchase a

property in an area like mine, then tough luck, you pay the tax. What the government needs to do is adjust the rates because it is a most unfair tax at the level at which it applies in my electorate.

Likewise in terms of land tax I have a number of land tax payers in my electorate — self-funded retirees and business people alike — some of whom unfortunately have been forced to sell their properties as a consequence of the government’s voracious land tax. Again I note that there has been what you call a cut, but there is not real relief for land tax in this budget, and they are clear deficiencies.

In the main I understand the gloss, I understand the spin, but there is a lot more the government could have done in these prosperous times.

Ms McTAGGART (Evelyn) — I rise to speak today on the Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill. I firstly congratulate the Treasurer and the Bracks government for delivering once again for all of Victoria, but in particular for the residents of the outer east of Melbourne. Constituents living in the shire of Yarra Ranges, and particularly those in my electorate of Evelyn, will benefit greatly from the allocation of funds to many worthy projects and infrastructure commitments.

I am absolutely delighted that the Lilydale police members have been allocated \$13.9 million to build a new police station to better serve the outstanding police members of this district. I have raised this matter with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services over the last few years, and I commend him on his efforts in ensuring that this facility will be built. This station will ensure that the Lilydale police can continue to provide outstanding service to the communities in Lilydale, Chirnside Park, Coldstream, Gruyere, Wandin North and parts of Seville from a well-planned and a well-resourced station. The facilities in which they currently work are outdated. The original building was constructed in 1960 and was the original residence of the officer in charge.

Many honourable members would know that I am constantly promoting the Yarra Valley as a premier destination in the outer east of Melbourne for tourism, magnificent wines and produce, but the Lilydale police members are a constant support to events that we hold in our fine area, from sporting events and the Lilydale show to the grape grazing and Shedfest wine festivals, as well as concerts in the vineyards. They are always there, always supporting our communities, and I praise them for their work.

In a recent press release published in our local papers the Liberal candidate for Evelyn, Christine Fyffe, and the shadow Minister for Police and Emergency Services are reported as allocating \$6 million for an updated Lilydale police station — \$6 million! And we have delivered \$13.9 million, so their commitment is less than half what this government has committed. It is another half-baked idea to give our police members half a station and not deliver on anything.

It is just history repeating itself. This is why the Liberals cannot be trusted when it comes to issues of policing and community safety. They must think the Victorian public has a short memory and does not remember the promise they made in their last term in government to provide 1000 new police and then their actually cutting police numbers by 800. Their false promise of providing 1300 police at a cost of \$160 million is an absolute joke. I would not trust them and I am sure the members of the Victorian public will not trust them either.

The Liberals earmarked the Mount Evelyn police station for closure prior to 1999, and it was with the election of the Bracks government that this station remained open. It was actually rebuilt, and it also currently houses the traffic management unit. This government listened to the community in Mount Evelyn and made firm on that commitment, and in 2002 I was delighted to assist in the opening of that station.

Where was Mrs Fyffe then when they were going to close our police station? She was missing in action; yet she comes out now, six months out from an election, promising to deliver a \$6 million station at Lilydale. So we get half a station at Lilydale, and Mount Evelyn would have been closed. Thank goodness the Bracks government is here.

Many of my friends are police members and they still talk about the morale and the state of the force under the Liberals. The attrition rate was 6.2 per cent under the Liberal coalition government, and now, with our commitment to police numbers and infrastructure, the rate is at 2.3 per cent. That is the lowest rate of any state in Australia, and we can be proud of our efforts. I want to remind my communities in Evelyn that the Bracks government has spent almost \$1.3 billion in 2005–06 to maintain a world-class police force in this state.

Yesterday the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and I celebrated this fantastic announcement with the members of the Lilydale police station. I know many members personally and would like to thank them for their commitment to the process of achieving

this outcome. I thank senior sergeants Vin Butera, Bob Raymakers and John Docherty, sergeant and local councillor Terry Avery, and the other great members of the team at Lilydale. This has been a long process. I would also like to thank District Inspector Mick Beattie and Superintendent Gavin Barry for their efforts. This announcement certainly cements the Bracks government's commitment to police resources throughout the state and I, along with the local police and our communities, welcome it.

This \$13.9 million is part of \$53 million to continue to upgrade police stations and courts throughout the state, and \$109 million has been committed to combat terrorism and organised crime. Funding is also available to replace the law enforcement assistance program (LEAP) database of \$59 million, and \$10 million to establish a new commissioner of law enforcement, data security, and a new national police database.

There is also \$1.2 million to continue to fight against graffiti vandalism. The TAC will gain \$520 million to progress our road safety strategy. I certainly commend the government on this commitment to road users, to ensure drivers get the message to slow down, remain under the legal 0.05 per cent blood alcohol limit and avoid drug usage. This is particularly critical in the shire of Yarra Ranges where many young people have lost their lives over recent times. The communities and organisations within the shire are to be commended for their efforts in raising awareness of education as the key to getting a clear message to our young people that speed, drugs and alcohol and even mobile phones can kill.

There are many campaigns being organised to address the needs of our young people and their families. I see that the shadow police minister is in the house. I think he, along with some of his colleagues, needs to be counselled on the Liberal Party's irresponsible campaign to increase speed tolerance levels on our roads by 10 per cent. They condemn speed cameras, which have been an effective way of reducing the road toll and giving Victoria the three lowest road tolls on record. Giving young people a message that it is okay to travel a bit faster is ludicrous and undermines six years of hard work and campaigning by the Transport Accident Commission in giving young people a clear message that speed kills.

In my local media last year there were reports of the opposition's campaign against speed cameras. The following week they were campaigning that speed cameras were not working. The week after that they were campaigning for the education of young drivers. I

think they all need to slow down and have a good hard look at themselves.

The member for Polwarth is on the parliamentary Road Safety Committee, yet he comes to my electorate campaigning on speed cameras, knowing full well that Victoria is not only a leader in Australia but in the world on road behaviour strategies, including speeding and drug and alcohol consumption. He knows that this is evident from the road toll results, yet he and his colleagues still push the barrow of revenue raising. It just makes me so angry. They are telling the families of young children in the Yarra Ranges that it is okay to speed. This government can be very proud of its tough stance on road safety.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! Honourable members will assist the Chair by ceasing the constant interjecting across the chamber.

Ms McTAGGART — I am sure that Victoria Police, the other emergency services and our Victorian communities support our efforts. Community safety is certainly a priority for this government, and I believe we are committed more than ever to making this a safer state.

Once again the Bracks government continues to deliver on its key priorities of health, education and community safety as well as on infrastructure — something the Liberals could not do in seven years of governing the state. This budget strengthens our resolve to continue to be a government that listens to the needs of communities throughout Victoria, and we will continue to assist them by delivering services and infrastructure to support Victorians no matter where they live.

Our commitment is particularly strong to the nine interface councils throughout the state, and as my electorate has a rural-metropolitan interface, I know that the issues facing our communities are very diverse. My electorate is not a growth corridor like the other interface areas, but we still have areas of great need.

Some \$25 million has been allocated for early childhood welfare and health services under the Growing Communities, Thriving Children initiative. The Shire of Yarra Ranges, along with the other eight municipalities, will receive funding to deliver community-based child care and kindergarten services, maternal and child health services and disability services for children.

Living in the outer suburbs of Melbourne brings many challenges, including gaining access to services like

health and education, childhood services, schools, hospitals and jobs, and mobility has been a great problem. We are very proud to have delivered new and improved bus services in my region and to have connected local communities to these key services and also to the Lilydale railway station. It has been quite encouraging, in the time since we have put these services in, to have many residents ring my office and send letters of appreciation about being able to access services like these new bus services.

The no. 1 priority of this government is education, so I was pleased to see in this budget that the skills shortage has been addressed with traineeships and apprenticeships for young people. Last year more trainees and apprentices in Victoria completed their training than trainees and apprentices in any other state. There is a \$500 trade bonus that will give our young people an incentive to continue on with their apprenticeships, especially in the first 12 months, when many of them tend to drop out.

Last week the education minister visited Lilydale High School in my electorate, which has been given \$5 650 000 to complete stage 2. They are all very excited, and we look forward to that being built.

Just as this budget delivers many positive announcements for my local communities, it also reinforces initiatives that have already been put in place by this government. My community can see positive changes in a region that had been deprived for over 20 years by safe-seat Liberals. They can go through the electorate and see more buses delivering services to communities; they can see natural gas pipelines that have been laid and connected to 6000 homes in the Yarra Valley; they can see upgrades to schools like the Bimbadeen Heights and Birmingham primary schools, as well as e-learning projects in schools; and they can see survey pegs in Anderson Street for the \$9.5 million duplication to link Swansea Road to the Maroondah Highway.

They can see building works at Anglicare to support welfare agencies in the work they deliver; and they can look forward to works commencing on the Lilydale super-clinic, which we are looking forward to now that the compulsory acquisition has taken place. They are looking forward to the new Lilydale police station, and they are looking forward to the new works at the school. We also have \$400 000 to commit to the Lilydale museum, as well, which will be a civic and cultural hub. These people can see the changes that have been made since we came to government. They know they have a local member who fights to deliver

everything she can for them. I am proud of that, and I will continue to do it.

I have outlined the many positive initiatives in this budget, and I would once again like to congratulate the Treasurer on a brilliant budget that delivers benefits to all Victorians, especially in health, education and infrastructure. I am proud to be part of the Labor Party, I am proud to be part of this Bracks government, and I am proud to represent the people of Evelyn. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — On a positive note, I wish to start my contribution by thanking the government for the announcement about Boneo Primary School. I presume it has been done to keep me quiet, because I have been campaigning for this for about six or seven years. Boneo is the only school in Victoria in which every single building in the school is or has been portable, including the toilets. In fact the department would not even assure the community of the future of that school, let alone commit to any funding. Now that we have some funding, the future is assured. A lot of work has been put into that by the community, by the former Leader of the Opposition, who visited the school twice, and by the member for Warrandyte too, so we are very pleased to see that.

I will move on to a few issues in my electorate before I talk about the education portfolio. There was an opportunity to provide expenditure for the Gunnamatta sewage outfall, but there is no expenditure at all there. There is nothing for the upgrade of the eastern treatment plant, and nothing for projects for the recycling of water. I looked at the income figures to see whether the government was going to scrap its commitment to spend \$65 million on extending the outfall 2 kilometres out to sea and level the sand dunes in the national park. That is not there, so I presume that is not going ahead as well. Then I looked to see if there was any commitment to Point Nepean, which the government promised to spend \$10 million on a few years ago. It now manages two-thirds of the former defence land, but that \$10 million is still locked up and there is no commitment to even spend a pro rata amount of that money.

As to public transport and route 788, which I referred to in the debate on the matter of public importance yesterday, the Mornington Peninsula is still not included in the Met, so my constituents will have to continue to pay \$24 return just to go past Frankston every day. That is despite the promises of the Minister for Transport, who, when he was the opposition spokesman on transport, promised he would do it. There is nothing for major road projects in my

electorate — not even for planning major road projects, including the extension of the Mornington Peninsula freeway. There will be some duplication happening on the Western Port Highway, which, although it is not in my electorate, leads into it. I am pleased to see that. I have been working towards that, along with other members in this place, because it is a very important industrial road and also an important tourism road to the Mornington Peninsula. There is no commitment to funds for the channel deepening.

What I had hoped the government would do, seeing that it has delayed any decision on the channel deepening until after the election, is take the opportunity to fund an economic study to see how, if it goes ahead, it will affect the tourism-based economy of the Mornington Peninsula. No study at all has been funded for that. This is a golden opportunity for the government to look at less destructive options and also to do an economic study to see how it will affect the Mornington Peninsula.

Land tax has been a huge issue in my electorate, including the very public campaign involving the Arthur's Seat Hotel, whose owners were hit with a 1300 per cent rise. After much publicity, of course, the government backed down. We have seen \$1 billion put into land tax, then \$800 million and now \$200 million this time. It does not matter what happens, the take just keeps going up and up. As we heard today from the Leader of the Opposition, most people will still be paying more land tax next year compared with this year.

Finally, despite what I had hoped to see, in some ways I am not surprised that there is no change in the car registration charge on pensioners. I have the largest proportion of pensioners of any electorate in this state, and every single one of them will still be paying that \$80 registration charge. They would have been a bit cynical if it had been wiped out in this year's budget. But in that sense they will not be cynical, because it is still there and they will all be paying it between now and November, if they have not already paid it this year.

I will now move on to the education portfolio. First of all, we have the \$300 payout to parents. As the Leader of the Opposition said today, it is all about ads and answers — the ads are in the paper, but we do not have the answers. When the hard questions were asked of the Treasurer and the Premier yesterday, they both had different answers. No-one knows how they are going to get the money. Will parents be given a form to fill out, or will the schools just provide the information to the government and they will get it that way? I can assure

members that before the election the Treasurer will be up there doorknocking saying, 'If you have a year 7 or a prep child, here is your money; take it'. He will not care if it is spent on education, given away or given back to him. It can be donated to the ALP. He will say, 'Here it is; you have got to have our bribe'.

I was surprised that as the Treasurer read his speech he announced the \$300 for the preps and year 7s. I thought, 'He is surely not going to hand over half of that money when the school year is six months into the year already'. Sure enough, in the next paragraph he said that even though school started back in late January or early February, they are going to get some money this year as well. They will be forced to love it.

The debate about the means test is interesting. The government said there would be no means testing of the School Start bonus. But I remember both the Treasurer and the Premier were very keen on means testing when it came to first home buyers grants. They were great advocates for it, but suddenly they have gone very quiet. The government's philosophy seems to be, 'We cannot give you high standards in our schools; we cannot give you a safe environment or a well-maintained school, but here, take \$300'.

I would like to move on to the Snowy money. Back on 6 April the Minister for Education and Training said in this place that the \$600 million Snowy money to schools would transform the education capital system. On 1 March she said it was going to bring an additional \$600 million into capital.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr DIXON — It has not been sold; that is right! We have a commitment in the budget for some of that money, but it has not been sold as the member rightly says. The education minister also said they would bring forward projects and it would be a significant increase.

It is money for schools today that they would otherwise get tomorrow. On the same day, 1 March, the Premier said, 'We are reinvesting for a whole new generation of school buildings'. But what is the reality? I refer to page 283 of budget paper 3 from last year and to the table headed 'Asset initiatives'. When you add up the various projects where capital money is going into schools — there are about five separate columns — they all add up to capital investment in schools in 2005–06 of \$140.2 million.

The corresponding table in this year's budget paper is on page 293. When you compare the corresponding tables to those of last year, you see \$70 million plus \$56 million of Snowy money — that is, \$126 million of

capital expenditure this year. So that is \$140 million last year and \$126 million this year, and \$56 million of that amount is Snowy money. The normal capital expenditure on schools, even though it is still less, is not new money. It is not extra money. It is replacement money for what the government should normally be spending on our schools. As I said before, it is actually based on the proposed sale, so it is filling the gaps in the government's capital expenditure in our schools. Therefore, the government has lied. The minister and the Premier have lied about the use of that money. It was going to be extra money. It was going to leave a legacy in education in this state. All it is going to do is fill in the gaps of the expenditure the government should have been undertaking in our schools.

Also \$50 million out of the Snowy money is going to be for maintenance. That is not leaving a legacy; \$50 million is patching up the built-up maintenance backlog that has mounted to hundreds of millions of dollars in our schools. When I go around the schools all they ever say is, 'I do not want a brand-new school; I do not want a rebuilt school like the occasional school around the outer suburbs; I just want my school maintained'. To spend \$50 million of this legacy, which has been built up over years, on maintenance is a crying shame. It is an insult to those who built the Snowy Hydro scheme to think that the government is selling it just to plug the gaps in the maintenance that should have been filled by the government over the last seven years.

I have one more point to make on the money from the sale of the Snowy Hydro. There are 55 schools that have been nominated to receive some money for projects in the budget this year. That is \$100 million of capital expenditure. Given that \$500 million is yet to be spent — and I am sure we will hear about it before the election — based on 55 schools over the next few years, 55 schools times 5 in my mathematics comes to 275 schools. If you add the 55 that have already received money, that makes 330 out of 1600 schools that are receiving Snowy money. Therefore, there are about 1270 schools that will not receive Snowy money that are under the impression that they will be getting money. A lot of schools in Victoria are going to be very disappointed. They are all queuing up. There are all doing their planning excitedly. Some of them have been told that if they do not merge, they will not get any money at all, which is a backdoor way of closing schools down.

The government's system is an all-or-nothing funding scheme; you get a lot of money or you get nothing. You do not even get maintenance. That is why the federal government's investing in our schools program has

been very successful. In just the first two rounds 1800 projects have been funded in amounts up to \$150 000. Some schools have got more than one project. That is why it so popular, because it is what the schools need. They have major maintenance issues; they have a specific project that they want to have done; and they do not all necessarily want to rebuild. The education ministers often say there is not a maintenance problem because they have rebuilt 50 or 60 schools. How does a brand-new school in the eastern or the south-eastern suburbs improve the maintenance of a school on the Mornington Peninsula or in the inner suburbs of Melbourne? It just does not work, and the argument just does not stack up.

I move on to some discontinued performance measures. It is very interesting that they are not included this time around. In budget paper 3 at page 392, buried at the back of the book in small print are some of the discontinued performance measures in education.

Under 'Middle years' there were figures for the percentage of year 8 students assessed as consolidating at curriculum and standards framework level 5 or above in English. The figures from 2004–05 to 2005–06 show that the percentage is sliding down, and guess what, the measure has been discontinued. The figures for the later years refer to the percentage of year 10 students assessed as consolidating at curriculum and standards framework level 6 or above in English, and again they were sliding. So what does the government do? It gets rid of the performance measures; they are no longer in the budget. I find that very disappointing. It is not honest. Schools, parents and teachers need to know that. Our schools and our government need to be accountable, yet the measures have now been discontinued.

I was pleased that the government reannounced Maribyrnong College as a school of sporting excellence and announced a new school, the John Monash science school. This is a fantastic concept which is straight out of the opposition's policy. There should be more than two. I was very interested, but there was just a reannouncement of the Maribyrnong school. We will wait and see how long it takes before we actually see the John Monash school.

Next I want to talk about the trade bonus, because education and training is part of my portfolio. The government announced a \$500 grant to each of the 17 500 apprentices it has identified who would actually receive the grant. That adds up to \$8.75 million, but unfortunately only \$8.3 million has been allocated in the budget. According to my mathematics 900 apprentices will therefore miss out on that money. I

think it is a good policy — \$500 is very useful and will encourage apprentices to continue with their courses and buy the equipment they need — but unfortunately 900 of them are going to miss out.

Educationally the budget is smoke and mirrors; it is a bit of a con. The \$300 is an absolute con, and the biggest lie in this budget, as I have said, is the lie about the Snowy money leaving a legacy for our schools, providing extra brand-new money for capital expenditure in our schools. As can be seen quite clearly from the government's own figures, that is not the case.

Ms MORAND (Mount Waverley) — I want to commend the Treasurer, the Premier, the Minister for Finance and the cabinet on this great budget. It is a great budget for families and for business to meet the challenges facing the Victorian economy and the Victorian community into the future.

In my electorate of Mount Waverley, like the rest of Victoria, education, health, community safety, transport and the environment are the key issues of greatest concern. Education in particular is a high priority for Waverley families. It is great to see once again the high priority this government places on education, with a further \$1.2 billion additional investment in schools and skills. I want to take the opportunity to also congratulate the Minister for Education and Training and the Minister for Education Services on the great job they are doing. We have great government and non-government schools in Waverley. There are three very large government schools with first-rate reputations and achievements. All of them either have undergone or are currently undergoing rebuilding programs.

Parents living in Waverley will now benefit from the School Start bonus, which is great news for families. It will provide a payment of \$300 to parents of each child who starts prep or year 7. A School Start bonus of \$150 will also be made available for students who are currently enrolled in prep and year 7. There is no confusion about this payment, as the member for Nepean and the Liberals are claiming. The payment will be made directly to all parents of children attending government, Catholic and independent schools. It will be made directly to families early in term 3, which starts 3 July. This is great news for families with children reaching these important milestones in their lives. In Mount Waverley there are 560 preps and 1260 year 7 students in government, Catholic and independent schools. I am very sure those families will welcome the support.

I also welcome the initiatives in the health budget that focus on promoting better health in schools. There is \$4.2 million over four years to provide an expansion of the Go for Your Life program to improve children's eating habits and physical activities. It is a very welcome investment in our future. Establishing good eating habits and positive attitudes and behaviours early in life is really important, as these behaviours once established can carry the child forward into high school and their lives. Sustained behavioural change will affect the whole of their lives. The programs in schools will be supported by the continuing funding of the Go for Your Life campaign across the whole community.

It was also great to see funding of \$29 million over four years for initiatives targeting tobacco use and other known risk factors for chronic disease. The community faces a significant challenge with an ageing population and an increase in demand for services. My electorate is the oldest metropolitan electorate based on the median age shown in the 2001 census. I was particularly pleased to see that health and aged care received a very significant boost of \$2.4 billion under health and community services. The funding includes a \$1.6 billion increase to hospitals, a \$10 million blitz on waiting lists and an additional \$170 million over five years in mental health services. That is very welcome indeed.

The Premier announced last week the first stage of the Box Hill Hospital redevelopment. Construction will start early next year. This health service is very important to the residents of my community. The new building will include a 16-chair renal dialysis service and new facilities for outpatient services. I am really looking forward to commencement of construction of that project.

The budget also includes \$847 million for the brand-new children's hospital. The Royal Children's Hospital is highly regarded and much loved by the Melbourne and Victorian communities. This redevelopment will be the biggest hospital building project in Australia.

I want to mention benefits to seniors in the budget, particularly the extension of stamp duty concessions: the thresholds have increased for concession card holders. Senior Victorians will receive a full concession when buying a house valued at up to \$300 000, which is an increase from \$250 000. There will be a partial concession up to a value of \$400 000. This change will benefit seniors who want to downsize and move into something smaller. That is welcome.

The Monash Freeway also has a big impact on my electorate. It is incredibly busy at all times of the day and night and on weekends. Yesterday morning I came into Parliament for a breakfast. Even at 6.30 a.m. there was a massive amount of traffic. There are congestion problems on the Monash Freeway which have been increasing every year. I am very pleased with the announcement of the extra lane in both directions between Glenferrie and Heatherdale roads. It is estimated that they will save around 20 minutes in travel time. I am sure the people of Waverley will very much welcome this change when it comes into place.

I also briefly mention the additional investment in bus services, in particular the buses that service my electorate. I refer to the improved hours of operation of routes 733 and 737, which run through my electorate. I also take the opportunity to note the success of the existing SmartBus program that runs along Springvale and Blackburn roads. The investment in that SmartBus program has been very successful, and the patronage of those services has increased by up to 40 per cent.

I also welcome the significant funding boost for neighbourhood houses. I have three great neighbourhood houses in my electorate, all of which offer a fantastic range of activities. They are run by a group of wonderful coordinators, and they have great committees and volunteers. I am really pleased to see them getting support.

Finally, Waverley businesses will benefit from the 10 per cent reduction in WorkCover premiums. The average WorkCover premium rate of 1.62 per cent is now the lowest in the scheme's history and is a great achievement. Payroll tax has been cut, which the Treasurer has spoken about, from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent. That will bring to 13 per cent the total reduction in payroll tax since the Bracks government came to office. In summary, this is a great budget for Victoria, not just for today but into the future. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — The 2006–07 budget is nothing more than bribery. It is bribery by the Slumber Party, which believes that the lowest common denominator is good enough. The message is: do not excel; just be happy with the lowest common denominator. This budget is focused not beyond November but just on the next election.

This government will be in debt to the tune of \$7.1 billion, and that will increase to about \$14 billion, so you can imagine what will happen in another 10 years time. It will go above \$32 billion, which caused the mess that the former Labor government left

us in 1992. Despite all the extra taxes that Victorians have to pay, services have not improved. Voters in my electorate of Bulleen know that this government will take a lot of their money. They also know that the government will lose and waste a lot of it. They know that projects will be late and over budget. They know this government will break its promises, and they also know that this government is all about spin, employing hundreds of spin doctors to ensure they spin the government story. There is no substance here, just rhetoric.

What have the newspapers said about this budget. The *Age* had the headline 'Brumby's bribe'. It also asks in an editorial headline, 'but where is the vision?' The *Herald Sun* has the headline 'Confusion sours school "lolly"'.

I am very disappointed with the budget in relation to the city of Manningham and in particular my electorate of Bulleen. Once again the residents of the electorate, including students, have been neglected. The government has taken the residents of Manningham, Bulleen and Templestowe for granted. That is very disappointing, especially when the Labor Party is trying to get one of its upper house members, who lost preselection for her upper house seat, to stand for the lower house seat of Doncaster. The government has not been prepared to spend 1 cent in the city of Manningham, which is very disappointing.

As reported in the *Manningham Leader* a Labor upper house member said after the last budget that there was nothing major in it for Manningham. She will have to say the same thing this year, because there is absolutely nothing in there for Manningham.

Major roads need to be upgraded in the electorate of Bulleen. I refer to Templestowe Road, King Street and, of course, Thompsons Road. In 2004 the Premier said that the government would allocate some funding for Thompsons Road and that in two years time it would be finished and rebuilt. The two years are over, and the government has not commenced any real work on Thompsons Road. The original cost of \$9 million will probably go up to \$12 million, but if the government had started the work on time it might have saved \$3 million, which could have been spent on King Street or Templestowe Road. This government cannot manage or finish a project on time or on budget.

That leaves me with Templestowe Road and King Street, which are appallingly dangerous roads. Students, children and the elderly walk along these two roads, yet the government refuses to put in 1 cent to upgrade them. We had hoped they would have allocated some

money in this year's budget, or at least provided a plan or a time frame for upgrading these two roads. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the budget, and the residents in that area will miss out again.

Schools in my electorate have missed out. Templestowe Heights Primary School, Templestowe Valley Primary School, Serpells Road Primary School, Manningham Park Primary School, Bulleen Heights Primary School, Templestowe Park Primary School and Templestowe College have all missed out again under this lazy, inept and incompetent Labor government. It has ignored the residents, and the government will realise this in November.

I turn briefly to multicultural affairs. This is a government that claims to stand up for our culturally diverse communities. This is a government that, year in and year out, comes in here and says, 'We support all Victorians. We are here to ensure they have all the services that they need'. It is interesting to note that the director of the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs travelled to Europe. There is nothing wrong with her going to Europe, but why did she travel there? She said:

This is a timely conference ... on the success of multiculturalism and whether it is time to develop alternative approaches as guides to public policy.

So what the Premier, who is also the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, is saying is that perhaps we should do away with the concept of multiculturalism in this state — 'Perhaps the director of the Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs should go to Europe and see if there are alternatives which can be used across government'. The government paid for this person to go to Europe and come back with some vision of what to do in multicultural affairs. Despite the rhetoric, the government wants to find an alternative to it. Ministers stand up and talk about the merits and strengths of having a multicultural community in Victoria. Unfortunately, this document proves they have a secret agenda to do away with it.

In 1999 the then government launched the Victorian interpreter card. It was a great service that ensured people with limited English were able to go to departments and agencies, show their card and get a qualified interpreter. For seven years this government sat on it and did nothing, and people missed out. A week ago it re-launched the 1995 initiative of the former government. After seven years it decided to wake up.

What the government should be doing is ensuring that this is a nationally accepted interpreter card. It should ensure that it does not stop at the border. If someone

goes from Victoria to New South Wales, they should be able to use the interpreter card there. If people with limited English go to local government, they should be able to use the card. They should be able to access the services of commonwealth agencies by ensuring they are able to access a qualified interpreter. Unfortunately this government has been sitting on its hands and has not done much to implement a national interpreter card.

I am pointing out to the government what it should be doing. I will refer to some of the departments to ensure it understands the needs of our multicultural communities — firstly, to the Department of Education and Training. Under the previous government classes in languages other than English (LOTE) were compulsory from prep to year 10. The member for Ferntree Gully would support the view that the LOTE program is a key to our future. Unfortunately this government has allocated no resources in its budget for languages other than English (LOTE), so that program is now an extra. Schools do not have the money, and therefore students cannot pick up a second or third language. It is appalling that the government has neglected to support LOTE. It has also neglected to support the after-hours language schools. They provide a service to the community, yet there is no extra money in the budget for those schools.

I refer to the Department of Human Services. People in the community want ethno-specific programs for the elderly to assist in the prevention of isolation and to enhance aged and health care. Yet there is nothing in the budget for that. They also want more advertising in non-English newspapers so they will know what services are available to them. A whole raft of programs and initiatives that are needed in multicultural affairs are missing from the budget. I also refer to the Department of Infrastructure and the need for some additional promotion and advertising of VicRoads' activities.

I refer to youth affairs. In the budget there is nothing new for the Office for Youth. The government has offered coffee and biscuits to the regional councils, nothing more. It is encouraging them to meet and come up with ideas and to put forward those ideas to the minister, but the minister does not have to listen. In fact, the minister does not have to do anything — and all she has to offer them is biscuits and coffee. There is a unit within the department, and one has to ask why it is there. What has happened with programs to deal with alcohol and drug abuse? What has happened with bullying in schools? They are problems facing our young Victorians, yet this document is silent on all of them.

The government needs to ensure that the youth of today are treated as equal partners. It needs to ensure that they are not told what to do but are listened to and their concerns taken on board so that it comes up with policies and initiatives that will make a difference to them.

I turn briefly to information and communications technology (ICT) and innovation. There was nothing for that area in the budget last year, and there is nothing for the two portfolios in this year's document. Both ministers responsible for ICT and innovation are happy to go along and cut ribbons and open offices when things go well, but they ignore people and ignore companies when things go wrong. It is all about spin, nothing more. There is no substance, just spin. It is disappointing that there is no money for new programs and new initiatives in these portfolio areas.

As I said from the start, this budget is all about spin and rhetoric. It does nothing for Victoria and absolutely nothing for Victorians. All it does is look to the November election. Once 25 November is over, there will be nothing there.

My electorate of Bulleen has missed out once again. No money has been allocated, and in Bulleen they have just given up.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I tell you what, the member for Evelyn should look for a new job, because after November she will not be in this house.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr KOTSIRAS — And she knows it. Christine Fyffe will be sitting over there. I suggest that the member for Ferntree Gully tries to find another job, because she will also be out of this place after November.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr KOTSIRAS — She too needs to look for another job.

I return to the electorate of Bulleen. We need more public transport, because there are people in Bulleen who have no access to public transport whatsoever. There is a bus which goes nowhere, and the roads are appalling and in urgent need of repair. Yet once again that has been ignored by this government.

I refer to schools. We have schools with toilets like those you see in a Third World country. They are

appalling. We have raised that with the minister, and she just seems to ignore it. Why? As I said, she will find out in the November election.

A Labor upper house member who has done nothing at all — absolutely nothing — intends to run for the seat of Doncaster.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr KOTSIRAS — I have to tell her that unless she does something in the next six months, she will not win. She has had three years to do something, and as I said, she has not achieved much.

In the area of multicultural affairs this government has an agenda to do away with programs that ensure that everyone has the ability to access government services. In youth, ICT and innovation there are no new programs and no new initiatives, and that is a shame. The government had a chance with this budget, but unfortunately it has failed and failed miserably — and it will find out about its inaction in November.

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — It is an absolute pleasure to speak on this year's budget. I would like to start by congratulating the Treasurer, his staff and his department on the tremendous job they have done. This is clearly a budget for everybody, and it is a budget that has been made possible only by the strong economic management we have had in this state. Since 1999 we have had outstanding economic management, and that has positioned Victoria as a star performer in our region.

The people in the Eltham electorate have benefited enormously from the government's policies. Our education outcomes are up, our unemployment is down — we have one of the lowest rates in Victoria — and our crime rate has plummeted. In Banyule it has gone down by 12.3 per cent since 2000–01, and in Nillumbik it has dropped a massive 29.2 per cent. That is a 29.2 per cent drop in crime. This budget will further strengthen our local community.

I would also like to congratulate the Deputy Premier, who is also the Minister for Victorian Communities, on this budget, particularly the latest A Fairer Victoria package, which I will speak about a little bit. What is notable in that package and in this budget is the number and diversity of departments and agencies that have worked together to put in place a truly coordinated package which addresses disadvantage and assists families.

It is clear to anybody who looks at the Department of Victorian Communities that it is working well. Despite

the scepticism some people had, it is genuinely breaking down the traditionally narrow silos of public service departments, and it is doing it through coordinated programs to the benefit of millions of Victorians. What an absolute disgrace it is that the opposition and the new opposition leader still have in place a policy — one of the few policies they have, I should say — of dismantling this highly successful department, which is doing a fantastic job in addressing disadvantage in this community.

The 2006–07 budget will make families and businesses great winners. In Eltham people understand the importance of strengthening our businesses and industries, safeguarding our economic security and ensuring that the Victorian economy is strong. They understand that the benefits provided for their families, their schools, their community centres and their health centres are all a result of strong economic performance. We have to be constantly vigilant to ensure that Victorian businesses are able to compete against our fairly vigorous and active regional competitors.

Local businesses in Eltham — and there are a lot of small businesses in the electorate — will reap the benefits of the \$1.4 billion in reduced business costs in the budget. Included in the benefits to business are cuts to payroll tax, which will drop from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent over three years. That will assist 20 000 Victorian businesses, many of which are in Eltham. Eltham is a fairly affluent area with a lot of two-income families and a lot of small businesses that will benefit from that in particular. They will also benefit from the reduction in land tax rates and the lowering of WorkCover premiums.

This will help small businesses in the electorate of Eltham to thrive. One great benefit of this budget is for families. As I said, the electorate of Eltham is renowned for its number of two-income families with school-aged children. There are something like 14 500 school-aged kids in the electorate of Eltham, and they will substantially benefit from this budget.

Members should have a look at one of the best parts of the budget but which the opposition hates. The Leader of the Opposition is so stingy he will not even commit to it — it is the School Start bonus. It is going to be a huge — —

Mr Nardella — Won't he commit to it?

Mr HERBERT — He will not commit to it. One can only assume he is going to scrap it. I do not know why he hates families, but it is clear that he does not

think families have additional pressures and costs on them when kids go back to school. But we do.

Mr Nardella — He hasn't had to face that, though.

Mr HERBERT — That is very true. The member for Melton has pointed out that he has not had to face that.

In Eltham something like 3000 children who started school this year or are due to start next year will benefit from this initiative. The parents of over 3000 local students who started or who will start prep or year 7 this year or next year will receive a one-off payment to help them ease their school costs — that is, \$300 will be paid for any kid who starts school in prep or year 7 next year, and \$150 will help with the costs of students who started prep or year 7 this year. I think that is a fantastic initiative, because it is for government, Catholic and independent schools. It does not matter where parents send their kids, parents have additional costs and are going to benefit from that extra money.

As I said before, the Deputy Premier is to be congratulated for the A Fairer Victoria package. This second A Fairer Victoria package is a great \$818 million investment in our society to make it a safer and fairer place to live. No matter where you are, you will all benefit from this package in terms of the better community that we will all live in in the future.

A couple of notable features of that package directly assist young kids and families. They are: something like \$268 million is going to be spent on children's services and child protection; there will be \$11 million for literacy teams; there will be \$14 million for youth programs; there will be money for senior Victorians; and importantly — I do not think this been given a lot of attention during the coverage of the budget — there is \$41 million to improve access to justice, a new child witness program, implementing a human rights charter and reforming the system of handling sexual assault. These are great initiatives and will be certainly welcomed.

I will not speak much longer but I want to comment on schools. There is no doubt that Eltham has some of the best schools in the state and probably the best schools in the country. A lot of those schools would match pound for pound any school in the world. They are fantastic and thriving schools which are delivering fantastic outcomes. This budget, which adds an extra \$1.2 billion over five years of new programs — literacy programs, capital works, school leadership initiatives

and greater choice in the senior years of schooling — is going to be an absolute boon for schools in Eltham.

I would like to particularly note one of those schools — namely, Eltham Primary School. It is a fantastic local school which is doing a great job. It has been trying to get capital works for a while as the school needs that funding. I am so pleased that the government could fund \$2.16 million for construction of the school's new art facilities and that it will go towards renovating some of the ageing school buildings. It is a start — it is a stage 1 development. As I have said, the school will be funded with \$2.16 million. I know the Eltham community, and it is absolutely delighted about that money.

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — I did not realise that members from the other side of the house were cutting their contributions short.

One of the most asked questions from people in my electorate when we talk about the Bracks government and how it manages the economy is, 'Is there any money left?'. People have a mistrust of and poor regard for the ability of Labor governments to manage money. As our leader, the Leader of The Nationals, said in his contribution this morning, Labor just cannot manage money.

This government will be remembered for being over time and over budget in the last seven years, because that is its report card for everything it does. A classic example of this, which we have often talked about in this house, is the fast train project of 1999. It was going to cost \$80 million. What will it cost now? It is up to \$800 million and the tote is still ticking over.

None of the \$96 million appropriated by the Treasurer for the upgrade and standardisation of the Mildura railway line in 2001 has yet been spent.

Mr Nardella — You closed the line!

Mr WALSH — We never closed the line! The member for Melton should get his facts right. The line has never been closed. It has been put into absolute disrepair, because the government has not spent any money on it — that's all!

That railway line is now in a worse condition than it was at that time, because \$96 million has not been spent. Now \$53 million has been appropriated to fix up that line, but that is dependent on \$20 million that the federal government allocated a couple of years ago to standardise it. The real challenge for the federal government will be in what it will get for its \$20 million. Will it just get a bit of a patch-up job that

keeps it going, and then the government will come back to the federal government and want more money out of it in the future? The line will get a half-baked upgrade instead of being fixed up so that people can have the passenger train services returned as was promised. If members have a look at the 10-year plan of the transport strategy, there is no mention of returning the passenger train to Mildura.

If members look at the budget papers — and if they went to the breakfast this morning — they will see that one of the key things in this budget is an increase in debt.

Mr Smith — A huge increase in debt.

Mr WALSH — It is a huge increase in debt, as the member for Bass said. People in my electorate say, 'We know Labor cannot manage money, so is there any money left in the barrel down there?'. They will see a big increase in borrowings to keep things going. We are getting back on the borrowing gravy train. We are going back to the Rob Jolly era — the government is going to keep borrowing to keep the state going. We are going to get on a treadmill of borrowing. The state might be running cash surpluses — the budget might look good on a year-to-year cash basis — but the underlying figures show that this government is increasing debt as we go forward.

I know the Treasurer's love for quoting from newspaper clippings. It is interesting to read the editorial in today's *Age* which refers to early Roman times and Juvenal, a poet who lived then. It quotes something that he wrote:

Two things ... people anxiously desire, bread and circuses.

Mr Wells — This is the *Age*!

Mr WALSH — This is the *Age*, describing the budget as bread and circuses. It is interesting to consider what are the bread and circuses. The budget provides \$143 million for another sports pavilion in the Melbourne sports precinct. How many more sports pavilions do we need in that cluster on that little area of land, when there are so many towns around country Victoria that would love to have an upgrade of their football change rooms or their netball courts or whatever? But, no, we have to have another pavilion here in Melbourne, just to overload that sports area.

Another thing that comes under bread and circuses is \$52 million for attracting new major events and exciting events to Victoria.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr WALSH — They will all be in Melbourne, will they not? I am sure that all those major events will be within 1 kilometre of the central part of Melbourne.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! The member for Richmond and the member for Melton!

Mr WALSH — This government — —

Mr Nardella interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! If the member for Melton continues to interject in that vein, I will be forced to call the Speaker.

Mr WALSH — This government was elected on a mantra of governing for all Victorians. Let us hope that some of that \$53 million for attracting major events is actually spent in country Victoria. Would it not be absolutely fantastic if some of that money went into making sure that the Quambatook Tractor Pull was promoted and made a bigger event in Victoria, instead of putting it into the grand prix? The grand prix has been going for long enough to be self-sustainable; it should not need to be propped up by government any more.

Further on the *Age* editorial says:

But there is rhetoric and there is rhetoric, and then there is the grand vision. As to the latter, this budget provided none.

As the *Age* editorial says, the budget provides absolutely no vision at all.

I will touch quickly on some of the issues in my portfolio responsibility area. It is interesting that the Treasurer quoted from a Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) media release. He quoted very selectively from one paragraph, whereas the rest of the media release was quite damning of the budget. It is headed, 'Big spend misses the mark for farmers' and states:

Farmers will be disappointed the biggest infrastructure spend in Victoria's history has ignored the top priorities of the farm community.

...

'Farmers across Victoria will be extremely disappointed to learn that no funding has been allocated to repair or upgrade their deteriorating local roads and bridges. While the farm community has welcomed the ... \$690 million investment in arterial roads and bridges, none of this funding will be spent on connecting farming families to their local communities.'

The Treasurer has quoted selectively. In general the VFF thinks this budget is a non-event for country Victoria.

There is nothing in this budget for channel deepening. We have had the Channel Deepening (Facilitation) Bill on the notice paper for probably 18 months now but it has not been brought on for debate.

Ms Garbutt — Do you support it?

Mr WALSH — I do support it. We need to have the channel deepened and make sure that the port of Melbourne remains competitive. Otherwise we will lose business to Botany Bay in Sydney or the port of Brisbane, which is a natural deepwater port, and Melbourne will lose its place of pre-eminence as an export port in Australia.

There is another thing in my area for which there is nothing in the budget. Horticultural exports are one of the key drivers of the economy. There is nothing in the budget to put in place a proper fruit fly monitoring and management program to make sure that we have the right protocols so that we can actually export fruit out of this state.

There is no money to reinstate some of the vermin control measures that we would like to have. I cannot see any additional staff coming back into the Department of Primary Industries so that we can again have 1080 carrots, which have been taken away because there have been no staff, and so we can have liver baits again for fox control, instead of the Fox-Off that does not work. More importantly, there is no money for the \$10 foxtail bounty. Would it not have been fantastic? To her credit, when the Minister for Community Services, who is at the table, was the Minister for Environment and Conservation she had a foxtail bounty and we got rid of something like 170 000 foxes from this state. We lost a good minister and what happened? We lost the foxtail bounty. What a pity!

Referring to water, there is no money in the budget to assist with putting fire hydrants into the Wimmera Mallee pipeline project. I acknowledge that both the state and federal governments have put substantial funding into that project but something was missed — in the planning process, I suppose — and now local government is responsible for putting all the fire hydrants into that project. It would have been good if the budget had some assistance for local government to cover the cost of those fire hydrants.

What is a surprise is the \$30 million for the pipeline from the Waranga channel to the Lake Eppalock

reservoir. I find the process very interesting. A feasibility study is being conducted into the viability or pros and cons of it. Before that report has even been done, we have an announcement of funding to build that pipeline. In everything else we seem to have to have report after report and study after study. I will commend the government for doing it so quickly, but I ask: why can it not do it so quickly for other things, so that we can actually get on with life?

In the short time left, I would like to talk about some of the issues in my local area. The budget has \$22 million for an upgrade of the Warracknabeal campus of Rural Northwest Health.

Mr Wynne interjected.

Mr WALSH — I have said thank you to the minister, and I say thank you to the minister on the *Hansard* record.

Mr Wynne — You got \$22 million?

Mr WALSH — Yes, \$22 million. I put on the record that the minister and officers of the department have been a pleasure to work with on this project. It is an interesting study on how ministers relate to the opposition. If ministers will actually work with the local member, even though they may be part of the opposition, we can achieve good outcomes for electorates.

Mr Wynne — We govern for all of Victoria!

Mr WALSH — The member for Richmond interjects. That is the issue: some ministers do not want to work that way, which is a great pity.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr WALSH — There were some significant challenges at Rural Northwest Health. Three years ago, not long after I was elected, the members of the board were asked to show cause why they should not be dismissed and they chose to resign. For nearly three years we have had an administrator in that hospital. We have just had a new board appointed and now we have this funding to do an upgrade. It will give that community a real show of support from the minister and the department to have that hospital rebuilt. There was a lot of angst and fear that Rural Northwest Health may have been merged with the Wimmera health service, but this shows that that fight was worth while. They will have a stand-alone health service into the future.

Another thing in the budget for my electorate is the money to acquire some land at Swan Hill to build a new justice and emergency services precinct, which is another culmination of several years of working with the previous and current Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the assistant commissioner who covers that area to get that project up. The vision is to co-locate all the emergency services on one site so that initially we will end up with Rural Ambulance Victoria, the police and the State Emergency Service all on one site, and in the longer term we hopefully will have the regional office of the Country Fire Authority, although the CFA has a quite long lease where it is at the moment. That will be an excellent facility with some synergies, so that training rooms and such facilities can be utilised by all the emergency services.

Another thing in the budget that could be of assistance to the Swan Hill electorate is the \$19 million for the racing industry development project. At this stage it is unclear how that is going to be distributed, but currently the racing industry at Swan Hill has an application in and is being quite proactive in wanting to do a redevelopment there. The Nyah community is quite concerned that the Nyah Harness Racing Club may be relocated to Swan Hill, so there are some challenges that that community and club have to work through into the future.

Something that is probably not in the budget for my area is school maintenance, as it is yet to be defined how the additional funding for that will be spent. Quite a few schools in my electorate are now significantly behind in their maintenance programs. Everyone talks about the seven dark years of the Kennett government, but the one thing that the Kennett government did, to its credit, was actually catch up the backlog of maintenance in schools. That maintenance program is now slipping behind.

A particular example of that in my electorate is Lake Boga Primary School. In one of its rooms the floor is so weak from what is assumed to be white ants that a table has had to be placed over that area so that no-one walks on it lest they fall through the floor. I hope the school maintenance program is distributed all around Victoria and does some of the things that are needed in the schools in my electorate.

In conclusion, what is not in the budget but was in last year's budget is a provision that from 1 July this year every fee, every fine and every licence in this state is going to be automatically increased and indexed upwards every year. While people may think they are getting a bonus out of this budget, they need to know

that on 1 July every fee, every fine, every licence is going to automatically be increased into perpetuity.

Ms ECKSTEIN (Ferntree Gully) — I am absolutely delighted to speak in support of the 2006–07 state budget. I congratulate the Treasurer, the Premier and the government on bringing down an outstanding budget — the best yet! — which makes Victoria a great place to live, work and raise a family. This is a fantastic budget for Melbourne's outer suburbs, for my electorate of Ferntree Gully and for ordinary families. There are many significant initiatives in this budget that will benefit Victorian families. It is difficult to choose which one to comment on. As there are many members on this side of the house who wish to speak on this outstanding budget, I will just highlight a few of the more important ones as I see them.

This budget continues to deliver on the most important priority of this government, which is education. It is also a budget that continues to deliver on other key services such as health, as well as on the sound financial management for which this government is renowned. It maintains a healthy operating surplus of \$317 million in 2006–07, preserving Victoria's AAA credit rating into the future.

This budget delivers for Melbourne's outer suburbs, particularly for the people in my electorate. This year's budget provides an extra \$781 million in output funding and \$448 million in capital funding for education and training. This includes \$50.2 million to build new and replacement schools and \$115.4 million to improve and upgrade schools across the state.

In my electorate Karoo Primary School will receive \$3.1 million for an upgrade of the school's facilities. This will enable the school to build six extra permanent classrooms, a larger staff room and administration area, including extra staff toilets, as well as an improved and extended physical education space. The planned new classroom block has been designed with the flexibility to provide a range of learning spaces which can be opened up or closed off depending on the needs of the learning and teaching program.

The six classrooms will be clustered around a shared core space with movable walls between both classrooms and a central area to make a range of different sized spaces. I understand that the school will dedicate this area to year 5 and year 6 students so that appropriate learning and teaching programs for these middle years students can be provided. The schools current permanent buildings are completely inadequate for the 700-plus students who attend the school.

I have spoken in the house before about how the school's long-term projected enrolments were wrongly calculated a number of years ago and how the school has missed out because of this in the past. I am pleased to report to the house that the school and its community are absolutely delighted that in this budget the Bracks government has funded the entire upgrade. This will give the school sufficient funding to allow it to complete the total upgrade in one redevelopment project rather than over several stages. This is a much-needed redevelopment of the school's facilities, and the school community has been celebrating the announcement ever since the Treasurer brought down the budget.

Skills and training will also be boosted through \$241 million to fund the Maintaining the Advantage skills statement, and \$36 million will fund the \$500 trades bonus for first year apprentices to encourage them to continue and complete their apprenticeships. This is an important measure in addressing the looming skills shortage, as a large percentage of first year apprentices drop out and fail to complete their training. They therefore are a loss to the skill base of our community and our economy.

The \$182 million School Start bonus of \$300 for each student in prep and year 7 is also a welcome measure and one I am sure will be particularly appreciated by ordinary working families in my electorate. It will assist parents with the start-up costs, such as uniforms and books, of sending children to a new school. Parents will get the full payment from 2007, but parents of this year's preps and year 7s will get a half payment of \$150 in term 3 this year. This year the Schoolyard Blitz program will also deliver small grants of \$5500 for playground improvements to each remaining primary school in my electorate that has not received the grant in previous years. This funding is also greatly appreciated by these schools.

Transport-related infrastructure is receiving \$2.6 billion in this budget. Some \$345 million is being provided to improve metropolitan and regional arterial roads. I am absolutely delighted that \$13.6 million is being provided to duplicate 2.2 kilometres of Kelletts Road in my electorate, between Taylors Lane and Napoleon Road. This includes replacing the current roundabout at Napoleon Road with traffic lights. More than 20 000 vehicles travel along Kelletts Road each day, and there is severe congestion during the morning and afternoon peaks. There have also been 25 casualty crashes along this stretch of road in the last five years, including one fatality, so separating the lines of traffic will significantly improve safety on that road.

I would like to thank all the people who live in the area around Kelletts Road for letting me know how important it was to them that something be done about the safety of and congestion on this road. I am very pleased that together we have achieved a real win. Unlike my Liberal opponent, who is trying to claim the credit, I have been able to deliver the funds for the duplication of this road for the people of Rowville.

As part of the \$191 million over four years, and the \$71 million total estimated investment to improve bus services, I am also pleased to say that bus route 737 from Monash to Croydon, which passes through part of my electorate, will be improved by extending the span of hours during which services operate.

The outer east has been poorly served by public transport services for many years, and a lot more work still needs to be done. The budget and the government's recently released transport and livability statement are a significant step in the right direction.

This budget also invests significantly in health and community services, with an extra \$1.2 billion over five years in output funding and \$1.3 billion in capital funding being provided. This includes funding to rebuild the Royal Children's Hospital, as well as funding to treat an extra 37 000 patients in our hospitals in 2006–07 and a blitz on waiting lists. This will benefit all Victorian families.

In closing, I would like to again congratulate the Treasurer, who has delivered a magnificent budget for Victoria and a magnificent budget for my electorate of Ferntree Gully. It is the best yet. It is a great budget for Victorian families, making Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — I rise to join the debate on the Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill. I remember back to 1992 and to the days when, as a 34-year-old, I was first elected to this house as a member of the newly elected Kennett government. After we came in we had an audit done on the finances, and we could not believe what we found — \$33 billion of debt. The Cain-Kirner government was spending \$2 billion a year more than it was receiving in revenue and taxes! As an accountant you would technically have to say the entity was bankrupt, because it meant that the government was having to borrow money to pay for recurrent expenditure. In other words, the government was putting on a credit card the wages of police, nurses and teachers. That was the reality.

One interesting point is that there was a \$600 million backlog in school maintenance.

Ms Allan — That is rubbish.

Mr WELLS — In 1992, when we came in, the audit figures showed very clearly a \$33 billion debt. That government was spending \$2 billion a year more than it was receiving, and there was a \$600 million backlog in school maintenance. That is what we were faced with in 1992. When we left in 1999 — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Delahunty) — Order! Members in the chamber will have their turn. The member for Scoresby has the call.

Mr WELLS — That \$33 billion debt meant that the Cain-Kirner government was spending more on interest repayments than on health. It is very important that the members on the back bench of the Bracks government understand the facts and understand their history. My understanding is that they get into the Labor Party room and gee each other up after the Treasurer has given them all a bit of a boost!

The member for Bass has pointed out to me that in his second-reading speech the Treasurer stated:

It is true that we inherited a strong financial position.

So this government started off with a very strong base.

I turn to the budget papers, because I have real concerns about some of the claims that are being made in them. One issue that comes to mind is crime statistics. I refer members to page 165 of budget paper 3, which is headed 'Reducing the crime rate'. I remind honourable members that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services had input into setting the target for reducing offences against the person. The Bracks government was aiming for a 2 per cent reduction this financial year. What do we find? Violent crime in this state has increased by 6 per cent. We could not understand why the police minister set that target. Maybe there is a memo from the Treasurer that he should have but did not read.

In an answer to a question without notice on Tuesday this week the Minister for Police and Emergency Services said:

... many things are occurring which confirm Victoria's status as a safe place to live and a safe place to raise a family.

He then went on to say:

Last time I checked, assault was a violent crime, and Victorians are less likely to be assaulted than people in other states or territories.

So on the one hand the Minister for Police and Emergency Services is telling us that we were living in a safer community, yet on the other hand the Treasurer was all the time hiding from him the fact that there had been a 6 per cent increase in violent crime, which indicates to me that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services is clearly not over all the facts in his portfolio. The increase in crime is a very difficult situation which the government has to contend with.

If you look at the 6 per cent increase in violent crime in the community, you would expect that there will be 2315 more violent crime offences in this financial year than there were last time. There is no doubt that the rhetoric of the Bracks government and the police minister is just not stacking up.

Victoria Police crime statistics reveal that violent crime committed against Victorians has increased by 23 per cent since the Bracks government came in. The Bracks government has mismanaged law and order in this state. The government got rid of the previous police minister, the current Minister for Manufacturing and Export, but the new minister has made the situation worse. Under Labor the number of assaults has increased by 42 per cent; abductions and kidnaps have increased by 30 per cent; homicides are up by 21 per cent; and the incidence of rape has increased by 18 per cent. Yet we had a bizarre situation today where the minister was congratulating himself because of the increase in the number of assaults.

In my 14 years as a member of Parliament that is the first time I have ever heard a police minister congratulating himself for an increase in the number of assaults. During question time today he went on to say that the reason is that the government has a domestic violence protocol with Victoria Police. I think the domestic violence protocol is a very positive step, but the fact is that it was in place three years ago. The protocol is not something that has happened in the last six months to alter the budget figures. He agreed to the budget figures showing that there should be a 2 per cent reduction in violent crime. He then says, 'Well, no, hang on a minute, we have to add the protocol of domestic violence'. He was misleading in the way he answered that question at question time today. Even paragraph (c) on page 166 of budget paper 3 states:

The 2005–06 expected outcome reflects the current upward trend in the level of offences against the person. This is partially attributable to the rise in the level of assault.

If the minister were over all the issues in his portfolio, he would have factored the protocol for domestic violence into the results three years ago. It was ridiculous of him to stand up in question time today and

say, 'No, this is just a new development; that's the reason why there's an 8 per cent variance in violent crime'. It made the police minister look very silly.

We have had an embarrassing situation, so on Tuesday the minister got up here and said, 'Victoria is a safe place to live'. Then the Treasurer comes in here about an hour later and says the level of violent crime is up 6 per cent — not down 2 per cent. Then today the house had the ridiculous situation of the minister trying to justify it by not adding in the domestic violence situation.

We have had broken promises in the police portfolio. The budget does not address the broken promise in regard to 24-hour police stations, the policy on which under the Bracks Labor government was very clear. It said there would be 24-hour police stations at Belgrave, Rowville, Bellarine, Kilmore and Gisborne. There are not enough police in the force at the moment to keep these stations open 24 hours, so they are shut. And if you go to the Belgrave police station, you push a button and the alarm goes through to the Knox police station. If you go down to Bellarine, it is sometimes only open for 8 hours! It is another broken promise.

Expected revenue from speeding fines is about \$403 million. The government is right — the opposition claims that the police are being used more and more for revenue raising, and we make that very clear. The government has to have that \$403 million to ensure that its budget remains in surplus.

The opposition received some leaked information about so-called spider graphs. These spider graphs show what time the speed cameras should be set up in each municipality to coincide with when the most accidents occur in that spot. For example, in Knox the majority of accidents were happening between 10 o'clock at night and midnight, and the suggestion by the police traffic management unit was to have the speed cameras set up between 10.00 p.m. and midnight. But when we looked at the spider graphs, we saw that they had been set up between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock in the morning, or between 4.00 p.m. and 6.00 p.m. There was no correlation between when the accidents were happening and when the speed cameras were being set up.

The Minister for Police and Emergency Services at the time, and the Premier, came out and said that this time they would investigate it and make sure that the speed cameras would be set up where the accidents were happening. That is what we were promised. So when the Liberal Party applied under the freedom of information law to find out about the updated speed camera spider graphs, we expected to receive graphs

from the government showing a direct correlation between when the speed cameras were set up and when the accidents were happening. That would have made sense because we were given that commitment by the Bracks government.

What happened when we went to get the information? The government refused the opposition access to it because it was not in the public interest, it said. So we reviewed that decision, and now we have to go to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal to get something that should have been and was going to be straightforward. What does the Bracks government have to hide? Just give us the spider graphs! The only reason the Bracks government would not be giving the spider graphs to the Liberal Party is if it had used the speed cameras as revenue raisers — in other words, by setting up the speed cameras when there is the maximum volume of traffic.

They are not, as was promised, set up as safety cameras to reduce the number of accidents. That is the only reason why the government is not giving us the information. We are going to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. We will be briefing our barristers, and we will be fighting this to the nth degree. We have no choice, because we have been given commitments, and I believe that these spider graphs, when we finally get them, will show that the cameras are just purely revenue raising and there is no correlation between accidents and when they are being set up.

We also raise the issue of prisoners in police cells. Every day we seem to hear a story one way or another. We had an example just recently in Narre Warren where a prisoner had been shipped around all the different police cells for 72 days. He tried to commit suicide. He tried to block the door so they could not get in. Seventy-two days in a police cell! The *Herald Sun* reported the other day on someone being in police cells for 52 days. The point is that that is taking police off the beat, out of the divisional vans, to look after prisoners in police cells. Prisoners in police cells are the responsibility of Corrections Victoria. For example, if there are prisoners in Bairnsdale or Sale, they should be taken to Fulham, because they are the responsibility of correctional services and not Victoria Police. We seem to hear it every year when we have a budget and especially every three or four years when we get another shot in the arm when it comes to corrections: they say they are going to fix the problem, but they do not.

In the electorate of Scoresby we have seen broken promise after broken promise. We cannot trust Labor. It

promised a tramline to go all the way through to Knox City — it has not delivered! It is a broken promise from the 1999 election. During the 1999 election campaign they promised a feasibility study on a train line from Huntingdale or Glen Waverley to Rowville — nothing has happened! It is another broken promise. After the issue of the Scoresby toll the people in the outer east are fed up. We want to know what the Bracks government has actually delivered to the people of Scoresby, apart from a long list of broken promises. I can see my campaign slogan at the moment: ‘Do you trust Steve Bracks?’. The answer will be no. We got no tramline and no feasibility study. All of a sudden we had tolls. Each time you can count on government members saying anything and doing anything to get the votes at the election, and straight after the election they will just roll over. They say and do anything to get the votes. We do not trust the Bracks government.

Mr WYNNE (Richmond) — I rise to support this budget, which by any measure achieves an extraordinary result, because this budget delivers much-needed services across the state of Victoria. This is a budget that delivers to the Melbourne metropolitan area, to our provincial centres and to country Victoria as well.

I want to start with the extraordinary investment in two major areas. The first is health. The 2006 budget delivers a massive \$2.4 billion investment in improved health services and facilities. I am talking about two of the most iconic health services in the state, both of which have metropolitan and country catchments. I refer firstly to the redevelopment of the Royal Children’s Hospital. What an extraordinary result! The redevelopment of this hospital, built over 50 years ago, will be delivered by the Bracks government in full and on time. Providing for a new, rebuilt, iconic Royal Children’s Hospital is something this government is immensely proud of.

I also refer to the Royal Melbourne Hospital, which is an important facility in the seat contiguous to mine, the seat of Melbourne. We are doubling the size of the Royal Melbourne Hospital emergency department. This is again an incredibly important and significant investment in public health, not only for the inner city, but for the broader Melbourne metropolitan area and country Victoria, when people need to come down to access specialist services provided by those two major medical and teaching hospitals.

On a more localised front, I had the pleasure last Friday of attending the North Richmond community health centre with the Minister for Health to announce a \$19 million redevelopment of the centre — and as the

parliamentary secretary advises me, it is the biggest investment in community health in any centre, ever.

It is important for us to remember where community health was born. It was born of the Whitlam government. In fact this North Richmond centre was one of the first community health centres funded under the Whitlam government and it has been operating now for almost 35 years in conditions that have been less than satisfactory for that period of time. This is a centre which is based on the North Richmond public housing estate, but it supports a wider catchment of members of the Richmond community. It is the Bracks Labor government that has invested those dollars in this critical community health centre to provide first-class medical health, preventive health, dental, physiotherapy and allied health facilities to the community of my area.

My community is absolutely delighted with this timely decision, which again shows the significant level of investment that this government is prepared to put into not only the broader metropolitan health services but also those services that are so critically based in the community sector. There is none better in my view than the North Richmond community health centre.

The second area that warrants acclaim, frankly, is the extraordinary investment by this government in education. This government has committed in budget after budget to rebuilding the chaos that we inherited in 1999 from the former government. Shame upon that government for its closure of schools, sacking of teachers and a complete downgrade of — —

Mr Andrews — And cutting of budgets.

Mr WYNNE — Indeed, cutting of budgets — a complete downgrade of the education system. That rebuild has taken time, but look at the results. Point to any criteria that you want to think about in educational achievement and the Bracks government can hold its head high — whether it is year 12 completion rates, and we know the nexus between young adults who complete year 12 and their prospects, not only for further education but for employment. That nexus is well established and irrefutable, and it is our government that has achieved outstanding results leading the nation in terms of year 12 completion rates.

If you think about the prep-to-grade-2 class size initiative, that is perhaps one of the most important starting points in terms of establishing young people in education. In that respect the prep-to-grade-2 class size and the intense amount of activity that is required to support young children in getting them established within their education pathways is a truly marvellous

initiative of the government which without doubt in the out years is going to bear wonderful fruit for those young people who are going to work their way through the education system.

On a local level, it would be remiss of me not to advise the house of a wonderful decision made at the end of last year. Fitzroy High School, which was closed under the Kennett government and reopened by this government as a year 7 to 10 school, is now to be a year 11 and 12 school — in other words, a school from year 7 through to year 12. This is yet another example of this government's investment in public infrastructure, and in this case public education.

There are exciting opportunities ahead, and not only for Fitzroy High School. There are also very interesting opportunities arising from the twinning of Fitzroy high with Collingwood College to create an exciting suite of curriculum opportunities for young people in my electorate. My colleagues have dealt with the question of community safety, so all I want to say is this: the score is on the board. There are 1400 extra police, the academy is full — —

Mr Crutchfield interjected.

Mr WYNNE — My colleague from South Barwon informs me we will achieve 1500 extra police. In my electorate the outcome of this has been a drop in crime rates of 8.9 per cent since last year. This builds upon the \$7 million investment in a brand spanking new police station in Church Street, Richmond, in 2004 and, more recently, on the stationing of 11 more police officers in Richmond. They will be working on Victoria Street, foot patrolling, dealing with the issues we have been trying to address for some period of time. As the house would be well aware, there are difficulties relating to drug trading within the inner city. That is having a big impact, and I applaud Victoria Police for it.

The transport and livability statement has been well canvassed by my colleagues. It is a visionary statement for the next 10 years that has a very strong emphasis on public transport. I was delighted to be with the Premier and the Minister for Environment two weeks ago when we launched the extraordinary program of investment in bicycle paths right through the metropolitan area. There was a wonderful endorsement of this strategy by Bicycle Victoria. It simply could not believe this extraordinary capital investment by the government in the bicycle paths and bike trails program — \$8 million this year.

As for my electorate, those who know the Yarra Trail — one of the most used bicycle paths in the

metropolitan area — will know that it stops bizarrely at a set of stairs, so cyclists are forced to lift their bikes up and walk up three sets of stairs to get back onto a bike path. The Bracks government will invest \$1.5 million to remove those stairs and improve the path so that there is a smooth transition enabling easy access right through to the city centre for the thousands of bike riders who will use the trail in the future. What a wonderful thing for my area!

I conclude by discussing the fantastic set of announcements that are the other aspect of this government's strategy. We have a very responsible budget, with strong economic figures going forward, and today the Deputy Premier released the next stage of the A Fairer Victoria package. This is by any measure a wonderful adjunct to the budget released a couple of days ago. The \$818 million it provides is a further example of how this government is addressing social disadvantage. By these actions the government is providing very tangible evidence of how our social justice direction is addressing the needs of people in the most serious social circumstances. This money has been extraordinarily well received by all the peak bodies. We were down at the Brotherhood of St Laurence today. Critical work has been done by the Victorian Council of Social Service in assisting the government in framing this budget.

I would like to mention a couple of areas arising from *A Fairer Victoria — Progress and the Next Steps*. I refer particularly to \$268 million in extra resources for children's services and child protection — that is one-quarter of a billion dollars extra. Building on last year's A Fairer Victoria, as my colleague indicated earlier, there is increased support for mental health services. The last budget was \$180 million. In this budget — —

Mr Andrews interjected.

Mr WYNNE — My colleague the Parliamentary Secretary for Health indicates that there is \$136 million for early intervention in mental health. In those two areas alone — children's services and mental health — there has been an extraordinary investment in people. It says everything about how this government is seeking to go forward.

This is a fantastic budget. It not only deals with setting a strong economic framework for the state going forward, but it also deals with both the Melbourne metropolitan area and provincial and country Victoria. It also strongly addresses areas of disadvantage in our community, not only in A Fairer Victoria last year but in *A Fairer Victoria — Progress and the Next Steps*.

There is near enough to \$2 billion to address systemic social disadvantage.

To conclude my comments, I think it is reasonable to say it is only Labor governments that have an interest in protecting the interests of people who are disadvantaged, people who are powerless and people who require assistance and a bit of a hand up. Only Labor governments are interested in that. I am incredibly proud of this budget and of the social justice elements of this budget. I commend it to the house.

Mr SMITH (Bass) — I could not miss the opportunity to get to my feet to speak on the Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill. I would like to bring to the attention of the house a number of issues. It is a great disappointment that after seven dark years of Labor we have this deplorable drivel dished up to us as the Treasurer's seventh budget. All that we can believe is there is planned debt of at least \$7 billion by 2010.

The people of Victoria have heard all these promises before. Year after year, promise after promise, things are going to be better. The government is going to provide infrastructure and benefits for the people of Victoria. To date it has provided very, very little for Victorians, apart from spin and work for the spin doctors that this government has employed for such a long period.

I would like to raise a number of concerns on behalf of my constituents in the seat of Bass. I have trawled through this load of rubbish that has been put together as a budget which is supposed to tell us what we are getting for our money. I found very little of benefit for the people in my electorate.

On behalf of the people of the Bass electorate, I say we have been treated very badly by this government, which is very disappointing. The major investment in the Bass electorate by this government was the \$50 million for the Seal Rocks development when it had to pay out the developer, and the money the government has had to invest since then to get the development going. That could have been a private sector development, and it was starting to work well. This government has done very little.

I know from documents that the government will not give to us that there are plans to spend another \$2.4 million per year in ongoing running costs to keep the Seal Rocks centre going. What a waste; what a legacy from this government! When we look at that white building sitting out there on the rocks we can say it was a Labor government that bugged up what was a really good project; it would have been great for

Australia and unique in the world. This government ruined it because it could not say, 'Right; you can proceed with the next stage'. The government had to buy its way out of it, and it has cost the taxpayers tens of millions of dollars.

I brought to the attention of my colleague from Scoresby the Treasurer's admission on page 2 of his budget speech:

It is true that we inherited a strong financial position.

You can bet your life this government inherited a strong financial position. We left about \$1.8 billion for this government to work on and do great things with. Those opposite have had the money and have had the opportunity, but they have not produced. It has been all spin and very little result for the taxpayer. They talk about the seven dark years of the Kennett government. Let me say they seem to forget that when we came into government in 1992, the debts and liabilities we faced were horrific. We were the rust-bucket state.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! The member for Bass, without assistance from the government benches.

Mr SMITH — We used to be asked what was Victoria's net worth, and we used to tell them it was about \$2.50 — and that was in the good days of Labor. It got down to about 25 cents in the end. What a disgrace! The Kennett government had to come in and make a lot of changes. It had to address the problems of debt, because had Victoria then been a company, it would have been declared bankrupt. The truth of the matter is that probably the Cain and Kirner governments and the ministers at the time should have been put in jail. Had they been running a business in the private sector in that way, you can bet your life that they would have ended up in prison.

Not only did Victoria get back onto an even keel as far as its finances were concerned but it also got back the state's AAA rating that members of this government now seem to think is their doing. They were not responsible for it; the work of the Kennett government got it back. We returned this state to being the pride of Australia so far as development, manufacturing and investment in the state of Victoria were concerned.

The Kennett government got it back, and this government has been the beneficiary of that. It is not the taxpayers who are the beneficiaries of the hard work of the Kennett government. Government members now seem to forget the hard work we put in over that period.

They seem to be quite happy to point the bone and talk about the seven dark years of the Kennett government — but they were not dark years; they were great years. They were years when we had to work hard and make tough decisions, to the extent the present government was in the position where we handed it \$1.8 billion and said, ‘Go for it’.

Democracy was then at work; the people made their choice and put this government into the position where it is making the decisions, but the truth of the matter is that this government has made it difficult for itself because it is putting Victoria back into debt again. That is not good for this state. The government says we are going to have a \$100 million surplus, but the truth of the matter is we will be \$7 billion in debt in another couple of years, and that is not the way to go. We, as members of the Kennett government, had to work damned hard to ensure we got the finances of this state back in order — and there is no doubt that we certainly did that.

The budget was about \$19 billion when we lost office in 1999. It is now around \$32.5 billion. Where has all the money gone? Where have they put it? Let us have a bit of a look. They have to rely on money coming in from the Snowy Hydro Ltd sell-off to do school maintenance. It is a \$600 million black hole — —

Ms Allan interjected.

Mr SMITH — Yes, it is. The minister can sit over there — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! Interjections are disorderly, and the honourable member for Bass should ignore them.

Mr SMITH — The minister is responsible for this. Why has the work not been done on the schools? Why was the physical resources management system (PRMS) not kept going, whereby school maintenance was done on a regular basis? Why do we have to wait for money to come in from the Snowy scheme to invest in schools and carry out the maintenance work that is needed? Cain and Kirner left a \$600 million black hole, and this government needs \$600 million from the Snowy scheme. There are no other promises for schools. There is nothing in the budget about spending on schools. It talks about \$100 million and that is all — not \$600 million. We just have to wait.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr SMITH — The budget is in excess of \$32 billion, so there should be money for schools. But no, this government has misled the people of Victoria and is

waiting to get money from the Snowy scheme to invest in our schools. That is a disgrace. I say to you — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! The honourable member will address the Chair and ignore interjections.

Mr SMITH — I say to them that what they have done to education in this state is wrong. We have the lowest literacy and numeracy rates of anywhere in the country. Some of the school buildings in my electorate are an absolute disgrace. The teachers, students and parents are terrific, and they have had to put up with that year after year. This government has ignored the pleas of the people, not just my pleas, to do some school rebuilds. You only have to look at some of my schools at Koo Wee Rup, Nar Nar Goon, Garfield, Bunyip, Inverloch and San Remo. Each and every one of them could be totally rebuilt because this government has ignored what is happening in my schools.

There is no money in the budget for my roads.

Ms Allan — They are not your roads!

Mr SMITH — I say ‘my’ on behalf of the people of Bass. The first bit of work on the Bass Highway in seven years has been done from the Gurdies to Grantville, and a lot more should have been done. It is a most important road, because it carries international tourists who want to visit the penguins. It would have taken them to Seal Rocks, except this government has ruined that facility.

The Koo Wee Rup–Pakenham bypass is a road that should have been built or at least be under construction by now. There should be a four-lane road that people could drive on safely, but there is not. Instead there is a two-lane road that goes through the main town of Koo Wee Rup. We need the Lang Lang bypass. We need an upgraded road from Anderson to Cowes to get the international, interstate and intrastate tourists down to that area. As late as today I have been told that the roundabout that is being built in the middle of the road in Lang Lang cannot be finished because they have run out of money. This was called a roundabout when the signs went up. We have all seen government signs go up, and this had a figure of \$1.2 million put on it. That has been changed, and it has gone up to \$2.5 million. Overnight a tag was put over the sign and the amount of money went up to double what it was before. Now they say they cannot do anything about it.

In the area of public transport we have had this great scheme put out by this government, saying, ‘We are going to spend \$10 billion’. All the government is

spending is \$10 million to try and have a feasibility report done. It is all just promises: \$10 million and \$10 billion, and 10 years for it to be done. It is all a bit of a joke on the people of Victoria, because this government is just wrong and has lied to the people.

I want to know about the health services that are going to be fixed up in Wonthaggi. I do not have a hospital with an accident and emergency unit that operates 24 hours a day and that is fully staffed. When ambulances come in we have to wait for a doctor to be called to come into the hospital to deal with someone who may have had a heart attack or other serious problem. They could quite easily die waiting for the doctor to arrive. The doctors do damn well — they work hard, and they really put in the effort — but they have to go and treat their regular patients during the day as well as work most of the night at the hospital. Where is it in the budget? Tell us where it is in the budget. It is not in there!

I want something done about the accident and emergency service at the Warley Hospital in Cowes as well, because that has been neglected. This government closed down the operating theatre at Koo Wee Rup hospital, which was performing 2500 operations a year. Patients are now lining up on trolleys waiting to be treated at Casey Hospital, which cannot handle them. Why? Because this government stole away the doctors and specialists who go and operate at Casey Hospital. We know that is the truth of what the government has done.

Parks Victoria closed down the State Coal Mine at Wonthaggi. We have down there in the State Coal Mine a tourist attraction that will be 100 years old in a couple of years time. We want to get about \$1 million out of the government for it. What is in the budget? Absolutely nothing is in the budget to say that the government is going to put any money into that great tourist attraction.

I want to know about some of our public safety issues. I want a new police station in Koo Wee Rup. Why should the people not have one there — except that they have an old tumble-down building there now! I want a new ambulance station for Grantville, because it is at least a 20 to 25-minute drive for ambulances going from Wonthaggi or Cowes or from Pakenham.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr SMITH — What about my people? My people are entitled to the same things as you have in your area. They pay the same taxes, and they are entitled to have some of these services provided. But those things are

not in this budget. Into the rubbish tin with it! That is where it should be! There is nothing there for the people of Victoria, and it is wrong that people in this government are lying to the people of Bass and saying that they are providing services. They are not providing anything.

I cannot believe that these people can sit here, all mouthing the same tune. They have all been provided with the same briefing sheets. They are all going to say, 'This is a great budget'. The truth of the matter is that the people on this side of the chamber know that it is not a good budget. We know that the people on the other side have blown billions and billions of dollars on crazy schemes. This lot has been over time and over budget on every major project they have carried out. They are a disgrace. They will go down in history as being the worst government that has ever been in power in the state of Victoria.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on the budget. It is always a pleasure to speak after the member for Bass. I must congratulate the new leadership team of the Victorian Liberal Party on their tactics. It is important that the member for Bass speaks before dinner rather than after dinner, because you can imagine how bad he would be after dinner. The member for Bass certainly lacks coherence, though if nothing else he pursues his subject vigorously. I am sure there will not be too many people that read that particular part of *Hansard*.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — Oh dear, I am shivering!

The commentary has been very positive about this budget. It certainly has been positive in regional Victoria, which I am very proud to belong to. The member for Richmond talks about not just the capital side of the budget but its human capital side. Although there is a record capital works budget of some \$4.9 billion in this budget — and I will mention a number of local projects in my area that have been outlined — all members of this house have enjoyed some capital programs, just as we will enjoy programs on the human capital side in terms of the social programs that have been confirmed and reaffirmed in this budget. I would certainly like to congratulate the cabinet on this particular budget.

I want to limit my contribution to the debate to local projects, and I will start with the medical school at Deakin University. Deakin is having a thank-you function on Monday for the people who successfully lobbied for the money to build a medical school on the

waterfront campus. I certainly acknowledge that after the Bracks government's announcement on Geelong and Gippsland the federal government matched that funding. We look forward to the medical school on the waterfront at Deakin.

There are also some announcements for education. There is some \$2.9 million for Grovedale Secondary College, and I want to congratulate the principal, Jeff Cooper. Jeff has transformed that school with five or six years of very hard work. This is the second modernisation of Grovedale, and it involves the technical, musical, arts and staff administration side of the program. Jeff has got together a wonderful staff. The school has a sports academy that incorporates André Borovic from the Geelong Cricket Club, a number of people who have been involved at the Geelong Football Club and some netball expertise.

The school runs the sports academy and uses it as an attractor for kids from outside its immediate catchment. It has been a wonderful addition to the school. The Grovedale Tigers Football Netball Club and recently the Grovedale Tennis Club have all been upgraded so that that school can become a real community focus. In addition to that, Jeff has managed to get the Bayside Christian Church to work out of its gym on Sundays and I am going there on Sunday for its service. The church provides a counselling service to that school. Well done to Jeff Cooper and the Grovedale community.

For Barwon Health, I worked closely with John Mulder with respect to the \$25 million that was allocated to the Grovedale aged care facility on Torquay Road. It is the first piece, if you like, of the new suburb to the south of the Grovedale railway line. We had talked long and hard about a new suburb in Mount Duneed to the south of Grovedale. This is the first piece of public infrastructure, or indeed private infrastructure, that will be built. I look forward to being there when the Premier turns the sod later this year. I know that some of the residents of Peter Street, Grovedale, and the John Robb Centre in Belmont will welcome this facility rather gleefully. Although their facilities have been adequate, they are in need of an overhaul to bring them into the 21st century. They can certainly look forward to the new facility.

In addition to that, having spoken to the people at my neighbourhood houses, I can say that Laura Connor from Spring Creek in Torquay and Deidre Slater from the South Barwon community centre are overjoyed about the additional funding that is being provided for their facilities, as is Kylie Pollack, who is the area coordinator. Neighbourhood houses can now apply for

additional hours, which will certainly be of benefit in terms of the more extensive programs that they will be able to put out into their communities.

Before finishing I want to outline some of the programs that were announced in the provincial statement and refer to some grants that in particular Surf Coast shire has managed to get its hands on through the Small Towns Development Fund and the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. The funding has been used for a number of projects, and I notice that the expanded programs will allow the smaller municipalities to access some capital funds which they may not previously have been able to.

I am looking forward to working with the Great Ocean Road Committee on the Provincial Pathways program — and I think the member for Richmond talked about the pathways program when he referred to bicycle paths. GORC is certainly looking towards that in connection with bicycle paths. I am also looking forward to working with the foreshore committee concerning the area from Point Danger down on to Fishermans Beach. The committee certainly has plans to do up that area, both from a lineal and amenity point of view. As a community facility that would replace the marine rescue shed and the fishermen's clubrooms with a real facility that all of Torquay and Jan Juc could utilise.

Another area in which I look forward to working with the City of Great Geelong is the Barwon River. The member for Richmond talked about the Yarra River. The Barwon River is the Yarra River of Geelong. I note that —

Mr Wynne — The Yarra River of Geelong?

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — Yes, except a lot cleaner. The Barwon River is used not only for active recreational activities but also from a passive point of view. We focus on that, and I understand that is done with the Yarra. One thing the Barwon River will not have that the Yarra River has is Docklands. The local Liberals are campaigning for a Docklands on the Barwon River, which has met with some amusement from representatives of the chamber of commerce, the City of Greater Geelong, and almost anyone else who has discussed it. It is quite bemusing. I can say quite strongly that there will not be a Docklands on the Barwon.

Mr Wynne — You have got one on the Geelong waterfront.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — Correct, there is one on the Geelong waterfront, and we are certainly expanding

that into the western wedge project with the Transport Accident Commission and a number of other focused capital items.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — Transit cities, indeed; but there will not be a Docklands on the Barwon River. I look forward to working with the members for Geelong and Bellarine to enhance the Barwon River precinct. A recreational park would be ideal in terms of expanding the passive and recreational opportunities there, rather than some elitist, goofy idea about a Docklands on the Barwon River. I can certainly consign that to the scrapheap.

That rounds it up as far as projects go, and I know a number of other programs will be released during the next few months. I again congratulate the Treasurer and cabinet on a wonderful budget.

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — I am pleased to make a number of comments on the 2006–07 budget. During the Treasurer's speech on his seventh budget I was pleased to hear him make an acknowledgment that the government inherited a strong financial position. Unfortunately, when you look through the budget you can see that this government is now going the way it normally goes. Labor cannot manage money and it has now decided to go into debt.

The budget is city-centric and is strongly and squarely aimed at Melbourne. In fact, there will be very few major projects for country Victoria. Even though the budget has announced a \$4.9 billion capital works program, most of this will be in Melbourne. While many of us like to see projects in Melbourne, which is our capital city, most of us who live in the country would like to see a lot more major projects happening in country Victoria.

There is also a lot of spin in this budget. A great part of the spin is about the increase in police numbers and how police numbers have increased under a Labor government. In Shepparton we definitely need more police. While there might be more police around Victoria, they are probably being based in Melbourne rather than going into the country areas where they are vitally needed.

The budget says that there is the largest number of police officers ever, and that is terrific, but we would like to see them come to country Victoria. More particularly, I would like to see them come to the Shepparton police station, where there is a substantial lack of police numbers. The police station is certainly understaffed. This has been supported by the police

association and Mr Paul Mullett, who agreed that they were about 20 officers down in the Shepparton police station, which services four other stations — Mooroopna, Tatura, Dookie and Murchison.

Over the last year I have presented petitions from the communities of those areas asking for more police officers. They very much support their police officers. They say that the ones who are there do a fantastic job, but when any of those police officers go on leave — whether it be maternity leave, stress leave or annual holidays — they are not replaced, and that is putting a lot of pressure on the police officers who are there manning the stations.

The Mooroopna community signed a petition containing 2048 signatures; Murchison signed a petition with 143 signatures; and Tatura signed a petition with 710 signatures. It is interesting to note that although Murchison is a small community, during the fruit-picking season the town doubles in size, and there are a number of challenges with new people coming into the area.

In Tatura the police station actually closed on one weekend because there were not enough police to man it. Because of the outrage by the community, extra police had to come from Shepparton so that it remained open. We really need to make sure we have the appropriate police numbers, even though when I raised it in this house the police minister said the police numbers for my region were appropriate, but that is certainly not the case.

We also need more ambulance officers in Shepparton. I have spoken with the ambulance officers and they are looking to upgrade their rosters to make sure there is appropriate staffing so that they can have the number of shifts needed. We have been pleased to have an upgrade of the Shepparton ambulance station, and I thank the Minister for Health for that substantial upgrade. We also have a new ambulance station in Mooroopna but we do need to staff the stations. I know that Rural Ambulance Victoria is working with the Shepparton branch to try to come up with an acceptable roster which will not overtax the members working there.

I will mention some of the things that concern my community. I know there have been cuts to the Department of Primary Industries funding, which is a huge disadvantage to country areas. One of those is the cutback on DPI pest plant and animal officers. I heard this from one of those people who was going to be retrenched. The government has failed to adequately fund people to deal with the weeds and feral animals. I

met with the Sheep Pen Creek land management group in December last year for an information session on the Chilean needlegrass, which is a weed that is now becoming fairly prevalent in the Shepparton district. If it is not checked, it has the potential to travel right across Australia.

Fifty land-holders attended that meeting, at which we gained an idea of how to identify the weed and also what was needed — that is, more, not fewer, controllers and inspectors. I urge the government to have another look at that and make sure we have the right number of pest plant and animal officers to ensure that weeds and feral animals are controlled.

The Treasurer also acknowledged that one of the challenges for the government was to make sure we have a skilled and educated work force in Victoria, and I totally agree. I was disappointed when I mentioned in this house the Worldskills Australia national competition that was happening in Melbourne. The minister said it was a good event, and I know that a number of people who went to it also thought it was good.

It is really important to expose students to the opportunity to try a trade because we need some of our students to choose to go into trades rather than leaving school and not knowing what to do, and perhaps leaving country towns. I was disappointed when the Minister for Transport would not allow a travel concession of a meagre \$50 000, which would have allowed 2000 students from country Victoria to attend that day. It would have meant that students from country schools would have been exposed to a career in the trades and would have seen something of the sorts of trades they could go into. That was a great disappointment to me.

If this government is serious about getting trained and skilled people, it needs to put more money into allowing our country kids to go where those trade seminars are held. On this occasion it was in Melbourne, and I thank the Apprenticeship Factory in Shepparton which calculated the cost of taking those students to Melbourne. We have a severe trade skill shortage in country Victoria.

Turning to the education portfolio, I know the government has said it has put lots of money into education, but I would like to talk about some of my local issues. On 11 November last year and again on 5 May this year I wrote to the Minister for Education Services, seeking for the Ardmona Primary School funding for a school bus so pupils could be moved from there to Mooroopna. The school needs about \$10 500 a

year, which does not sound like a lot of money. On 15 May I received an interim response to my letters, but nothing has happened there.

I also sent a letter to the minister on behalf of the Mooroopna North Primary School council, which had written to me over its concern about funding cuts to its severe language disorder program, as the teacher aide component had been removed. I have received a letter saying that the funding has not been reinstated. I have been very disappointed about those local issues which have not been funded. It would have meant a lot to those small schools in my electorate.

We understand that the sale of Snowy Hydro will fund certain schools in Victoria. While The Nationals think it is important to fund schools, the sale of the Snowy Hydro project is certainly not a way to do it. The Nationals do not support Victoria's selling its 29 per cent share of Snowy Hydro. We would like to put that on the record.

Two years ago the budget provided \$6.3 million for the Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway. I was grateful for that. Two years down the track nothing has happened. There has been some preliminary work done. When I spoke to staff from VicRoads, they said it would be starting in the next few weeks. It is again a blow-out of a major project that was supposed to have been started. It has been put on the backburner and now the funding has blown out — \$6.3 million is now \$10 million. We are now having to pay extra money for the same amount of work which was going to be done for \$6.3 million. It will now cost the Victorian taxpayer \$10 million for the same amount of work. This is a very important road — it is on the Midland Highway between Shepparton and Mooroopna — but it does not even meet the minimum safety standards of VicRoads. We also need to have lighting on the full length of the causeway. I will be lobbying the government to make sure we have that lighting to maximise safety on that road.

The Goulburn Valley Highway is a federally funded national highway; there is scope for the state government to be involved in its upgrade. I am part of the Goulburn Valley Highway Action Group. The chairman, Mr John Corboy, makes sure we have meetings regularly. This issue has been on the agenda for about the last 10 years. I have raised it in this Parliament quite a number of times.

We have received \$40 million from the federal government to fund the Arcadia section of the highway. We are pleased with that. Planning for the Nagambie section has been approved by the Minister for Planning. It has been gazetted and is on the planning scheme of

the Strathbogie Shire Council, but we need to continue those roadworks. While the Nagambie section of the road has been gazetted, and planning has been done by the Victorian government, we need to make sure that the Victorian government does some planning for the Shepparton bypass. We need to have an environmental impact study. There is a corridor of the road that has an impact on the squirrel glider. Representatives from VicRoads have said it would have to do an environmental study. I am not sure about the progress of that study, but I hope VicRoads is being proactive to make sure that report is released soon, because before more federal funding continues we have to make sure that all of the preliminary works have been done. This is where the state government can be of some assistance.

We need to look after our senior citizens. There has been a lot of rhetoric from the government about this. The government's document *Meeting Our Transport Challenges — Connecting Victorian Communities* deals with travel savings for seniors. It mentions free travel for Victorian seniors on Sundays within metropolitan Melbourne and major regional centres. The problem is that the document deals only with Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo. I would like to put on record that I think Shepparton should have been included in that document. It is one of the fastest regional centres in Victoria.

We need to make sure that Shepparton is put on that agenda so that people can use rail transport from Shepparton to Melbourne and have concessions on Sundays. I know the Association of Independent Retirees would like to make sure that seniors around country Victoria have concessions seven days a week. At present they have concessions five days a week. It is important that they are able to travel on Saturdays and Sundays so they can have the privilege of going to the football, seeing a show or seeing some of the major events that are in Melbourne. It is important to make sure it is not too prohibitive for them to travel to see those events in Melbourne.

This budget provides some funding for the former Ambermere site — \$6.5 million. I appreciate this funding from the government. I have been lobbying for this for about eight years. The funding will build independent psychiatric units and allow for the early assessment and treatment of people suffering from mental illness and will provide accommodation for them. I have spoken to the chief executive officer of Goulburn Valley Health, Mr Greg Pullen, and the chairman of the board, Mr Clem Furphy. They told me that one of their main priorities was to make sure that the \$6.5 million was in the budget for that purpose. I

am pleased to say it is in the budget. We look forward to those independent units being built.

One of the other areas for which I am appreciative is the funding for the Tatura netball courts upgrade. They have received \$50 000 from the government. It was an early announcement. I attended a fundraiser in Tatura last week where \$32 000 was raised at an auction by the locals and \$50 000 was given by Visy Board. An amount of \$10 000 was received from the Rotary Club of Tatura, and almost \$800 from the Lions Club. These courts are uneven, the asphalt is lifting, and they have become dangerous for players.

Another issue I would like to raise concerns public housing. I have raised this issue in this house probably ever since I have been here. In 1999 the government announced that \$5.3 million over three years would be allocated in the budget to redevelop the Parkside Estate. After three years very little had been done, except for the minister coming back to Shepparton and announcing an allocation of \$13 million over eight years. There is still no extra public housing on that site; there are still hundreds of people on the waiting list; and there are still houses being left vacant which are being vandalised, resulting in huge renovation costs. The government needs to employ more inspectors to look after and maintain its public housing stock.

On the issue of local government, which is my portfolio responsibility, in the 1 minute I have left I want to point out that major infrastructure spending is needed on roads and bridges. The Nationals have a policy of making sure that 1 per cent of the GST is provided to local governments so that they can repair and maintain their roads and bridges which are vital to country Victoria.

Another issue I want to raise concerns the provincial Victoria web site which was initiated by this government. In 2005 \$2.85 million over three years was allocated for the web site to entice city people to move to the country. There were six jobs advertised across country Victoria at that time. At present there is one in Sorrento, a boat cleaner; three in the Wimmera–Mallee, a tree pruner, a labourer and a plant operator; one in Gippsland, a home carer; and the Grampians Pyrenees links to the Job Network, which has 50 jobs.

This money could be better spent if the provincial Victoria web site actually did the work it was supposed to do and linked with the newspapers to get on board with the real jobs in country Victoria and try to entice people to go there to work.

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine) — I am very pleased to join the debate on the 2006–07 budget. The government has again shown its ongoing strong commitment to supporting and growing the whole of Victoria. It has shown its commitment to all Victorians and all Victorian families.

Over the last seven years we have seen substantial investment in Geelong and in the community of Bellarine. These investments are showing results, with an enormous decline in crime rates — around 27 per cent in the city of Greater Geelong and around 58 per cent in the borough of Queenscliffe. We have declining unemployment rates; we have improved prep to year 2 class sizes; in Bellarine alone there has been a reduction from almost 25 to 21.4 students in those years.

This budget makes further significant investments in the community of Bellarine. One that I was extremely pleased to see was our ongoing commitment to the Newcomb Secondary College. This year's budget commits \$5 million to stage 2, on top of the \$3.3 million committed in last year's budget. Newcomb Secondary College is a fantastic school in my local community.

This project will also deliver a new bus station which will bring the bus off the Bellarine Highway, which is a very busy highway, and onto the grounds of the college, keeping students, staff and the broader community safe. It does not just do that, it also delivers new science, arts and technology amenities, as well as new middle-school facilities. There will be new general science, physics and chemistry buildings, new arts, personal development and technology classrooms, and a new entry for the school. This is a major redevelopment that will transform this more than 40-year-old school.

This project has been overwhelmingly welcomed by the local school community, and I would like to quote the college principal, Toni Sharkey, who was reported in the yesterday's *Geelong Advertiser* as saying:

This is wonderful that the state government has made this commitment and acknowledged that Newcomb Secondary College and the whole community deserve state-of-the-art facilities.

As the local member I am thrilled with this commitment, having worked on this project since being elected, and it is great to see it come to fruition.

The budget also provides significant funding to support families to offset some of the costs involved for students commencing at primary and secondary schools. Members have heard a bit of criticism of this. I

am not quite sure what the Liberal Party policy is, but we know the policy of The Nationals is to abolish the \$300 payment. I am not sure what the opposition is going to do. This year in my community alone more than 1500 families will have a direct benefit from the \$150 half-payment and that figure will continue to increase. I think I heard someone call it a 'lolly'. I am not sure that the communities in my area would agree that it is a lolly. I think it will provide an opportunity to offset some of the burdens that families in my community face in purchasing uniforms and books. It is difficult for families out there and this a way for the government to contribute to those families and make life a little easier for them.

Also, as part of the government's \$240 million Arrive Alive safer roads strategy, I was really pleased to be able to announce \$420 000 to install traffic lights at the Portarlinton and Christies roads intersection in Leopold. This intersection has been a major safety concern for local residents and other people who travel along the very busy Portarlinton Road. Over the past five years there have been three serious casualties at that intersection. The area east of Christies Road has a growing community, so it was going to continue to be a major problem. I have been working closely with the local residents and only a few weeks ago I was pleased to be able to table in this house a petition with almost 700 signatures.

Mr Smith — Did you get what you wanted?

Ms NEVILLE — Yes, \$420 000 to install the traffic lights. I congratulate Debbie Endri and Amanda McKie, who organised the petition and have certainly welcomed the announcement. I quote from Debbie's comment as reported in the local media:

I'm ecstatic, we're over the moon. My older daughters have to cross the road to get to school and they say, 'We have to play chicken to cross the road' — it made me feel sick. Lisa Neville looked right into it for us and we're rapt with her.

Mr Smith — No relation?

Ms NEVILLE — No relation. It was great to have been able to achieve this great result, in partnership with that local community.

The budget makes even further investment in Bellarine. As part of the second instalment of *A Fairer Victoria*, the community of Whittington will have additional support, on top of community building projects that we have already put into that community. It will come out of the \$7.5 million community renewal program. Over the past 12 months or so I have been chairing a committee which has included the local community,

local community agencies, the schools and neighbourhood houses. We have been looking at ways that we can identify the key priorities and issues for that community. For probably 20 years that community has had no investment in it. The community renewal project is all about harnessing local energy. There is a lot of commitment of local residents to the community. They have come up with ideas, looking at job and learning opportunities and ensuring that we have the right facilities and activities to revive and really strengthen that local community. I will continue to work with all those communities.

One of the fantastic outcomes over the past 12 months has been that now for the first time we have key service agencies working in that community. We have Bethany Community Support, Glastonbury Child and Family Services and the City of Greater Geelong — the workers that the government has funded — who are working and delivering real benefits and real changes in terms of the activity, the park area and all that. The community is feeling extremely positive about the future.

I also need to mention the commitment to neighbourhood houses as part of A Fairer Victoria. As a former coordinator of a neighbourhood house, I am lucky to have four fantastic houses in my electorate: the Ocean Grove neighbourhood house, the Springdale neighbourhood house, the Bellarine Living and Learning Centre in Whittington, and the Queenscliff neighbourhood house. In the past, under the former government, those neighbourhood houses lost a number of hours. Those hours were reinstated by this government. With the additional funding the neighbourhood houses have an opportunity to increase those hours, and they have certainly welcomed that.

I am also pleased to see in this budget the money for the new \$3.6 million Country Fire Authority facility in Ocean Grove. Currently the CFA works out of what is a good building but it is very cramped and unable to cater for the volunteers and staff who will be based there as well as the equipment required to service that area.

This is in addition to, for example, the ambulance station that we announced last year, which is now currently operating out of a temporary building. We are about to start on the permanent building. It is also in addition to the Bellarine police station, which was never going to be built under the former government — in fact, no police services were to be provided. Because the members for Scoresby raised this earlier I have to reiterate not only that this government committed to keep the three other police stations open, which we have done, for 16 hours a day, but that we have put at

least an additional 16 staff in the Bellarine station, which has a 24-hour capacity. If you ring 000, you will get a local response from that station.

I must also mention the commitment of \$21.1 million for the Barwon Heads bridge. I would like to state very clearly for the house and for the community that this ensures that once the advisory committee process is completed and there is a determination about the best location or the best outcome — whether it is building a new bridge or fixing the current one — the money is there to enable us to start straightaway. It will not be dragged out until the next budget. That provides security for the community: it says that we are serious about implementing the outcome of this process.

I also want to mention the commitment that the government has made to Crown land caravan and camping parks. As the chair of the Crown land caravan park reference group, one of the clear messages I received as I travelled around the parks and from the surveys we did with communities was that people overwhelmingly love our caravan parks on Crown land. Some of the facilities — things like toilets — need a bit of an upgrade to provide greater accommodation opportunities at those parks. I am very pleased that the government has accepted the recommendations of the reference committee and established a caravan park improvement fund, and \$4.8 million has been made available for that. I have already received positive feedback from caravan parks across Victoria on that decision.

There is an extra commitment to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund of \$300 million. That is a fantastic fund, and it has done much already in my community. It will give us an additional ability to continue to upgrade the sorts of facilities that the community demands in regional areas. This builds on seven years of fantastic work in Bellarine. There is gas on the North Bellarine Peninsula, we have invested in schools and there has been enormous investment in Barwon Health. We have not just new infrastructure but new staff, new teachers, new police officers and new nurses. We have new tennis courts and neighbourhood house upgrades, and we have community facility upgrades — and that is just in Bellarine!

This is about investing in people, investing in families and investing in communities to ensure that they are sustainable and viable. I have seen the words 'big winners' used in relation to the budget. I can tell you that the Bellarine community is again a big winner in this budget, all of it based on a financially responsible model. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr COOPER (Mornington) — I am happy to make my contribution to the budget debate. I have been listening to a few of the speeches, and we are hearing a litany of praise of this budget from government members. While I have been in here we have heard the member for Bellarine and the member for South Barwon speak. I do not know why the member for South Barwon bothered to give a litany of praise of the budget, because he is not going to be here after the next election. I do not know about the member for Bellarine — it is probably unlikely — but certainly the member for South Barwon —

Ms Kosky interjected.

Mr COOPER — But I am retiring. He is going to be kicked out by the electors, Minister. They are going to dump him in no uncertain terms, and for very good reason. He has been a lazy and incompetent member, and he is up against a very good candidate who will show that to the electors of South Barwon. The member for South Barwon should have spent the last three years working for his electorate. That way he might have had a chance of survival, but now he has no chance.

While this budget has been praised in glowing terms by members on the government side, the reality is that this government has its eyes firmly fixed on November this year. Beyond that there is no genuine vision.

Interestingly enough, that was picked up by the *Age* today in its editorial. Whilst the editorial commented in great detail on this budget, it said that it would have been nice if there had been a bit of vision in the budget instead of it being a budget that concentrated purely and simply on the short-term objective of getting the Labor Party back into government at the coming state election. That is the disappointment about it. It is a budget of missed opportunity. Interestingly enough, the budgets of the previous two or three years have also been budgets of lost opportunity. Here is a budget that is presented to this house by a Treasurer who admitted, albeit reluctantly, that the Labor Party, when it came to government in late 1999, had inherited a very healthy economy. Of course it had. This government has ridden on the coattails of the very successful financial management of the Kennett government. What has it done since then? It has simply concentrated on short-term political objectives, and it has let down the people of this state.

We know from the budget papers — from the government's own publications — that the Bracks government intends to plunge Victoria into a \$7.1 billion debt by 2010. That is something we know. We know from the budget papers that the Bracks

government is taxing every Victorian a record \$2360 per year — every man, woman and child in this state is being belted by the Bracks government's taxation of \$2360 per year. We know that Victorians will be paying even more in land tax next year. We know that the budget's alleged land tax cuts are nothing more than smoke and mirrors. They are simply a con job, a confidence trick on the vast majority of those who are caught up in the Bracks government's land tax net.

Only property over the value of \$2.1 million will get a cut. That means a very tiny minority of the people who pay land tax will actually get a cut in land tax. The rest will pay more; they will make up for that cut. The government trumpets the great job it is doing in reducing land tax, but the reality is that it is smoke and mirrors. As has been described by other members on this side of the house, it is nothing more than a confidence trick.

We also know that the Bracks government is scrapping the \$3000 first home buyers bonus and refusing to reduce Victoria's stamp duties, which are the highest in Australia. Take the example of a \$350 000 house. Here in Victoria people who buy a house worth \$350 000, which these days would be regarded as a house in the median bracket, pay stamp duty of \$16 660. In Queensland, on a house of exactly the same value, the stamp duty imposed by the Beattie government is \$3250. In New South Wales, under the Iemma government and the Carr government before it, the stamp duty on a \$350 000 house is exactly \$0. That exposes a government that is greedy and has no feeling for people, particularly first home buyers.

We are in a situation where all the economic forecasts are saying that there is going to be a contraction in the residential construction market, which is going to be something that will impact on jobs and on the economy of this state. You would think that a government with vision, a government that looks beyond an election date in November of this year, would be planning for that. It would be looking to see what it could do to overcome that and ensure that the building industry, which is the industry that both directly and indirectly employs the most people in this state, and the government were protected from the downturn that is coming.

What does this government do? It says it will remove the \$3000 first home buyers grant. What a disgrace that is. It is an abandonment of a major industry. This is another very clear indication that this government does not plan too far ahead — it plans for the events of tomorrow and as far as it is concerned the future can look after itself. I am reminded of the days of the Cain and Kirner governments when they did that. They

looked at tomorrow, they did not look at the day after tomorrow. They looked at tomorrow and hoped that the day after tomorrow would look after itself. Let us take water policy as an example. The water policy of this government is to hope it rains — it does not have any genuine policies or vision in regard to water. This has been exposed in this house over and over again by people on this side who have tried to persuade and beg this government to do something about a decent water policy.

Getting back to the plight of this state, we have longer hospital waiting lists, a school maintenance backlog which is an absolute disgrace, and a public transport system which is in shambles. Look at the fast rail project which is just a horrible blunder, and a very expensive one, and all of the other debacles that are occurring. Money should be going into essential things like grade separation of rail crossings but there is no money available to do that because the money has been wasted on this disgraceful so-called fast rail project. It will not deliver meaningful benefits to this state but it will cost over \$1 billion by the time it is finished. In 1999 Labor promised the fast rail project would be done for \$80 million. It came into government a month or so after making that promise, and here we are six years down the track and it has spent \$800 million already and the meter is still running. What a disgrace that is.

In the 5 minutes left to me I want to concentrate on a couple of issues. One is a matter I have raised in this house on many occasions and that is funding for disability services. People with a disability in this state have been given a very tough ride indeed. A few years ago the state government produced a state disability plan. That state disability plan was heralded as a forward-looking document which would guide the state in the way it treated these people with a disability. However, the government failed to fund the plan. A few weeks ago we had a rewrite of the Disability Services Act. The question posed to the Minister for Community Services at that time was: are you going to fund this? It is all very well to have the words, to have the rhetoric but if you do not fund it, it will be meaningless.

I gave the example of Disability Opportunities Victoria, which was previously called Wongabeena. Its headquarters are in the electorate of Nepean but it draws its clientele from all over the Mornington Peninsula, including a large number from my electorate. It is really struggling. The parents are struggling now because they are being hit with increased transportation fees which absolutely eat away the disability allowance their sons and daughters get

from the commonwealth government. That money is being eaten away because the government has failed to provide funding which matches the increases caused by inflation. As a result we have had 72 per cent increases in transportation costs.

This is putting enormous additional strain on the families of people with disabilities whose sons and daughters attend Disability Opportunities Victoria. They are protesting about this and say that the government needs to match funding to its rhetoric. The government needs to put its money where its mouth is — and that is how the parents are putting it to me! They are not just saying it to me; they are saying this to the member for Nepean, and I am sure they are saying it to the members for Hastings, Bass and Frankston. But we do not hear anything from the members for Hastings or Frankston; it is left to the members for Nepean and Bass and me to stand up here to argue the case for these people.

Why is it that these people are being put to the sword by this government? The answer is that this government has made a political decision that their voices and their issues do not count and that when it comes to putting ballot papers into ballot boxes they will not be able to muster themselves into a viable political force to do damage to this government. That is how this government makes its decisions. The government's decisions are based on politics rather than on the issues themselves and on the best interests of minority groups, like people with disabilities.

It is exactly the same with kindergartens. There is a huge movement in this state, which seems to be ignored by this government, to move kindergartens from community services over to education, to follow what has happened in the rest of Australia. New South Wales is currently doing this, and for a very good reason. It is because kindergartens should be seen as part of the education system, not as glorified child-minding centres under the control of community services. But this government has just said point blank, 'No way! Kindergartens are going to stay under the control of community services'.

I argue that the government should at least give some sensible consideration to this issue and listen to the people who are putting an alternative view, but the government is not interested in even talking to them. Parents in my electorate have tried to get appointments with the Minister for Community Services so as to argue their case, but they are turned away because the minister is not interested in talking to them.

Finally I will mention the issue of channel dredging in Port Phillip Bay. I know the economic arguments for channel dredging, and I do not ignore them or say they do not have any validity. If channel dredging is to go ahead — and one would assume that it will go ahead; but we can only assume that because this government is trying to delay doing anything until after the next election — the government should not dump the spoil from the dredging back into Port Phillip Bay.

The government is going to create a dump at Mount Martha for a massive quantity of spoil, which will be circulated around the bay by the washing-machine action of the bay. That is a disgrace. It is an environmental disaster in the making, and the soil from the dredging should be taken out to Bass Strait and dumped there. These are the sorts of things a government with vision would do, but of course it is asking a lot of the Bracks government to have any vision, as the *Age* has said in its editorial today.

Mr LOCKWOOD (Bayswater) — I am very pleased to make a contribution on the Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill. It is a great budget for my electorate, despite what we have heard from the doom-and-gloom merchants in the Liberal Party and The Nationals, who are predicting disaster. They are simply jealous that they cannot be handing down such a budget.

This budget builds on the achievements of previous years and proves that Victoria is a great place to raise a family. My congratulations go to the government on what is a great budget, and the A Fairer Victoria package proves that we lend a hand to those who need it most.

There is great investment in the budget. In capital infrastructure, for example, it is \$4.9 million, as has been mentioned already. There is \$2.6 billion for transport, \$1.3 billion for health and \$448 million for schools. We have a strong and growing economy in the hands of a great Treasurer. Only Labor can manage the state's finances responsibly and at the same time deliver services to all Victorians, including and especially those most in need.

The Liberals and The Nationals make much of borrowing — in fact they get quite hysterical about it — but debt is not necessarily bad. This is good debt; it is debt that is an investment that will produce a return for the Victorian community far greater than the amount invested. The economy lives on debt. Without it we would all be living in bark huts; and if it is good for the private sector, it must be good for government as well. Why would it be anything other? It is not a debt for recurrent funding, as some members have suggested

it would lead to. That would be irresponsible, which it has been in the past. It is debt to build our future.

It is to invest in our children and our health. There is no better investment than in our children. Members of the Liberal Party want to live in the past, in the good old days. They want this government to blow the budget. They want us to borrow for recurrent spending because it is the only way they believe they can win office. But it is not going to happen.

There are a number of initiatives for my electorate, building on from last year when we got the Knox health facility which is currently under construction. We also got the SmartBus, and there is work on Stud Road for the SmartBus from Ringwood to Frankston. The Bayswater Secondary College development is under way right now. Those are great things from last year's budget. This year we will see an upgrade to the Country Fire Authority fire station. The volunteer men and women of the brigade are ably led by their captain, Craig Ferguson, and \$200 000 will help with the rebuild of the \$500 000 project. The volunteers do a great job in Bayswater as they always have. They follow a long tradition of volunteering in Bayswater.

The Ringwood transit city will get \$2.6 million. The member for Warrandyte was bagging Ringwood this morning and talking the place down, but the \$2.6 million is the next step towards the rebuilding of the railway station. Part of the funding — \$1.5 million — is for feasibility and design work for the station and bus interchange, and \$300 000 for a traffic and transport study. That is the next step. Once we have the design we can move on to the rebuilding of the station, which will be a full bus and train interchange with a commercial and retail development as part of it.

The improvements to the metropolitan tram fleet will have a benefit. The Knox transit link which links into Vermont South will be part of that improvement program. Of course through Bayswater and Ringwood we will get more late-night train services which will be a great improvement for the area. The SmartBus — the yellow orbital route — will go from Ringwood to Tullamarine, extending it from Dandenong to Ringwood and then on to Tullamarine. In other bus improvements there will be later hours and extended times for route 737, which goes from Monash University to Croydon. It is a key route that goes right through the outer east, linking Monash University, Glen Waverley, Knox City shopping centre, The Basin and Croydon. It is quite an important bus route and it is one of the things I have lobbied for over the years.

I have lobbied for improvements to public transport in the outer east. I have often said that buses in our area are afraid of the dark, do not go shopping on Saturday and do not go to church on Sunday. With these improvements they will now be able to do that, and along with routes 664 and 738 it will be a great boon for the area. Route 664 goes from Chirnside Park to Knox City, running through the suburb of Bayswater, which is very well used by the residents in that suburb. It provides a link between Knox City and the railway line. Route 738 which goes from Knox City to Mitcham gets its greatest use in peak hours as people avail themselves of the train service at Mitcham linked by the bus.

Mr Cooper interjected.

Mr LOCKWOOD — I love this! I sit up the back behind the Liberal Party, and they turn to face me and give me a great welcome. I really like it. They should sit back, relax and listen to it all.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kotsiras) — Order! The member for Mornington has had his go. The member for Bayswater to continue in silence.

Mr LOCKWOOD — Thank you, Acting Speaker; he is quite helpful.

Mr Smith interjected.

Mr LOCKWOOD — Believe it, because it is all documented in the budget papers you so ably threw in the bin. That was very theatrical —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Kotsiras) — Order! The member should address his comments through the Chair.

Mr LOCKWOOD — It was a very theatrical movement — right in the bin, good shot! — but I noticed that the member pulled them out again. He must really want to read them.

Mr Smith — I could not believe it the first time.

Mr LOCKWOOD — Are you sure you have actually read it all?

Of course there is great news for businesses in the area, and we have thousands of businesses in the area. WorkCover premium savings in the Knox local government area will be \$5.7 million with the 10 per cent cut to WorkCover premiums. In the Maroondah local government area it will be \$2.5 million. These are great savings for businesses in the electorate. It is 10 per cent,

year on year, for three years. These are great savings for business.

We are investing in people. We are investing in education and health. Combined with the land tax cuts and the payroll cuts we are creating a better environment for business in our state. It will keep our local economy strong. We are committed to keeping business costs down which drives investment and creates jobs, which is most important.

There are a huge number of people in my local area whose workplace is in the local area — they do not have far to go to work — and these are great things for the area.

The bonus for prep and year 7 students is a great thing. Parents face quite significant expenses associated with starting their children at those two levels of school — school hats, bags, uniforms, shirts, blazers, sporting equipment — and the bonus will be a great help to parents with kids starting out. I am sure they will love it, and I am sure they will make great use of it.

I have 22 schools in my electorate, at which 577 of the students are in prep. There are 96 students in the Catholic sector, 469 in the government sector, and 12 in the independent schools. In year 7 my electorate has 1180 students — 273 in the Catholic system, with Aquinas College; 850 in the government sector and 57 in the independent school. This bonus will be a great help for our schools.

There are a huge number of initiatives for education in the budget. All the things that the opposition claims are not in the budget are actually in it. In terms of capital, there is \$247 million for spending on schools; \$21 million on TAFEs, \$100 million anticipated from the Snowy Fund, \$48 million being spent on TAFE teaching equipment and \$32 million on technical education centres.

I think I mentioned the allocated \$10 million for the sustainability centre at the Wantirna campus of Swinburne University in the electorate of Scoresby. Of course the government does things for the whole of the state, not just for Labor electorates. The National Centre for Sustainability will be located there. It will be a sustainable building, and naturally it will complement the work being done there and assist with studies. It will be a great boost not only to TAFE but to the small and medium-sized enterprises that characterise the area. Particularly in the Bayswater electorate there are thousands of those type of businesses, which lead to huge industrial areas in Bayswater and Bayswater North.

In the budget this year an extra \$1.22 billion has been allocated for education and training, \$769 million for output initiatives and \$448 million for assets, as I mentioned earlier. In addition, there is \$348 million for things like building leadership, continuing VCAL, continuing schools for innovation and excellence, services for students with special needs, and \$50 million has been made available for school maintenance, which issue the opposition keeps bringing up. There is always money for school maintenance.

The member for Warrandyte is always mentioning trains to Ringwood. With the improvements to the signalling system, particularly through the city loop, we will have more and better services through to Ringwood because we rely on the throughput of the city loop for the trains out to Lilydale and Belgrave. If we cannot get them through the loop quickly, one after the other, we cannot have the extra services no matter how many rail lines we have out to Ringwood. We really need that signalling upgrade to ensure that we have the extra services.

The neighbourhood house funding will benefit my electorate. Orana, for example, is one of the neighbourhood houses in my electorate. These houses are receiving an extra \$27.8 million over four years to boost neighbourhood houses and increase the coordination rate by 25 per cent and \$38 per hour, and increase the number of hours as well. That amounts to a threefold increase for neighbourhood houses — from \$6.1 million in 1999 to \$18.08 million in 2006–07 in recurrent funding. They do a great job. There are a great bunch of volunteers down there, and Leanne Hermann is a wonderful coordinator at Orana.

We have had announcements of a \$33 million top-up to build on A Fairer Victoria; to fund new initiatives such as 37 new homes in VicUrban housing estates, 15 youth foundations across Victoria to give young people experience of financial management; and \$7.5 million over five years for new community renewal programs, which expands the success of neighbourhood renewal.

It is a great budget, despite the gloom and doom from the other side. All we hear from the other side are claims that the sky is falling in and complaints from the grumpy old men who sat together on the middle benches, where they were known as the Snowy Rangers, but who are now spread out on the opposition benches. On that note, I commend the bill to the house.

Sitting suspended 6.30 p.m. until 8.02 p.m.

Ms BUCHANAN (Hastings) — It gives me very great pleasure to stand in support of the Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill. It delivers what has to be one of the fairest, most balanced and most progressive budgets ever handed down in this house. I want to start off by complimenting the Treasurer and his competent team for an economically responsible budget. It reiterates this government's commitment to govern fairly and provide opportunities for all Victorians, whether they live in urban or interface areas or in regional and rural Victoria.

Most importantly, it is backed up by our fair and balanced policies and proven financial management track record, as is reflected by our AAA rating. It is a fantastic budget for Victorians. This state budget really delivers for Hastings residents. I would like to talk about how this will positively impact on many people across the Hastings electorate.

As an MP in an interface area, I am certainly aware of the pressures that are put on interface regions. I want to start firstly by talking about how businesses will benefit across the Hastings electorate. There are many small to medium businesses in the Hastings electorate. Many of them are home based, and many of them are family oriented. For those businesses within the Hastings electorate, of which there are many, that employ people outside the home, the cutting of the payroll tax from 5.25 per cent to 5.0 per cent will certainly have a great impact. It will mean a Victoria-wide saving of \$350 million. Providing a further \$167 million worth of land tax relief will benefit many of the businesses within the Hastings electorate. I know they will all be very happy with the news that the Treasurer advised them of yesterday.

Further reducing WorkCover premiums by 10 per cent this year is another major achievement, adding on to the 10 per cent reduction last year and the 10 per cent reduction the year before. This is how this Bracks Labor government is giving back to businesses across Victoria, and the businesses within the Hastings electorate will certainly benefit from these opportunities.

Leading on from that issue, it is also worth noting that the Hastings electorate has one of the highest percentages of builders and labourers — the people that keep our booming building trade alive — based within this region. It was with great pleasure that I read about the opportunities and the support that is to be given, from a skills perspective, to our apprentices through the \$500 trades bonus. This support builds on the fantastic skills statement we released earlier this year. It is unfortunate in one respect that it has taken a Victorian

government to recognise that we need to deal with our skills problems very quickly. It is a pity the federal government has not taken up that opportunity.

Education is one of the backbones of making sure that we are planting in our education system the seeds that will ensure the future prosperity of our communities. This government is committed to that, and I was very pleased and honoured that within the Hastings electorate Pearcedale Primary School, which is governed by a fantastic principal in Don Mackenzie, received funding to carry out further extensions. It recently received the stage 1 expansion. A great deaf population has deliberately moved into the Pearcedale area to take advantage of the tremendous facilities for the deaf at that school. When Don Mackenzie was contacted and advised that his school had been given a guernsey for an upgrade, he was ecstatic. He certainly was not backward in coming forward with praise for this government for recognising the needs of not only hearing students within the education system but also those with a disability whose opportunities for the future will be greatly enhanced by this extension.

Speaking of opportunities, one of the other fantastic initiatives announced in this budget from a community safety perspective was the \$2.5 million extension and redevelopment of the Hastings police station. This will be great news for Senior Sergeant Don Wilson, who has worked at the Hastings station for a very long time and who retires in about three weeks time. It further reiterates his commitment to the Hastings community. The local police will now be provided with modern facilities to reflect modern policing needs. Coupled with the fact that we have an all-time low crime rate, this investment will allow our police to make our community even safer.

Getting back to education, there are some other great initiatives there. One of the things that will certainly benefit the Hastings area is the \$300 School Start bonus. This year it will benefit some 805 prep students and some 706 year 7 students who in term 3 will receive the pro rata \$150 payment. That will certainly assist many people across the Hastings electorate to continue to keep their kids in school and keep them equipped and give them the best possible start at those very influential stages of prep and year 7.

Infrastructure has always been one of the most important things this government has invested in. As the data shows, we have trebled the amount of infrastructure investment in Victoria. The electorate of Hastings is certainly not excluded from that, and we have had the great announcement of \$36.8 million to start the duplication of the Western Port Highway, a

major strategic arterial road for both communities and businesses alike from Cranbourne-Frankston Road down to North Road. The duplication, incorporating a major roundabout at North Road, will certainly enhance travel times and the pedestrian and community safety along that line.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge many individuals who worked with me to achieve this fantastic outcome. I would like to start off by recognising the wonderful Ross Randall, a local police officer based at Frankston, along with Gary Emery, Michael Wearne and Trevor Teed, local police officers who really care about their community; Hank Metselaar, John McMillan and Mark Anderson from Cootes Transport; Bruce Hocking from Kleenheat; Don Fuller from Linfox; Kevin Wigg from Sempcom; Rod Thorneycroft from Patrick's; Rupert Hussey from Toll; and Tim Black and the great team at VicRoads, who all worked very collaboratively to get this fantastic outcome for the residents of the region. This road duplication will benefit not only the residents who live on the thoroughfare but also the many thousands of commuters who use that piece of road every day.

Housing support for Victorian families is another fantastic initiative in this budget. The \$75 million that has been allocated for this will build more homes across the state. The first new homes for families on low incomes will be ready to rent next year. This will be a fantastic opportunity. It contrasts quite starkly with the federal government's reluctance to care for people who need a roof over their heads. This is something it has backed away from, and coalition members should hang their heads in shame over it.

This is a socially progressive budget. Families will now get power bill savings and financial help. This is another great initiative to assist 1.2 million Victorian households and small businesses, which will receive savings on overdue electricity bills of between \$33 and \$57 in 2006–07. It is another classic example of how we are helping Victorian families and businesses get on with the job of progressing Victoria.

I am also proud to be part of a government that has allocated \$67.3 million for young and disabled people in nursing homes — another issue the federal government has ignored. We have not turned our backs on them, and the announcement of \$46.5 million over four years for extra disability services and individual support packages to help an extra 170 people with disabilities will, along with other fantastic initiatives, certainly benefit the community.

On a final note, mental health is an issue I am passionate about, and an extra \$170 million will go to mental health services. We are looking at enhanced postnatal depression services, great support for families where a parent has a mental illness, more support for the centre for women's mental health at the Royal Women's Hospital, \$12.7 million to establish early psychosis identification services for young people and conduct disorder programs for children, and the expansion of counselling services. This is all great news from a socially progressive and economically responsible government.

I could go on and talk about the fantastic opportunities we are creating for seniors and veterans, also backed by our sound planning for all the state, but I am afraid time is running away from me. I want to note one last thing, though: the member for Mornington claimed we lacked vision on water policy. I suggest he go back three or four weeks and look at the national water initiative. The federal government knocked back the Nepean sustainable water scheme because:

Project does not clearly produce significant national interest benefits ...

This flies in the face of what federal and state Liberal MPs have been saying — that they are the pioneers of water. Victoria is the pioneer in terms of water saving and issues like that.

Like everybody else on this side of the house, I am disappointed that the Leader of the Opposition has not taken the opportunity to tell us what his alternative financial policies are. I think Big Ted — he is probably now known as Rue Ted! — really had the opportunity today, as the new Leader of the Opposition, to talk about what his vision for the future is. On that point the contrast is like chalk and cheese. On that note, I commend this bill to the house. It is economically sound, it is socially progressive and it is what all Victorians know this state needs to grow and prosper.

Mr MERLINO (Monbulk) — I am very pleased to rise in support of the 2006–07 budget. This is a strong budget that delivers for Victorian families. It provides for continued economic growth — over 3 per cent in future years — a surplus of over \$317 million and the continuation of our strong AAA credit rating. In this economic environment, and through careful management, we are able to put record investment into the Victorian community — \$4.9 billion of capital infrastructure this year and \$12.6 billion over four years. This includes such icon projects as the \$847 million Royal Children's Hospital redevelopment.

On the issue of debt, which a number of opposition MPs have raised, I make the point that even after this record investment, debt as a percentage of gross state product (GSP) will be less in 2009–10 than when we came to power in 1999. I do not think anyone is falling for some of the simple lines the opposition has been trotting out today.

This budget contains a number of exciting initiatives. The \$10.5 billion transport and livability statement is reflected in this budget in the forward estimates. For those MPs who represent the outer east, that will mean significantly improved bus services. I look forward to working with the minister in coming months. It will mean a \$2.5 billion boost to health, which is among many initiatives within aged care and like portfolios and means an extra 37 000 patients will be treated in the coming year. In education and skills the government recognises the costs that families face, particularly families with children starting primary or secondary school. I am very pleased with the School Start bonus, and 1500 families in the Monbulk electorate will benefit from this initiative in the coming year.

In terms of apprenticeships and skills, the budget provides for a \$500 trade bonus to support apprentices in that very difficult first year when many apprentices drop out. Of course there is the \$818 million A Fairer Victoria Mark 2, which I will talk about later.

This unprecedented investment in our community is possible because this government is always focused on the economy, on continuing to grow the Victorian economy, on improving productivity and attracting investment. This economic discipline and support of business continues this year with land tax to decrease from 3.5 per cent to 3 per cent, payroll tax decreasing from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent over two years, and WorkCover premiums for the third year in a row seeing a 10 per cent reduction. Altogether there is a savings of \$1.4 billion over the next four years. This has rightly been welcomed by the business community. This government is as proudly pro-business as it is pro-family and pro-community.

The opposition does not understand how this government can successfully deliver on building and strengthening communities; on protecting and enhancing the environment; on investing at record levels in health, education and community safety; and at the same time have just as much focus and success in managing the economy. Victorians who work in our manufacturing, service or agricultural industries expect their government to support business, promote innovation and guide the Victorian economy wisely and prudently. They are the same Victorians who go home

at the end of the day to their families, and they rightly expect that that same government will put just as much effort into providing their families with first-class schools, modern local public hospitals and vibrant communities that provide opportunities in sport, recreation, the arts and lifelong education, and into having safe communities with local police stations and officers engaged in their communities.

Victorians do not want governments that say it is one or the other. That was the solution of the previous Liberal government. Based on the performance of the new opposition leader that continues to be what the Liberals offer the Victorian community.

I want to highlight three particular community building initiatives out of A Fairer Victoria Mark 2 that will be a great boost to the region I represent. These include a new performing arts centre in the Dandenongs, a \$27.8 million boost to neighbourhood houses and \$25 million for children's initiatives targeting families in interface council areas.

Last week was a fantastic event for the local community. The Premier visited the Dandenong Ranges and announced funding of \$3 million over the next two years towards the \$7.6 million performing arts facility. For the first time communities in the Dandenong Ranges will have a dedicated, purpose-built performing arts theatre. This is a great project that is desperately needed. For decades families had to travel off the mountain to facilities in Ringwood or Pakenham in order to attend any school musical or any local or touring performance events. Over many years the shire conducted a number of studies identifying this gap and pointed to Burrinja as the site for a new performing arts facility.

Burrinja itself has a terrific story. It was the former Shire of Sherbrooke offices that the local government commissioners tried to sell off, but the community rose up in protest, saved the building and turned it into a community cultural centre. Now it is going to have a 450-seat performing arts centre. When I was elected in 2002 I set myself the goal of putting this project back on the agenda. I established a working group with Burrinja, the Shire of Yarra Ranges, Dandenong Ranges Music Council and the four local secondary schools — Monbulk College, Mater Christi College, Upwey High School and St Joseph's College. The aim was to build momentum and get the support of both local and state governments for this project.

I take this opportunity to thank Ross Farnell and Louis Delacretaz from Burrinja, deputy mayor Noel Cliff, chief executive officer Rob Hauser, director Alison

Cran and manager Chris Dupe from the Yarra Ranges shire; Bev McAlister and Norma Durand from Dandenong Ranges Music Council; and principals Pam Glover, Mary Fitzgerald, Greg Holman and Vin Feeny who did an outstanding amount of work over the last couple of years to make this a reality.

This will have a huge impact on the communities in my electorate. Every school and every child will benefit from this project. The impact of the budget on the local community is shown under the leading headline on the front page of this week's *Ranges Trader Mail*. It reads 'Huge art boost' and includes comments from Cr Noel Cliff who said the performing arts centre would be the best thing that has ever happened in the region and would put an end to local schoolchildren having to travel all over the surrounding area for performances.

The Dandenong Ranges community music coordinator, Bev McAlister, said she had been lobbying for such a facility for decades and was delighted it was now on its way. She said:

We need it for the community to be an audience to world-class performances as well as to celebrate its own performances in a purpose-built venue.

It's particularly important for the children ...

Louis Delacretaz, who is president of the board of Burrinja, said he was elated that there would be a dedicated performing arts centre in the hills:

I knew that this was the one development that we needed.

The reaction in the community has been outstanding.

I would like to briefly mention a couple of other matters. The best examples of neighbourhood houses show that they are critical in building stronger communities. Their role is not only in adult education and childcare but also as community leaders. I am lucky enough to have five neighbourhood houses in my electorate — in Kallista, Olinda, Selby, The Basin and Coonara in Upper Ferntree Gully and, just outside the electorate, Japara in Montrose and Morrison House in Mount Evelyn. If you are a community that is lucky enough to have a neighbourhood house, you have a ready-made local champion to provide social, educational and community strengthening projects.

The announcement in the budget of the \$27.8 million for neighbourhood houses, which includes \$16.5 million for extra hours, over \$10 million to increase the neighbourhood house coordination hourly rate to \$38, just under \$1 million for the 16 neighbourhood house networks and just under \$90 000 for the peak body, reflects the support of this

government for neighbourhood houses as it has increased funding from \$6.1 million in 1999 to over \$18 million this financial year.

I would like to read a note I received from Jan Morrison, the chief executive officer of Morrison House, in relation to the announcement this week:

The sensational news of the \$27.8 million funding allocation for neighbourhood houses is a real affirmation of the community strengthening and development role undertaken by neighbourhood houses in their local communities. It demonstrates a government very much aware and in tune with what is happening on the ground and also shows a knowledge of the valuable resourcing and community infrastructure that neighbourhood houses can contribute.

It is a great first step towards the goal of \$84 million over five years, which is the ultimate target. A huge hurrah for the Bracks government and in particular the DVC and Minister Candy Broad and all those local members who have responded to the call to action.

That is a great vote of confidence in our support for neighbourhood houses. In winding up, I also highlight the \$25 million for children's initiatives in interface areas. Two-thirds of my electorate is in the Yarra Ranges, which is an interface council area, and the response from the council is absolute delight at this increase in funding. Congratulations to the Treasurer, the cabinet and the Premier on this terrific budget.

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — In rising to give my last response to an appropriation bill, I would just like to point out that Ringwood for the seventh year in a row — in fact my entire electorate, as usual — has been shunned by this government. We find that notwithstanding the attempt by the member for Bayswater to justify that Ringwood is in fact a transit city in practice rather than theory, we find the budget papers themselves prove otherwise.

Ever since this government was elected in 1999 we have had a big sign outside Ringwood railway station promising tens of millions of dollars to revamp that station. Seven years later, nothing has happened. Seven years later the buildings are falling apart; they are exactly the same as when this party came into government in 1999. Nothing has changed. The only thing that has changed is that we are on to our second or third working party now under the guise of the transit city working committee. The Maroondah City Council now very much regrets the fact that it agreed to join in with that working party because basically it has been conned. The mayor, a man who has been a great supporter of the Labor Party over many years, went on record only last week to say that basically this government has conned Ringwood when it comes to the transit city.

The member for Bayswater claimed that we were going to get funding in this budget as a transit city after seven years of waiting, but what do we find? We find that there is a \$2.4 million allocation in the coming budget for the transit city in Ringwood. That seems impressive enough, but if you look at the following year it goes down to \$300 000 and after that nothing for the following two years. Compare that to Dandenong which seems to be getting everything by way of public transport from this government. We find that the transit city of Dandenong is going to be getting \$600 000 in this budget, ramping up to \$12.8 million the following year, \$14.4 million the year after that and \$4.8 million the year after that. It is getting approximately 10 to 15 times more than Ringwood is going to get. What does Ringwood get for the largesse this government has designed to provide?

... at Ringwood, detailed design work to examine the feasibility of improvements to the station and the interchange, streetscape and public realm works, planning and partnership agreements to lock in private sector development ...

In other words, 'We are looking into it, don't you worry about that'. There is \$2.4 million for the design stage for looking into it. That is what has been going on in Ringwood for seven years — looking into things!

This is a transit city in theory only. As I mentioned in my 90-second statement this morning, my constituents in that part of my electorate have been doubly duped. In 1999, way before the transit city dream was foisted upon them — and that dream is never going to become a reality while this party is in power — they were promised a third railway line, which Dandenong is now going to get with some tens of millions of dollars in additional funding. We were going to get a third railway line with flyer trains that were going to fly from Ringwood at the junction of the Belgrave and Lilydale lines straight through to Box Hill and Mitcham and then into the city. It was going to cut down commuting time in my zone 3 public transport area.

Of course with every budget for seven years we have been waiting and have not received \$1 for the third railway line. It was a seven-year long dream which, just like the transit city, was a mirage. It was never meant to happen. It was just a deliberate attempt to fool the constituents of my electorate. They are lining up to punish this government. You only have to go to the shopping centres in Ringwood and Croydon to learn that they will never forget this Premier for having promised a freeway that is now a tollway. So be it the transit city mirage, the third railway line that is never going to happen, the freeway that is now a tollway, people in the outer east have had a gutful of this government promising but not delivering.

They know that this government does the talk, but will not deliver at the end of the day. When we look at overall spending on public transport in this budget, we see that a \$2.6 billion headline figure for transport-related infrastructure has been allocated. The budget documents say this is for public transport, but when you look at the detail you find there is very little going into genuine public transport. In fact there is only an estimated \$9 million for the third railway line I mentioned from Ringwood, and only 10 per cent of the total 2006–07 budget expenditure will be dedicated to transport and communications overall. Considering the abysmal state of transport in many areas of Victoria, this seems very low.

Of the \$2.6 billion for transport infrastructure, only \$16 million over four years and \$45 million of total estimated investment will be dedicated to improving existing rail services and planning for more rail services. However, almost \$1.3 billion is going to be spent on roads and freeways or tollways. The government is also allegedly putting hundreds more buses on the roads, which is incredibly irresponsible, when you think about it, from an environmental point of view. In other words, there is \$2.6 billion in this budget for transport, with virtually all of it going on roads and buses and very little on rail.

At the end of the day you can have your pointless congestion levies as much as you like in Melbourne's central business district, but all that is going to happen is that we will have increased emphasis on the use of vehicles and on buses on the roads and correspondingly significant increases in carbon pollution. Whilst the Minister for Environment, the Deputy Premier, can preach the gospel of climate change and the attempt to reduce our carbon usage, this budget is all about roads and buses. It is all about expanding the road network and forgetting about trams and trains. So much for the Bracks government's allegedly leading position in tackling global warming!

Whilst on the environmental theme I turn to the other side of my electorate of Warrandyte. We in Warrandyte–Park Orchards have been on the 20-year plan for septic tank replacement now for at least the 18 years that I have been the local MP. The Deputy Premier has just reannounced that we are going to be waiting for another 20 years, so the 20-year plan has actually become a 40-year plan. He thought he would make a good news announcement when he came out to Warrandyte. The only good news was that he launched a 10-foot speedboat with volunteers sitting in it, ready to go and do some river watching. That was the only bit of good news for my electorate.

He thought he could get away with saying, 'And guess what? In 20 years time we are going to give you sewerage'. As I said, the initial plan was put in place 20 years ago, and it is a 40-year plan now, not a 20-year one. No funds have been allocated for a sewerage connection program in municipalities such as Manningham, in which the townships of Park Orchards and Warrandyte remain unsewered. At least the Kennett government provided funding for sewerage for about a third to a half of the Warrandyte township, if not the rest of Warrandyte and all of Park Orchards.

Thus we have thousands upon thousands of septic-tank-dependent homes. In many cases home owners do not even know that they are on septic. They do not understand why the grass is higher in one part of their allotment than it is in others. This, of course, results in huge quantities of effluent running into our creeks and rivers. It is very hilly terrain, as anybody who has been to Warrandyte–Park Orchards would know, and after rain E. coli bacteria will be flushed into the creeks and into the Yarra River.

That is how we know that this government's record on Yarra River management has been absolutely dismal. No previous government in living history has had kayakers forced into hospital with leptospirosis. No previous government has had the incredible number of fish and eel kills as a result of its failure to manage this iconic resource for the people of Victoria. We will not even go near the Maribyrnong River because we know that is just a chemical effluent dump — and this government's own Environment Protection Authority has turned a blind eye to that, according to a recent front page of the *Age*. Human effluent continues to seep into the Yarra River from my electorate, notwithstanding 18 years of working to try and ensure that we reduce this problem.

I turn to basic services that people often take for granted. No specific funds have been allocated in this budget for the improvement of library services in my electorate. That is a big priority for the Liberal Party. When in government the Liberal Party devoted a considerable amount of money to improving our libraries and to ensuring that the state government was a genuine partner in library funding, rather than a partner that has walked away from the effort.

The eastern library network that is spread over three council municipalities in my area — including Maroondah in my electorate, Knox and Yarra Ranges which are adjacent to my electorate — is the largest library system in Victoria and serves a population of more than 380 000 people. State government funding for the libraries in this eastern library network has

steadily declined over the years and now under the Bracks government we have a meagre 21 per cent contribution from state government funding.

The Maroondah library branch has the worst ratio in Victoria. Again my electorate has been punished when it comes to the impoverished and their rights of access. The poor and the aged who love our libraries and who make great use of them are getting the lowest contribution of any municipality in Victoria from this government. There is no specific undertaking that there will be greater funding in the future from the other side of the house, whereas from the Liberal's side of the house we are committed to being a true partner in funding the library networks.

When it comes to penny pinching in my electorate, even in the area of maternal and child health funding the government cannot help itself. That funding from the Department of Human Services has been grossly inadequate and is not meeting the promised 50 per cent joint funding obligation. In real percentage terms DHS has only been funding 39 per cent in the 2005–06 period and there is no indication in this budget that Maroondah council will get its 50 per cent funding for this vital service in the near future. However, at least nine other municipalities were identified as beneficiaries in 2006–07 funding in the areas of early childhood services. For some reason, again this government punishes Maroondah — we miss out.

What is the message to be gained from that? The message is twofold. First of all, this government has already dumped its one-term local members in Maroondah — namely, the members for Bayswater and Kilsyth. The government has already totally ignored any chance of those two members retaining their seats at the forthcoming state election. If it were serious about looking after the members for Kilsyth and Bayswater, it would have put some real dollars for the area into this budget; but for seven years it has put nothing into that area.

As I said, the area has the lowest library ratio funding of any library network in the state, the lowest funding of maternal and child health care network in the state and the government has made an absolutely abysmal attempt to use the excuse of having more working parties so as to justify no funding in any meaningful way for the transit city, the third railway line or indeed the freeway that has become a tollway.

The people of the outer east are lining up to punish the Bracks government; they know this government does not mean what it says. The only other rationale is that the members for Bayswater and Kilsyth have done

absolutely nothing to lobby the government. Maybe that is why the people of Maroondah and Manningham have been ignored, because those two members have not even bothered to lobby the relevant ministers to try to get a fair deal for the constituents of their electorates which border my electorate.

Unfortunately in the last redivision of electoral boundaries Maroondah Hospital was taken out of my electorate. When I was the member for that district we were able to expand Maroondah Hospital to an enormous extent. What has this government done? Yet again, there is not \$1 for any major capital works at Maroondah Hospital in this budget. All the focus is on Box Hill, which is a long way from Croydon and Ringwood. Box Hill Hospital is going to be the focal point for an upgrade. Therefore, the only public hospital in the outer east has been totally ignored, and this government has totally ditched the commitment by the previous Liberal government to build a brand-new public hospital in Knox.

It has abolished the whole idea of a public hospital in Knox, it has given no additional funding for capital works at Maroondah Hospital and has said, 'Do not worry, you can all eat cake and go off to Box Hill, many miles away'. Since Maroondah Hospital has been put into the member for Kilsyth's electorate, what have we found? There are no improvements and no additional capital funding, particularly in this budget.

At the end of the day, compared to the hardworking candidates in Kilsyth and Bayswater — David Hodgett and Heidi Victoria respectively — we have got a situation where there is absolute lethargy in the outer east when it comes to any action plan by Labor. Therefore, these seats will be absolutely lost to this government, and deservedly so, because whether it be the skills work force, whether it be health services or whether it be the road networks in my electorate — and we had been promised major upgrades to the road network over the years but the freeway construction was always the excuse as to why no funding was forthcoming — those crucial service delivery areas have been ignored by this government. But they have been ignored at its peril. And that is the legacy of Labor — seven years of doing nothing in the outer east.

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Warrandyte and his learned contributions. I had the pleasure of listening to the tale of woe that he subjected us to in talking about the horrible things the Bracks government has allegedly done in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

It reminded me of many things, but one statistic which will not be found in the budget — and we wish the member for Warrandyte all the very best as he enters the next phase of his life — is that he entered this place in 1988 as I think the youngest Liberal member of the Legislative Assembly and he is leaving, 18 years later, still as the youngest Liberal member of the Legislative Assembly. In a sense it is a reminder of how far the Liberal Party has come, or perhaps how far it has not come, in the last 18 years. It is ageing along with the population, perhaps. We wish him all the best, and we note his contribution.

We also note that the seven years the Liberal Party spent in government in this state was a period of neglect and decline, because it was not able to chew gum and walk at the same time. It could do one thing, but it could not do anything else. So in its efforts to balance the budget it closed 350 state schools — —

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Mr HOLDING — It removed 9000 teachers from our schools — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Lindell) — Order! The house had the courtesy to listen to the member for Warrandyte without interruption, and I ask the member for Bulleen to afford the minister the same courtesy.

Mr HOLDING — It took 3500 nurses and 6500 support staff out of our hospitals, and closed six passenger rail services. Where was the member for Warrandyte? When did we hear his voice speaking up for the people of the outer east, or the people of other parts of Victoria for that matter, during the time opposition members were in government?

On the contrary, this budget gets the settings right. The government has the right balance, making sure the state has high-quality services, a high-quality education system, a high-quality hospital system and a law and order and community safety campaign that makes Victorians safer, at the same time making sure that the budget is managed responsibly, that we have a sustainable operating surplus going forward and that we are able to maintain the state's AAA credit rating. It reflects the fact that this government affords a high priority to providing high-quality services, focusing on doing so within the context of being fiscally responsible and creating an environment in which business will be attracted to investing in this state.

That is why we have again cut WorkCover premiums by an average of 10 per cent — the third reduction of such magnitude in the last three years. We have again reduced payroll tax. We came to office with a payroll

tax burden of 5.75 per cent. That will be cut, in the years going forward, to 5 per cent, making it one of the most competitive payroll tax regimes anywhere in Australia, which is something we are very pleased about.

This evening I would like to focus, firstly, on some of our efforts in the police and emergency services and community safety areas, and also to briefly comment on some of the initiatives in my electorate of Lyndhurst, in which the government has been making some significant investments.

To begin with, this budget includes significant investments to ensure that Victoria continues to be a safe state. It includes \$109 million to help protect Victorians against terrorism and organised crime, including \$15.4 million for forensic science equipment for Victoria Police. It includes investments in new police stations, including one at Yarra Junction, an upgrade to the police station at Hastings, new police residences in Boolarra, Branhholme and Smythesdale, and the purchase of land for a new police station and justice precinct in Swan Hill — and of course a very significant investment of \$13.9 million in the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne — —

Mr Honeywood — Where?

Mr HOLDING — It is for a new police station in Lilydale. I know that the member for Warrandyte will be very pleased to learn of the new Lilydale police station, because the shadow Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the member for Scoresby, was out there only a few weeks ago, on 12 May, promising that the Liberal Party too would build a new police station if it came to government. What was his commitment to funding a new investment in policing services in Lilydale? The opposition promised \$6 million. That was its estimate of what it would cost to construct a sustainable, 24-hour police station in Lilydale. We know it will not cost \$6 million. In fact if you spent \$6 million on a new, 24-hour police station at Lilydale, the only way you could do it would be to cut the staff at that station.

The difference between the opposition and the government in relation to community safety in the outer east is very clear: under Labor you get a \$13.9 million police station that will support the needs of that community for many years to come; under the opposition's policy you would get a \$6 million police station, which would mean that staff would have to be reduced. It is a very sad indictment of the Liberal Party, but that is what its policy would be.

We should not be surprised that the Liberal Party just cannot get it right in relation to community safety, because year after year it has bemoaned the fact that here was Labor, committed to 1400 additional police over our two terms in government — 800 in our first term and 600 in our second term. All the way through our first term, the opposition was saying, ‘You are not going to get there. You are not going to be able to deliver it’. The member for Mornington is on the record as saying, ‘You could not get 800 police recruited in one term because the police academy just could not take it’. What did the Auditor-General have to say in a report tabled this week?

Our report on this campaign found that this target was met by April 2002, 14 months ahead of schedule.

So Labor delivered its first 800 police ahead of schedule. What was the Auditor-General’s comment this week on our second commitment of 600?

At June 2005 there were 10 569 police and 197 recruits in training. According to its recruitment schedule, Victoria Police is on target to achieve the planned increase in sworn officers by August 2006.

Labor will deliver on its promises in community safety, whether it is the promise of a new police station in Lilydale or the promise of 800 police in our first term and 600 police in our second term, because we take making Victoria a safer place as being a very serious commitment. The opposition is instead only interested in rhetoric.

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Mr HOLDING — The member for Bulleen interjects that crime is up. What a learned man he is! Crime is down in Victoria. The crime rate has been down over the last five years by more than 20 per cent.

Mr Honeywood interjected.

Mr HOLDING — The member for Warrandyte interjects that it always has been. We have got the member for Bulleen saying crime is up and the member for Warrandyte saying crime has always been down. It is true: the Liberal Party will say anything! Compared with other states, the Victorian crime rate is 16 per cent below the national average. That is the truth about Victoria’s crime rate: it is down on what it was in the 1990s and down compared with the average for other states. Property crime is down and classes of violent crime are down.

The member for Scoresby was in the chamber today trying to say that violent crime has increased dramatically. The budget papers make it clear that

across different categories of violent crime the rate is actually decreasing — for example, in robbery. In one significant area there has been an increase in violent crime — that is, in the area of assaults. This is because of the family violence code of practice which we are very pleased Victoria Police is rolling out. We predicted for some time that there would be an increase in the assault rate as a consequence of that. In fact the increase in the assault rate is a symbol of the fact that this policy is working. We would have expected it to.

Mr Kotsiras — Assault is good, is it?

Mr HOLDING — The member for Bulleen interjects that assault is good.

Mr Kotsiras — Reporting! Reporting it is good.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Lindell) — Order! The member for Bulleen!

Mr HOLDING — Reporting an increase in assaults is a good thing if it means that Victoria Police is taking seriously the threat of domestic and family violence.

There are of course many other initiatives in the budget which reflect very well on the priorities the government has set. In my electorate of Lyndhurst we have again this year made an investment for stage 2 of the capital works program at River Gum Primary School.

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Mr HOLDING — The member for Bulleen interjected by asking do I go there.

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Mr HOLDING — Yes, I was at River Gum Primary School only a couple of weeks ago. With members of the school, I celebrated the work that has been achieved in relation to the stage 1 development. We are now pleased to see in this budget a financial commitment to stage 2. We were also pleased to see in the transport and livability statement a commitment by the government to the construction of a new railway station at Lynbrook. This will serve that community and help that growing suburb.

I will also have the pleasure of opening a new police station in Springvale, which is a significant new investment. I will also have the pleasure —

Mr Honeywood — What about East Melbourne? East Melbourne does not have a police station.

Mr HOLDING — No, East Melbourne does not have a police station because it was closed by the

former government. We are constantly reminded of the closures of police stations by the former government. It closed police stations in Doveton, Noble Park and Port Melbourne. It closed police stations and we open police stations.

We have a program for 136 new police stations that have either been completed or are currently being constructed or significantly refurbished across Victoria. We are pleased about what we have achieved through supporting Victoria Police. We are pleased about what we have achieved in the electorate of Lyndhurst. We are pleased that we are opening new police stations in Springvale and Cranbourne and providing upgrades to the River Gum Primary School, and we are pleased that we provided a new primary school in Lynbrook, which was opened in 2005.

These are fantastic new initiatives which are growing this state and providing great opportunities for Victorian families regardless of where they live. We are very pleased about this budget. I am pleased to offer my support to it. We know it will support families and will make sure that Victoria continues to be a vibrant place to invest and do business. It will make sure that Victoria continues to be a safe place to live, with a low crime rate and a well-resourced police force.

Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) — This is a fantastic budget which is fiscally responsible and delivers for all Victorians. At the outset I would like to congratulate the Treasurer and his staff. I would particularly like to thank the Treasurer for his steadfast determination to make Victoria the best place to live, work and do business.

The 2006–07 budget delivers on the Bracks government's commitment to meeting the state's challenges and investing in Victorian families. No matter where they live, Victorians will have access to the highest quality services. The Bracks government has taken the benefits of a strong economy and is making sure that families right across the state, particularly in Melbourne's growing outer suburbs, share in that prosperity.

The budget contains the biggest infrastructure program ever undertaken by a state government in Victoria. I know many members in this place will agree that this will make a real difference to people's lives. With a record \$4.9 billion investment in infrastructure, this budget is certainly going to meet the challenges facing Victoria. Education, the top priority of this government, will receive a massive boost to both schools and skills.

The Bracks government continues to invest in services which will make a difference to the lives of many families. It invests in those services which are most needed and most used by families, especially services for children. Relief to families is going to take effect immediately by way of a package of particular initiatives for families experiencing financial hardship. The package will offer major new practical assistance to ease the pressure on families by helping them with education, transport and energy expenses.

The centrepiece of the Bracks government's family package is a \$300 School Start bonus for the parents of every Victorian child starting prep or year 7 to help meet the costs of starting school. In Frankston the parents of an estimated 557 children starting at local primary schools and 913 children starting at local secondary schools are set to benefit from this terrific initiative which will help with school start-up costs.

The most impressive announcement from the budget with respect to Frankston is the \$11.631 million which will bring new life to Frankston. Frankston will be rejuvenated by this huge investment — a huge budget boost — which is a part of the transit cities project. As part of the Melbourne 2030 transit cities strategy, Frankston will receive a makeover which is going to liven up the central activities area. This funding will certainly spark new life into Frankston, will help to kick along the local economy and will also improve the quality of life for families in Frankston. This investment over four years will transform Frankston and turn the city centre around to face its greatest asset — Port Phillip Bay. The Kananook Creek area will be redeveloped — there will be new cafes, recreation, housing and business developments, and a new boardwalk to link homes to the foreshore.

A study will also be undertaken to look at unlocking all the land around the railway station for potential development. This investment will lift the quality of our transport centre in Frankston and is a further demonstration that the Bracks government is committed to keeping local economies strong and to making Frankston a great place to raise a family.

Another initiative in the budget that I would like to highlight is the funding that will be provided to accelerate the development of the metropolitan bicycle trail network. In conjunction with the Frankston council, new shared-used paths will be constructed and significant capital investment will be made to deliver the Frankston bay trail. Frankston will receive an allocation from an \$8 million spend across Melbourne, linking Frankston with Port Melbourne.

Another key announcement in Tuesday's budget was the support for victims of sexual assault and for child witnesses. The Bracks government will be investing to improve the operation of the justice system with a \$34.2 million package to support victims of sexual assault. It will also establish a child witness program to assist the up to 500 children who give evidence in courts each year.

It goes almost without saying that the safety of all Victorians is a major priority. We know that many victims do not report sexual assault for fear of being treated poorly by the legal system, and the best way of improving reporting rates and the way the system responds to the needs of victims is to make a significant investment in it, so a new sexual assault centre will be established in Frankston; in fact, two such centres — in Frankston and Mildura — will cost \$6 million. These centres will provide victims with help from police, counsellors and forensic experts under the one roof.

Finally I want to briefly mention the government's fantastic A Fairer Victoria package. Last year many Victorians were very pleasantly surprised at and have already benefited from the huge \$788 million investment in A Fairer Victoria. In Frankston \$1 million was allocated to the Brotherhood of St Laurence High Street project, which is well under way at the moment. Victorians will be even more pleasantly surprised and very impressed that a further \$818 million will go into another 82 separate and important new initiatives.

This is certainly a government that cares about all Victorians and about making Victoria more livable — it is certainly doing many things in Frankston and in the outer suburbs to improve the lot of working families — and it is a budget that is all about meeting the challenges in Victoria. This budget is paying dividends right across the state, building on and complementing the hard work already undertaken and the positive things which have already been achieved. These are such things as the additional 6200 nurses in our hospital system, the additional 6000 teachers and support staff in our education system, which now has record high retention rates and low primary school class sizes, the additional 1400 police in our police force and the massive capital works programs, which have already been completed.

This is without a doubt a very fine budget. It delivers for the whole state and ensures that Victoria remains the best place to live and raise a family. Congratulations once again to the Treasurer. I heartily support this budget.

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I am delighted to have the opportunity of speaking on the appropriation bill this year because the Bracks government's seventh budget is a terrific budget and testimony to the investment in services and infrastructure that really do matter in Victoria in 2006.

I refer particularly to the government's outstanding investments in education, in health and in capital works that are greatly improving the livability of the suburbs, especially the middle suburbs that I have the privilege of representing. The government's commitments in these areas are being delivered while being able to reduce taxes in a way that enhances Victoria's standing and encourages continued high levels of business investment.

I am disappointed when I listen to the contributions on the budget by members of the Liberal Party, which started this morning with the Leader of the Opposition. To the newer members in this house I ought to say, 'Do not worry too much about what you hear. I have been hearing the same speeches from opposition members for six and a half years'. To listen to them recount in intricate detail the history of this state going back 10 or 20 years makes me think they are seriously in danger of suffering a repetitive strain injury. It says a lot about them that after six and a half years in opposition they have not come up with anything new other than a rehashing of history.

For the Mitcham electorate this is, as I said, a sensational budget, and it delivers unprecedented capital commitments to that electorate. Let us start with education, one of the government's highest priorities. I am delighted that this budget delivers to Antonio Park Primary School in Mitcham, which the Premier has visited twice in recent years, \$2.63 million for a stage 2 building program. It is a program that will deliver to the school a new library, new classrooms and a new canteen.

That of course follows the very successful stage 1 redevelopment that was opened last year by the Minister for Education and Training. It is a great school. I congratulate the principal, Hans Kueffer, and the members of his school council who have done an extraordinary job in recent years in lobbying for these necessary improvements, and I have been very pleased to support them in that effort. The record will show that it was a school earmarked for closure in the early 1990s by the former Kennett government. Had the members of that government had their way, the school grounds would now have houses on them. It is a great credit to all the people involved that they resisted that proposal. Now they have some sparkling new facilities, with a

growing enrolment. It is a great advertisement for state education in Victoria today, and it is going to get better.

The School Start bonus is a tremendous initiative that hundreds of families in my electorate will benefit from. The importance of being able to afford things like uniforms cannot be underestimated. Given that those on the other side have derided this and tried to play it down, I encourage them to perhaps do a little bit of work and talk to people like Terry Green, who does an outstanding job in managing the State Schools Relief Committee in Burwood. They should ask people like Terry Green what is the importance of being able to afford school uniforms. He can tell some very poignant stories about the dignity associated with being able to send your children along in the proper outfits, something that I think opposition members fail to understand. The \$300 will go a long way to improving the dignity of our poorest families. That is a great initiative. Time will tell how well it is received but I have no doubt that it will be received very well indeed.

The Mitcham electorate has already seen a rebuilding of schools — the Blackburn Lake Primary School, the Laburnum Primary School and the Mitcham Primary School. In recent years we have also seen very substantial allocations for toilet block refurbishments at some four schools as well as global budget and other improvements. The minister has announced the government's decision to provide a funding allocation for maintenance. That is just another demonstration of the government's commitment to ensuring that our schools are not left wanting in providing education.

Health is another strong focus of the government. This budget again demonstrates the commitment of the government in that area. In the Mitcham area, we are already seeing the results of the government's investment in previous budgets — in 10 new dental chairs at the Whitehorse Community Health Service. Again, as much as those on the other side want to deride our achievements in office, those dental chairs have had a huge impact on reducing waiting times for dental treatment. In fact in the past two years the general waiting list has been slashed from more than 5000 to about 1500 now. That is an outstanding achievement.

On top of that, now the government has, of course, committed to a rebuilding of the Box Hill Hospital. This is sensational news. In this 2006–07 budget some \$38 million has been allocated for the first phase of what will be a \$650 million rebuild. The Box Hill Hospital has a tremendous reputation. It has served the community well for many years, and this funding is going to ensure that it does so for generations to come.

I particularly welcome the proposal to establish, as part of the rebuilding, a state-of-the-art dialysis treatment centre because, as all members will know, the incidence of renal disease is increasing. It is one of the scourges of modern life and is being detected in Victorians at a much younger age. We are going to be in need of such facilities, which are strategically located and in years to come will need to be even more strategically located. The government's decision to make that a feature of the Box Hill Hospital rebuild is outstanding, and it shows in very large measure the government's vision on how health care will be provided for Victorians in years to come.

The Royal Children's Hospital rebuild will also be most welcome. Like a lot of other parents in the Mitcham electorate, I have had the experience of having to take a child to that hospital and have received excellent care. The hospital has a well-deserved, fantastic reputation. I know that all residents of the Mitcham electorate and all Victorians will welcome the government's commitment to pumping some very serious money into rebuilding that hospital to maintain its standing. It is an excellent decision.

In this budget the government has also committed very heavily to maintaining and improving the livability of middle suburban electorates like Mitcham, where workers and their families are heavily reliant upon train services and road infrastructure.

The budget delivers very substantial investment in this area, the feature of which is the \$54 million provided for the elimination of the Middleborough Road level crossing — a bane of motorists for many years. Anyone who has been out there knows that it is situated on top of a very steep hill, and the traffic banks back for a long way. It has appalling lines of sight for traffic and has been the site of some fatal collisions over the years. The project will deliver a lowering of the rail line, will raise the road about 2 metres and will provide a new Laburnum railway station, a pedestrian underpass to service Box Hill High School and a realignment of nearby Laburnum Street, which has a very dangerous kink in it underneath the station. Of course it will deliver a marked reduction in traffic congestion along the second busiest corridor in the city of Whitehorse.

This is a tremendous initiative. I am only disappointed that the Liberal Party, firstly, has not had the foresight to come out and congratulate the government and support the project. It seems incredible that it has not. Secondly, the Liberal Party has not even worked out what its position is. I think the member for Box Hill very much supports the project but finds it difficult to say so publicly. To some extent you can understand

that. But his colleague in the upper house, Mr Atkinson, a member for Koonung Province, does not want the project at all. He is actually on the record as saying it should be abandoned. As for the shadow minister, the member for Polwarth, I am not sure anyone understands his position. He has had a look of consternation on his face in the last week since he has been joined on the front bench by the member for Bass. He does not understand what he has done wrong to have the member for Bass sit next to him. He is horribly confused. We have some sympathy for him in that regard, although I note that the member for Murray Valley is delighted that the member for Bass has been moved to his new position.

I suspect Liberal Party members will come out and say they will commit to eliminating the nearby Springvale Road level crossing. Let me just say that they have some form on this. At the last election the former leader trotted out there during the campaign and said, 'Yes, we've got a great plan. We are going to eliminate this. We are going to lower the line at what is a very difficult intersection. It will only cost \$55 million'. Lo and behold, two years later the City of Whitehorse had a consultant go out and look at the options for the area. The consultant had a look at the Liberal Party plan and said that it would not cost \$55 million, it would cost \$240 million. So in the space of two years, without lifting a finger, the Liberals managed to get an eightfold increase in their estimates. I think that is pretty good going. I look forward to their coming out with another blank-cheque proposal at the forthcoming election. If they think the federal government has any interest in supporting them, they should think again. We have a few surprises for them on that front.

The residents of the Mitcham electorate who use public transport will be gratified to understand that, as part of the budget, Nunawading railway station is going to be upgraded to premium status. This is something I have lobbied the minister for on a number of occasions. I am delighted to see that this busy station, which has quite a few bus interchanges, is going to get that recognition. In addition the station two stops up the line, Heatherdale, is going to be rebuilt as part of the EastLink project. The EastLink project recently floated some concept drawings of what that station is going to look like, and people in that area are very excited about it. In addition residents in the electorate will be serviced by some improvements to bus services, which is fantastic.

We have not forgotten about motorists either. As well as eliminating the Middleborough Road level crossing, the Canterbury and Middleborough road intersection is getting an upgrade by putting in controlled signals — that is worth \$56 000. Springvale Road and Silver

Grove in Nunawading are getting upgrades worth \$43 000. Motorists will have a number of reasons to be very satisfied with this budget.

I want to talk about a couple of other things, including the neighbourhood houses. Mitcham's three neighbourhood houses will welcome their new expanded funding. I want to congratulate Colleen Saunderson from the Avenue neighbourhood house in Blackburn, Sue Curlin, who is the coordinator at Mitcham, and Mary Roberts from Koonung cottage in Blackburn North for their outstanding work over many years and their consistent lobbying on behalf of the very many users of the houses to get a better funding deal. We are very pleased to support that.

Pedestrian safety will be improved in the electorate. Pedestrian lights will be installed on Mitcham Road near Mitcham station at a cost of \$330 000. This is a very necessary investment given the number of commuters who cross in an unprotected way and the fact that Vision Australia recently located its headquarters there and a lot of volunteers are using the facility and need a protected crossing. That is fantastic news. I want to congratulate Philomena Italiano, one of the local residents who has been instrumental in pushing for that.

Similarly, through the Minister for Sport and Recreation in another place the government has committed to floodlighting the Heatherdale bowls and recreation reserve just down the road at a cost of \$30 000. That will be of outstanding benefit to the bowls club, in particular Joan Coghlan, its long-serving and hardworking secretary. I know the club is looking forward to those floodlights and the way they will encourage more people to use the facility.

The tax reform in the budget is greatly welcome, particularly the changes to WorkCover. It is now fully funded — it achieved that status last year — and it is now being extremely well managed. That has allowed businesses to be offered a third 10 per cent premium reduction. However, that will not stop the federal government. It continues to undermine the viability of the Victorian scheme. It just hates good news, and its efforts to expand the commonwealth scheme and attract the bigger customers into that scheme, which would be to the detriment of all we have achieved in Victoria, is well understood. Of course nothing surprises us about the federal government and its tactics.

The payroll tax and land tax reforms are welcome. I appreciate the Treasurer's efforts to ensure that an enhanced valuation objection right was created for land tax assessments. That is something I, along with local

businesses, have been pursuing for a while. That is very welcome. Then of course we have the stamp duty relief for pensioners. All day today members of the opposition have been on about no stamp duty relief. They fail to understand what has been done with the stamp duty threshold exemption for pensioners and that it has been significantly extended. Again, that is something I have been very keen on; I wrote to the Treasurer about it some time ago. It will be of great value to many older people in the Mitcham electorate in years to come.

This is a terrific budget. I have not covered all that it delivers to the Mitcham electorate — it is such a bonanza of a budget that I would need about half an hour to get through it. It is a tremendous budget. In the city of Whitehorse we are calling it the \$100 million bonanza budget because it will deliver at least that much in improved investment in services. It is a terrific budget — I think it is the best budget this government has delivered — and I will wholeheartedly support it.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — It gives me great pleasure to join the debate on the Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill. Nothing would sum this budget up better than saying that education is the Bracks government's no. 1 priority. I am really pleased to say that local schools will be improved and new local schools will be built in my electorate at a cost of \$27.26 million.

I was very pleased to visit Yarrambat Primary School with the Minister for Education and Training yesterday. The 500 students at that beautiful school where the city meets the country were absolutely ecstatic to hear that their school will get some new general-purpose classrooms, an art and craft room, music facilities, a new library, staff administration facilities, a canteen, a first-aid room, new toilets and a physical education facility. The school has had a 25 per cent increase in enrolment from the growth corridor over the past three years and now has 500 students. It was fantastic to be there with the education minister. The principal, Lorraine Shannon, was delighted to hear the news first hand. At a special assembly the 500 students showed us what they had done. On Monday morning the principal asked them all to cross their fingers to help get this money in the budget. I would like to thank those 500 students for crossing their fingers because it has all worked out really well.

I would also like to make special mention of Andrew Hoogenraad, a local resident on the Laurimar estate in Doreen and a fellow Country Fire Authority volunteer, being the first lieutenant of the Doreen brigade. I would like to send Andrew a cheerio because he was

convinced that if I were successful in getting funding for the Yarrambat Primary School upgrade, I would not get the new school at Laurimar funded as well. I am glad to say Andrew has been proven wrong, and I will take the money for the bet from him later!

Laurimar primary school will be built at a cost of \$3 million, which delivers on an election commitment. The new community of Laurimar deserves all the services it can get, and I will be pleased to take part in the planning for that school and work with the local community to make it a wonderful school of the future.

I would like to thank the Minister for Children for her work and the package that has been announced as part of the budget for Growing Communities Thriving Children's Package. A new children's centre will be funded in the city of Whittlesea, and I am hopeful that that will be funded and operational in the area of Doreen and maybe co-located with the new Laurimar primary school. I think that would work well and be good for parents.

But the good news does not stop there. Students with disabilities and their families have also been well taken care of. I was pleased to let the principal of Merriang Special Development School know of some new funding, because she has been a real lobbyist not just for her own school community but also for families of students with disabilities in the growth corridor. Merriang Special Development School is a special development school with a dual campus. One is co-located with a primary school at Thomastown, and the secondary component is at Peter Lalor Secondary College in Lalor. Ann Georgis, the principal, wanted to see that model operate in the growth corridor, and I am pleased to say that the Mill Park Lakes school — the P-9 school, for which funding of \$1.2 million was announced in last year's budget — will also have a special development component to it at a cost of \$5 million.

While we are still on the Mill Park Lakes school, the second stage of that school — as I said the P-7 component stage will open next year — will receive an additional \$9 million for 2008, so the years 8 and 9 campus will be able to open the following year. It is fantastic, because the suburb of Mill Park Lakes has only been in existence for about five years, and to have a fantastic school facility with specialist facilities is a wonderful thing. We also have a children's centre, and I am grateful to the Minister for Children for that. She opened the centre in December last year, and that is also co-located with the school which will open next year.

Another school will be built in the other part of the growth corridor in my electorate — Epping North East primary school, at a cost of \$6.8 million. I am pleased to say that I will be on the planning committee with the local community for that school. That is good, because it will service the estates of Hayston Valley and Lyndarum. Most of the families have only been there a year. Six months ago they got their first bus service, so anyone who says that the government is not delivering infrastructure and services to new communities is categorically wrong.

The government is also looking after the environment and the outdoor and recreational needs of those new communities. I am pleased to see that \$2.8 million has been allocated for the creation of an 800-hectare park along Merri Creek, which forms the western boundary of my electorate. This will ensure the conservation of environmentally significant grasslands and have visitor facilities and a trail in an area which has previously not had public access.

There will also be a 16-kilometre continuous walking and cycling track along the Merri Creek between Craigieburn and the Northern Ring Road. This is in addition to the money that was funded last year — that is, \$250 000 for the Quarry Hills regional park. Not only are we looking after educational needs, there are recreational needs as well. This budget has been great for families in the growth corridor who often struggle with mortgages and other challenges to their budgets. They will welcome the \$300 School Start bonus for families of prep and year 7 students. Having had two children go through primary and secondary school, I know that year 7 in particular can be a real challenge in getting together the money for uniforms, books and facilities so that children can take that extra step in education.

In an area like mine, with the massive housing development that is occurring, we really need a skilled work force into the future, so I know the apprenticeship bonus of \$500 will be welcomed. My electorate has one of the highest number of tradespeople of any electorate in the state. Many of them want to train new apprentices, and many of their sons and daughters also want to go into the trades, and I think that is a really good thing. The land tax changes will benefit my electorate, because they will help housing affordability. There is a 30-year supply of land in the growth corridors, and developers are waiting to develop that land. They will now pay a much lower level of land tax, which will assist with housing affordability.

The most mind-blowing part of this budget is its capital spending. It is interesting for the community to look at

the Bracks government's record of spending on capital works and infrastructure. In the government's first six years of office there was a \$2.1 billion spend on capital. The previous government made a big deal about saying it was building lots of things, but let us look at the facts. It spent about \$1 billion, or only half that amount. We know it closed schools and hospitals and sacked teachers and nurses. It was not about building facilities for the community and growing the whole state. In the four years of the budget outlook period we are looking at a capital spend of \$3.2 billion. I referred to schools earlier, and \$1.2 billion will be spent on schools and \$4.9 billion on infrastructure overall.

I also mentioned the business environment. The WorkCover system has been functioning well and is very profitable. We are going to return some of the benefits of that to the business community, so WorkCover premiums will be reduced by \$170 million per annum.

As the member for Mitcham said, in the time allowed it is hard to go through all the benefits to the community in this budget. In the transport area a number of my local bus services will have increased hours. I look forward to the SmartBus yellow orbital bus route, which will ensure that in a few years time members of my community will be able to catch a bus to the airport. Capacity issues are being dealt with, and \$4 million has been set aside to do the necessary planning works to deal with the logjam at Clifton Hill. That will mean we will be able to get more train services into the city, particularly at peak times, which is very important in keeping our community moving. I also welcome the establishment of a new Best Start program for the shire of Nillumbik. We have seen that program operate very successfully in the city of Whittlesea.

It is important to reflect not only the good news in this year's budget, because many things are coming through from last year as well, including projects that are almost finished. One that has been finished involved the construction of eight new classrooms at Apollo Parkways Primary School in Greensborough, which was funded in last year's budget. The construction has been completed, and the students are happily working in them. New classrooms are almost complete at Morang South Primary School and Meadow Glen Primary School. The building of police stations is under way in Hurstbridge and Warrandyte. I was pleased to have the Minister for Police and Emergency Services visit a fortnight ago to turn the first sod for a new fire station at Arthurs Creek.

The gas roll-out to Hurstbridge is proceeding well, and the community very much welcomes that. The first

households along the main will be connected by the end of the year. In health it is great to see that the Royal Children's Hospital redevelopment has been funded in this budget. The northern area has done extremely well in previous budgets, and we are seeing the benefit of that with 64 new beds at the Northern Hospital opening early next year. Of course the Austin and Mercy hospitals are part of the largest ever redevelopment project and are serving the eastern side of my electorate well.

I am also pleased to say that the Greensborough bypass bridge over the Plenty River, for which \$17.2 million was allocated a couple of years ago, is almost completed. Not only will it have two lanes of traffic in each direction and replace the dangerous overhead signals, but for the first time there will also be pedestrian access and provision for bicycle usage.

It has been interesting to hear the pretty pathetic contributions from the opposition today. It really shows that the new opposition leader and his team do not understand the challenges that working families face every day. As their responses today show, the new opposition leader and the Liberals have no commitment to health, education or community safety. Certainly in the northern suburbs there is no mark of what occurred during the seven years of the Kennett government except what was actually destroyed through the closure of schools and the poor legacy of infrastructure decay. The Liberals have really shown again that they do not stand for anything and are not fit to govern in this state.

I am proud to be a member of the Bracks government. This is a fantastic budget. As other speakers have said, it is the best budget the government has delivered. I look forward to going out and talking to members of my community about the benefits of this budget and working with the community on all the worthwhile projects that have been funded in it. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave) — I am delighted to speak in support of this year's budget. It is a great budget for my local community of Mulgrave and for families right across Victoria. The Treasurer noted in his budget speech that governments in Victoria are defined by the choices they make. That is very true. In this budget the government has chosen to substantially reinvest the proceeds of its seven years of sound financial and economic management — its stewardship — in jobs and skills, in business tax reform and, most importantly, in the basic services upon which we all rely.

I want to talk about some initiatives that directly benefit my local community and then detail some of the important expenditure and effort we are investing in our first-class public hospital system. As I said at the outset, this is a great budget for Mulgrave families — for example, it will deliver a new \$4 million Monash Special Development School at the former Brandon Park Secondary College site in Wheelers Hill. This is a great project, and it is one I have been involved with. I have been lobbying the Minister for Education Services, and I am proud and pleased to see that this brand-new school will give kids with special needs in my community the very best start in life. It is a wonderful \$4 million initiative, and I am particularly grateful to the Minister for Education and Training for her support of this important project.

Further on education, the budget also provides an important boost to school maintenance. The local schools that will share in that boost and build on capital planning and redevelopment include Wheelers Hill Secondary College, Carwatha College P-12, both a completely rebuilt primary school and a Leading Schools Fund project that is under construction now, Wellington Secondary College and the Waverley Meadows Primary School — to mention just a few of the key education investments we have made in the last seven years. The budget also delivers the School Start bonus. I know that many members on this side of the house — not so many on the other side of the house — have been thrilled to learn of this wonderful project, which will benefit many thousands of local children in my community and in communities right across Victoria. It is a wonderful program, and it is one I am proud to support.

The record boost to transport provided under the transport and livability statement that was released last week will deliver locally the widening of the Monash Freeway between Heatherton and Glenferrie roads. This is much-needed support for a road that is under considerable pressure. Moreover, the budget will extend the hours of service of five important local bus routes in my community. It will also deliver an upgrade of the Dandenong rail line and provide expanded peak period services, which is another very important project in my local community. These transport initiatives build on the \$37 million Wellington Road SmartBus project, under which a SmartBus runs every 15 minutes during the day and the early part of the evening and every half hour on weekends.

Mr Mulder interjected.

Mr ANDREWS — The member for Polwarth swaggers into the chamber as I am speaking about

SmartBuses. I doubt they would let the member for Polwarth board a SmartBus. I have been diverted by the member for Polwarth. Let me just say that this \$37 million new SmartBus initiative is great. It is also about widening Wellington Road between Stud Road and Springvale Road, and this is strongly supported by my local community. They are a few examples of the direct benefit my community will receive from this budget. It is a great budget that strikes an important balance. As the Treasurer said, it defines the efforts and priorities of this government in making those very balanced choices to build a better future for all Victorian families.

In my role as parliamentary secretary I want to talk about health services. I am very proud to support what is a comprehensive boost to health and hospital services. It is a wonderful package. I note that the Minister for Health is in the chamber. I congratulate her on her work in this area, boosting funding in record terms.

In broad terms the budget allocates a \$2.1 billion boost for health. That, of course, builds on a couple of important points: 6000 extra nurses, 1300 extra doctors and record recurrent funding — it was about 72 per cent or 73 per cent prior to the budget delivered on Tuesday; I think we are up to about 83 per cent now. To put that another way, we are fast approaching a situation where under this government hospital funding will have doubled — double the funding, double the effort and, quite frankly, double the interest in these important matters. They are important matters, because every single Victorian relies on these health services. They define communities; they define the priorities of this government.

I will go through some of the detail. There is funding to treat an extra 37 000 patients and over 70 000 additional emergency department presentations each year, an enormous boost in patient flow. It is about meeting the challenges; building a system that can meet the needs of today but also the challenges of the future. I am very pleased to say that in my local area some of those emergency presentations will be coming through a brand-new emergency department at the Monash Medical Centre funded by this government with a \$10 million injection. It is just another example in a local context of our support for better health outcomes.

It should be noted that we are treating 250 000 more patients each year than were being treated when we came to government.

Ms Pike interjected.

Mr ANDREWS — We are talking about a substantial boost to that. Let us not quibble about the figures — I take up the interjection by the Minister for Health. One thing is certain: when that mob over there talks about lots of spending and no outcomes, that is absolute nonsense. More people than ever are getting first-class treatment in our public hospitals, and we as a government are proud to have provided the funding to make that care possible.

There is an extra \$30 million to build capacity in out-patient services. They are an important part of our hospital system. There is also the \$9 million Nurses on Call initiative, an innovative statewide telephone triage service which will mean that families will be able to get access to quality health information 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Nurses on Call initiative is great. There is also \$10 million to maintain elective surgery capacity following last year's very successful and substantial \$30 million elective surgery blitz.

In terms of community health, an area I am proud to be involved in and work hard for, this year's budget allocation is a record, with more than \$40 million in additional recurrent funding, especially in child health, chronic disease services and supports, refugee health nurses and a range of initiatives for diabetes, targeting the 15 000 Victorians who are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes each year. It is fair to say that this is the biggest recurrent boost for community health for many years. It is one that I am proud of, and I know the minister is also. I think every member of this government is proud of it, because it is about primary care to meet the needs of some of the most disadvantaged in our Victorian community.

Finally on health I want to talk about the \$170 million boost to mental health services. I have a great interest in this area, and I am proud to have been involved in the development of this package. This \$170 million package builds on last year's record \$180.3 million funding boost. The package focuses on early intervention services, postnatal depression services, funding for clients in emergency departments, expanding community-based care — that is one of our great challenges: building a truly community-based mental health service system through our prevention and recovery care centres; the prevention and recovery care (PARC) model — and expanding early psychosis services for the greater number of presentations in terms of the growing cohort of mental health clients.

I can also say with some personal interest that our first-class psychiatric disability and rehabilitation support services (PDRSS) sector also receives a funding boost following last year's pricing review

which I was privileged to chair, with a \$20 million boost in last year's budget as part of a base price adjustment.

Of special note is the \$40 million supported residential services (SRS) viability package. This is the business of good Labor governments — putting money in to support what are undoubtedly some of the most disadvantaged in our Victorian community. Of the pension-only SRS sector, around 60 per cent present with a mental illness issue. These are clients who need greater support. The viability and sustainability of the pension-only SRS is critical to their wellbeing. This \$40 million in terms of viability will be of profound and enduring benefit to those mental health clients both now and into the future. I think the Minister for Aged Care in the other place should be congratulated on this initiative — and while I am speaking about Minister Jennings, he would also be happy with \$188 million for aged care services.

Drawing to a close, I say to the house that mental health matters are important. We know that one in five Victorians will at some time in their lifetime suffer a mental illness. That makes mental illness everybody's business, and it positions it at the centre of work towards a more efficient, more effective and ultimately a more sustainable health system. I am proud to see \$170 million of additional funding on the back of \$180.3 million allocated last year. That is called leadership in mental health service provision.

I could go on to talk about a whole range of other hospital initiatives, particularly in terms of capital works — for instance, the \$850 million new Royal Children's Hospital, which I think will be the best paediatric centre of care in the world. It will be an amazing hospital. You have to aim high in these things! It will be the best paediatric centre anywhere.

I could talk about funding at the Kingston Centre and the Box Hill Hospital, as the member for Mitcham noted, with the important dialysis services there. I could talk about the boost to ambulance services where we have more than doubled funding — a 112 per cent increase in funding. I could talk about the expansion of the Thomas Embling Hospital. I could talk about a whole range of other capital investments — the things that define our health system — to provide the first-class facilities to match the quality and commitment of our staff and the quality of the services we deliver to Victorians. That capital program is almost \$1.1 billion worth of new and improved facilities. This is a great budget for my local community and a great budget for the health service that each and every one of

us needs, and basically it is of great benefit to families who rely upon those health services.

In closing, there is neighbourhood house funding of \$27.8 million to support neighbourhood houses. That builds upon, in my local community, \$1.6 million provided earlier this year to build a new Mulgrave neighbourhood house in partnership with Monash council. It is a great local initiative and again further evidence of this government's support to communities right across Victoria.

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — It gives me a great deal of pleasure to make a brief contribution on the Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill. This budget not only continues to build on the government's work of making Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, but it marks a significant turning point in Victoria's history.

With record investment in infrastructure, the Bracks government is focusing on the challenges in and opportunities for the future. Since 1999, under terrific leadership, the Victorian economy has been kept strong with a budget consistently in surplus. This has resulted in sustained economic expansion and substantial business investment. Record employment levels and a positive net interstate migration to Victoria have provided a sense of optimism in our metropolitan areas, regional centres and country towns.

The positive outlook Victorians currently have can be attributed to the confidence they feel through strong leadership, resulting in a climate of certainty. It has been said many times that governments are defined by the decisions they make. This government has had a clear aim of building the foundations to make real and lasting improvements to the health and wellbeing of our communities. This budget ensures that Victorians can share in the growth that has been achieved through the government's investment over the past six years with greater social and economic fulfilment a realistic prospect. We can see clearly the results so far for the Bracks government's investment to rebuild the health system, the education system, to improve community safety and invest in infrastructure.

This budget displays the strong priority the government places on education, quite simply because it is understood that there is no more important investment in our future than the quality and opportunities of the education we provide for our children. With over \$1 billion to be invested in our schools and skills, the initiatives will build on Victoria's high-quality education system with greater support for families than ever before.

One in eight people in Victoria are currently over the age of 55. In 30 years the figure will be one in four. The ageing population is a challenge being met head on. This government understands that in the very near future there will be fewer working people supporting those who do not work. Governments need to remove barriers to ensure that every person who has the capacity to work is able to do so. This is being achieved and is reflected in the decisions that they have made and continue to make.

With continued sound financial management and record investment in infrastructure Victorians can continue to look forward to a secure, vibrant and dynamic society with the capacity to deliver world-class services whilst paying particular attention to those in greatest need.

From the hundreds of constituents who have walked through my office door over the past three and a half years and the thousands I have spoken to at mobile booths and through doorknocking, I know how much the decisions this government has made in this budget will ease the real financial burdens they face on a day-to-day basis. The people of the electorate of Forest Hill remember altogether too well the fear and trepidation under which they lived during the years before the Bracks government was elected in 1999. My constituents know the government has listened and responded to the desires and concerns of the most important element of our state — the individual. This is a very exciting budget. I congratulate the Treasurer and commend the bill to the house.

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — It is a great pleasure to speak in favour of the Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill. I am proud to champion the Bracks government's budget commitments, which pretty much address all the areas that need to be addressed for the wellbeing of all Victorians.

When you start your primary and secondary education, this budget provides \$300 to comfortably settle you into the education system. This is a real boost to low to middle-income families in my electorate of Cranbourne and a godsend for single-parent families, low-income families and recent migrants, who do not qualify for social security for two years courtesy of John Howard's Liberal federal government. This payment is on top of the education maintenance allowance for low-income families, which is \$205 for primary school students and \$410 for secondary school kids. The majority of kids in my electorate are entitled to this.

Education is an investment for the future, and I am pleased to see that the Bracks government is providing

\$1.2 billion for education from this budget. Many schools in my electorate have been enhanced, including Mahogany Rise Primary School and Cranbourne Secondary College, and a state-of-the-art secondary college has been created in Carrum Downs. This is a complete backflip compared with the previous government, which closed 350 schools and removed 9000 teachers from our schools. Many schools in my electorate proudly support the decrease in class sizes. This is a result of the injection of a record-breaking extra 6200 teachers, the building of 28 new schools and the upgrading of hundreds of schools.

The budget sets aside \$36 million for the provision of a \$500 trade bonus as an incentive to those who choose to go through an apprenticeship. Apprentices are the lowest paid workers, and it is very hard for young people to survive a few years of apprenticeship. In some places apprentices are paid less than \$200 a week. If you are a new migrant and are thus not entitled to social security, it is tough luck. New apprenticeships provide much-needed skills for business and industry.

Businesses will also be the beneficiaries of the Bracks government's \$734 million tax package, including payroll tax cuts, further land tax cuts and a third consecutive 10 per cent reduction in WorkCover premiums. Businesses in my electorate welcome this announcement. I recently had the pleasure of opening a state-of-the-art manufacturing plant, and yesterday I was pleased to receive a call from one of the directors of this business congratulating the Bracks government on a strong business support package that will definitely assist with the bottom line of the business.

The budget provides the people of Victoria with a record \$4.9 billion for new infrastructure projects. This is almost the same amount delivered by the former government in six years. I am happy to see the real Cranbourne bypass being built with \$17 million provided in this budget to duplicate another stage of the Berwick-Cranbourne Road. This is on top of another \$21 million road project from the last budget that is the duplication of Sladen Street in Cranbourne, for which the tender has now been approved. Once Clyde Road has been duplicated all the way up to the Gippsland Highway it will be the major arterial road to Phillip Island and to other surrounding areas from south-eastern suburbs such as Dandenong and further north. This will remove the through-traffic congestion from High Street and the back roads of Cranbourne.

The \$36 million duplication of Western Port Highway is another fantastic initiative in this budget to remove the bottleneck near the intersection of Cranbourne-Frankston Road and Western Port

Highway. The city of Casey has enjoyed a record-breaking Bracks government investment of over \$375 million in road funding. I take great pleasure in seeing this budget allocating \$7.2 million to create 1000 car parking spaces over the next two years at a range of locations, including Cranbourne railway station.

This is a fantastic initiative under the Park and Ride program. Now my constituents in Cranbourne and surrounding areas will be encouraged to park and catch the train in Cranbourne, saving their petrol money. The extended services of bus route 893 in the budget will be most welcome to the young and the elderly who are not driving. This will to a certain extent be a door-to-door service between Dandenong and Cranbourne.

It is a visionary mission of the Bracks government to provide \$20.6 million over five years to set up the Growth Areas Authority to deliver government's plan for Melbourne's growth area. The plan supports new infrastructure and services to meet growth and maintain housing affordability in growth areas such as Casey. This is great news for young families ready to settle down in a brand-new estate.

I am also pleased to see \$2.4 billion in this budget to boost health and community services such as tackling hospital waiting lists, reducing obesity, helping train more doctors and addressing other health issues. This is building on the previous budget allocations which delivered hospital wards and equipment in Frankston, Dandenong and the brand-new Casey Hospital, all of which service my constituents in Cranbourne. The 24-hour, seven-day-a-week health helpline is an historic initiative for which the Bracks government will be remembered forever.

This budget allocates \$8.5 million to set up the Nurse on Call service, which will provide telephone advice and referrals. This will be a great help to the low to middle-income working families in my electorate, who find it hard to get to a hospital because of other commitments and as a result of high petrol prices. The new Cranbourne North peak-time ambulance facility will complement the good, efficient work carried out by the Cranbourne ambulance service.

Racing is big in Cranbourne. Is it not sensational to note that this budget is providing the racing industry with its largest ever budget allocation of \$18.6 million over two years? The number of horses in daily training totals around 800, supported by training and maintenance funding of more than \$1 million annually. The Cranbourne-based horse population has over 3000 owners — many residing in the local region.

It is also very pleasing to note that \$7.5 million over five years has been included in this great budget to set up new community renewal programs. I am absolutely thrilled that Frankston North in my electorate is one of six suburbs that will get funding for projects. It is one of the more deserving communities. Frankston North has a very spirited community. The local residents, business and other groups have come together working with the Brotherhood of St Laurence to explore the possibilities of setting up a not-for-profit community enterprise. This will be great news for them. I am sure they will expedite their mission with these budget commitments.

Our cultural diversity contributes directly to Victoria's economic strength. The Bracks government's seventh budget has not forgotten culturally diverse communities. I visit the multicultural senior citizens organisations a number of times a year. Once a year I visit the ones in my electorate with multicultural grant cheques. I understand how they are struggling to get things organised, and I am sure that with this extra money I will be able to give a bigger cheque next year. The extra \$3.5 million in the budget will be greatly welcomed by them. This is an unprecedented and terrific budget — the electorate agrees, commentators agree and the opposition agrees although it pretends not to. The budget has got the balance right: it has a huge capital works program, it has a range of big service delivery items and it is big on tax cuts, but at the same time it maintains a healthy operating surplus of \$317 million and net debt ratio of just 0.9 per cent of gross state product.

It is interesting that we inherited from the Kennett government — so-called good financial managers — a net debt ratio of 3.1 per cent of gross domestic product. This government has invested about one-sixth of its infrastructure commitments in this budget, which again proves the Bracks government is a better financial manager than the opposition Liberal Party. I congratulate the Bracks government and especially the Treasurer on a job well done. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — I am very pleased to speak in support of the Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill. At the outset I congratulate the Treasurer, the Minister for Finance in the other place and the Parliamentary Secretary for Treasury and Finance on putting together a very good budget for all Victorians.

The essence of this budget is that we have managed to put into the pipeline an enormous amount of infrastructure investment, averaging \$3.2 billion a year for the next four years, which will really set in place the new construction work that will continue to drive

economic growth. We all know that economic growth will sustain Victoria into the future. It will provide jobs for our children and grandchildren, and it will provide the growth in taxation that will see the services needed for our ageing population.

I want to talk about the reduction in business costs that are forecast for the next four years — that is, a \$1.4 billion reduction in costs to businesses in Victoria. I can remember some time ago the member for Brighton, who at the time might have been the second or third Treasury spokesperson, berating us for not doing enough in the area of cutting payroll tax, and yet we have 20 000 businesses that are about to save \$533 million through the reductions in payroll tax, down to 5 per cent over two years — that is, a 13 per cent total reduction in payroll tax since the Bracks government came to office.

We have further reformed land tax, with another \$167 million reduction in land tax liabilities, by reducing the middle rates by 20 per cent and cutting the top rate one year ahead of schedule to 3 per cent in 2006–07 and eliminating indexation. These reforms mean that most Victorian businesses with site values of between \$400 000 and \$3.4 million will now pay the lowest land tax of any Australian state.

For the third year in a row the budget sees another 10 per cent premium cut for WorkCover. In the city of Kingston, in my electorate alone, that represents a massive saving for businesses in the local area of \$4.8 million just this year — and that is just for businesses in Kingston. These reductions in the cost of doing business in Victoria keep us a very creative, competitive and innovative economy.

The economic fundamentals have been set to maintain Victoria's AAA credit rating, and a surplus well in excess of \$100 million is our target. We have a forecast surplus for the next year of \$316 million. With that framed and our economy forecast to grow by 3.25 per cent, thereby maintaining our very consistent rate of growth, we can deliver for families. In the electorate of Carrum there are 1000 local families that will receive the School Start bonus, which is \$300 for the very expensive times when your children start school — initially going into prep but especially when they move from primary school to secondary school. When you think of the price of uniforms and text books the \$300 will not go far, but it will help families manage in the most expensive years of their children's education. There are also changes for families facing financial hardship through the extension of the utility grants scheme. Now Victorians who need assistance and are on the safety net tariff will pay less for their power.

I also want to speak about the support in this budget for neighbourhood houses. I have spoken many times in this place about the fabulous work that is done by my local neighbourhood houses. They work with young adults who have left school prior to year 10, who can then link into a neighbourhood house to gain numeracy, literacy and life skills that will give them the appropriate skills that may get them into employment or back to school. The houses run programs for women returning to work, such as computer programs and programs in self-confidence and personal development. They run socialisation programs, drop-in centres and craft afternoons for older residents who may be isolated in the community. Neighbourhood houses do an amazingly fabulous job right across the state, but particularly in my electorate. I cannot speak highly enough of them. The additional support in this budget acknowledges the fabulous work they do. It is a joy to see.

I want to speak briefly about one of the initiatives that will make a difference to people in Carrum — the extension of the Carrum–Hampton 708 bus route. This route has only been extended in the last few months from 6.00 p.m. to 7.00 p.m. With the budget we will see an extension of the service to 9.00 p.m. every weekday, meaning that it is now an absolute option. People can get the train to Mordialloc, hop on the bus and get back to Chelsea Heights or Patterson Lakes by public transport. It will be the first time people will have had that option. With services all day Saturday and Sunday until 9.00 p.m. the young adults that live along the Wells Road corridor will now have an opportunity to get a part-time job at Southland or in Mordialloc, or go out to the cinema.

They can actually lead full lives without relying on their parents to drive them to and fro, and for the first time ever, people who live along the Wells Road corridor will have a real opportunity to make the choice of whether they have one car or two cars. This is a fabulous budget, and I cannot speak highly enough of it.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order!
The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Electricity: Bass electorate supply

Mr SMITH (Bass) — I wish to raise a concern with the Minister for Energy Industries in the other house, who is also the Minister for Resources, in regard to concerns over power outage complaints that have flooded into my office in recent times. I ask him to take some action to ensure that the electricity supply company TRUenergy and the maintenance organisation known as t squared fix this problem, which has been going on for some time in both Lang Lang and Bayles.

My office has spoken to company representatives who have tried to fob my staff off with stories about how they 'have to replace some wires' and 'have to get a new transformer to try and overcome this problem'. This is not a satisfactory answer, as it is not a recent problem but one that has gone on now for some months — and it should have been fixed by now. It is of course putting my constituents in difficult circumstances both in their businesses and in their homes.

I will give the house examples of the problems this is causing, and members will see that these are serious and not frivolous problems. Firstly, at the Bayles Regional Primary School the power went out three times just this morning. The school principal phoned at 10.00 a.m. and the power was still off. When this happens the toilets do not flush because they run off a pump. There is particular concern because two of the students have allergies, so there could be a need to phone for an ambulance; but the phone connects up to the power, and of course the school did not have any power.

In another call a lady from the hairdressing salon said the power was out again and had been off for 2 hours after having gone off at 9.45 a.m. She said that it was affecting the running of that business and that it was hard for her to reschedule appointments. The Lang Lang milk bar was also affected. A woman from the milk bar said power outages were crippling the town. People only had bottled gas to turn to, and it was costing them a fortune.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr SMITH — She indicated it had started getting bad over the summer months, with power outages of more than 4 hours at a time. The ice-cream was going soft — a bit like the member for Melton! She said they were losing sales. The lack of power meant that hot food had to be thrown out because it could not be maintained at the required temperature. The milk bar was having to stock up on candles because of the

number of people coming in and asking for them. These people cannot use torches to keep running their business.

The service station cannot pump petrol and has been forced to close. The panel beater cannot spray his cars. Workers at beauty shops who have been spraying people with tan lotion have got halfway through spraying their clients and have had to send them home half sprayed. That is not much good at all.

People are having electrical items blow up, which is a problem. Computers are going down, and it is costing people thousands of dollars to get them back up. EFTPOS facilities are not able to be used. The post office has reported problems. It cannot do anything because it has no power to run its computers, and it is dealing with people's money and those sorts of things.

I have a list of these complaints, and I think it is disgraceful that it has gone on for so long. I ask the minister to take some decisive action before this town's business community is ruined — and that is the way it is going. I think the company should be paying compensation.

Thompson Road, Patterson Lakes: pedestrian crossing

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — The matter I have to raise tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Transport. I ask the minister to take urgent action to improve the pedestrian crossing on Thompson Road, Patterson Lakes. I have a petition which is not in a form that can be tabled in this house but which has 237 signatures from residents of Patterson Lakes who are very concerned with the safety at the pedestrian crossing.

This pedestrian crossing provides a crossing from the Patterson Lakes shopping centre to the Patterson Lakes community centre. It is well used by children attending the local primary school, and there are also two very large retirement villages on one side of the road, so a lot of older people use it to cross over to the shops and back to the community centre.

Even though it is a pedestrian crossing that is controlled by traffic signals, there are a couple of things that cause crossing at this pedestrian crossing to be quite difficult. There is a bus stop about 10 metres from the crossing. If a bus is stationary there, cars coming past cannot see the traffic lights on the left-hand side of the road. The light on the right-hand side of the road as you come down towards Carrum from Patterson Lakes gets

caught up with the lights and signage of the shopping centre itself, and it is quite a difficult traffic light to see.

There have been some instances where cars have not stopped at the traffic lights, but when children are crossing a road they believe when they see the green man that that is when they should cross. Older people who are a bit slower to get across the road also have problems. It is time to have a look at this. I ask the minister to get VicRoads to come out and review the safety around this crossing. It may be that it just needs a mast arm light — one that goes across the road so that it is a little bit more visible. Perhaps it needs extra signage or perhaps there is even some lane marking work that can be done on the road pavement.

I would like to thank Tania Cassels, who has been very hardworking in putting together the petition. The petition has been supported by the local primary school and by the committee at the Patterson Lakes community centre, and as I say, it has 237 signatures from local residents. I urge the minister to take action to make the crossing safe.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! The member's time has expired.

Snowy Hydro Ltd: sale

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — The matter I raise is for the Treasurer. I call upon the Treasurer to withdraw the sale of Snowy Hydro Ltd until Victoria follows the lead of the New South Wales Legislative Council and establishes an all-party parliamentary inquiry into the sale.

The Bracks government claims that the sale of its 29 per cent share will net it more than \$600 million and has already committed that money for new schools and school upgrades. Given the record tax take of this government, we should not have to sell the Snowy to upgrade our schools. The Victorian government has now turned a blind eye to the Premier's promise in this place on 10 April 2003 to keep water in public ownership in Victoria. The Premier's white paper *Securing Our Water Future Together* reaffirmed that his government would:

... maintain overall stewardship of all water resources irrespective of source, on behalf of all Victorians ...

Despite these assurances, the government is now planning to sell Snowy Hydro, but the Victorian community remains unconvinced that a fire sale is appropriate or in the public interest, and there is an abiding fear that something valuable and iconic will be lost forever.

An all-party parliamentary inquiry should examine and report on the following critical issues: whether there is a need for the sale in the first place; whether the proposed sale of Snowy Hydro is in the public interest; impacts of such a sale on the short and long-term financial position of the government, including impacts on revenue and recurrent costs; potential compensation payments to affected parties; intended use of funds raised from privatisation; control of water regulation, especially how timing of releases will affect the interests of irrigators and the environment; access to lands controlled by Snowy Hydro Ltd; and limits to foreign and majority share ownership.

The Victorian public must have an opportunity to put a view on these critical issues, both by submission and public hearing. Water, and the sustainable production of power from that water, is one of the nation's most precious assets and needs the scrutiny of the Parliament before any proposed sale. Without an inquiry the Bracks government is abusing the parliamentary process just because it has a large majority in both houses. I ask the Treasurer to withdraw Snowy Hydro from sale until an all-party parliamentary inquiry into the proposed sale has been completed.

Environment: Watsons Creek

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Environment, who is also the Minister for Water. The action I seek is for the minister to reassure my community that the government will never dam the beautiful Watsons Creek. There is land in the Christmas Hills area adjacent to Sugarloaf Reservoir and in the vicinity of Watsons Creek which is listed in the current 2006 edition of *Melway* on maps 265 and 273 as reserved for future catchment.

When the minister visited the area late last year to declare the Neil Douglas reserve at the Bend of Islands I was really pleased when he reiterated to me that our government would never dam Watsons Creek, and I felt then that he, like me and the local community, appreciated the unique beauty and biodiversity of this beautiful Yarra tributary. However, I am disturbed that there may be some who do not share our government's commitment to this. I seek the minister's intervention to ensure that this reference in the *Melway* be deleted.

I am aware that The Nationals, were they to occupy the government benches again, would be committed to damming Watsons Creek. We certainly do not know what the Liberal Party's position would be on this, because it does not seem to stand for anything. Not only would this damming be an act of environmental vandalism, it would also hamper the local firefighting

efforts of our Country Fire Authority volunteers. The Christmas Hills CFA has long needed a replacement site for its northern shed to provide firefighting cover for the area.

However, it has been hampered by difficulties in locating a site that is further than the 200-metre buffer from a water catchment, or proposed catchment, as required by the Environment Protection Authority. Deleting the reference in *Melway* would free up a number of viable sites to allow our wonderful volunteers to do their jobs in better and safer conditions. A consequence of this would be that the CFA could undertake discussions with Melbourne Water about acquisition of an agreed site in the area.

This government has a fantastic record in protecting our environment, promoting water conservation and returning environmental flows to our river systems. Action such as deleting this reference to catchment in the Watsons Creek area would reinforce our commitment to this end and would send a message to The Nationals and the Liberal Party that damming Watsons Creek will not be supported by the majority of Victorians and the local community. The answer to dealing with Melbourne's water needs into the future is to encourage decreasing consumption, recycling, a changed approach to water and a respect for this wonderful commodity. I look forward to action by the minister to protect Watsons Creek.

Road safety: speed cameras

Mr COOPER (Mornington) — I have a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I want him to take action to restore credibility to the operation of speed cameras. On 5 January this year a vehicle owned and driven by a Mr David Wong was photographed by a speed camera in Malvern Road, Toorak, and an infringement notice was sent to Mr Wong stating that he had been driving at 70 kilometres per hour in a 60-kilometre-per-hour zone.

Mr Wong was certain that he had not been exceeding the speed limit and he requested a copy of the photo. On receiving it he saw a photo showing three vehicles, one of which was his. He was driving closest to the kerb and immediately alongside was a van, significantly larger than his car and obviously passing him. Travelling in the opposite direction was another car. Mr Wong wrote to Victoria Police about the photo, disputing the validity of the infringement notice. On 15 May he received a reply stating that the police were satisfied the alleged offence had been committed.

After receiving a copy of the photo and other documents from Mr Wong I sought advice from a speed camera expert who has provided evidence to courts on many occasions for people who had been incorrectly charged with speeding. He has a 100 per cent success rate in having charges dismissed. This expert told me that the photo the police are relying on to proceed against Mr Wong is — and I quote — ‘total rubbish’. After viewing the photo no reasonable person would accept that this booking of Mr Wong is legitimate, and the fact that Victoria Police is happy to persist in proceeding against him once again brings the operation of these cameras into disrepute.

The Minister for Police and Emergency Services needs to involve himself in this matter and ensure that Mr Wong is not forced to spend a large amount of money and take expensive time away from his business to defend himself in court against this ridiculous allegation. I have the speed camera photo in my possession, and I am happy to give it to the minister, along with copies of correspondence between Mr Wong and Victoria Police. In return, I ask the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to step in and give immediate and genuine assistance to this beleaguered individual.

Preston: legionnaire's disease

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — The action I seek is from the Minister for WorkCover and the TAC in another place. Mr Bert Blackburn wrote to me on behalf of the Communication Electrical and Plumbing Union to raise its concerns with the record of Optus in regard to occupational health and safety.

Of particular concern to Mr Blackburn is the evacuation of the Optus Vision building in Preston as a result of legionella bacteria being found in the cooling tower — which is pretty topical in here at the moment. Mr Blackburn notes that whilst employees of the Optus Vision building were subsequently evacuated, details as to when the legionella bacteria was initially discovered are still not clear. But as late as 9 March legionella bacteria were still in the tower and employees were yet to be fully informed and were in fact required to continue working on the night shift.

Disinfection of the towers took place later that evening. Mr Blackburn noted that Optus is currently being investigated by Comcare in relation to occupational health and safety issues to ensure that it is fully compliant with the commonwealth Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act. The objective is to determine whether Optus is complying with the act as well as the conditions of its licence. I therefore

request that the Minister for WorkCover and the TAC take action to ensure that Optus is fully investigated in relation to this most recent matter.

Doncaster Secondary College: disability funding

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Education Services. I ask the minister to investigate why disability funding for Doncaster Secondary College has been cut and to reinstate the funding the college previously received. The funding cut is having a devastating effect on the school community.

I received an emailed letter from a parent whose son attends the school where unfortunately funding has been cut. I will read from the email:

I wrote to you a few years back in relation to my son and his funding needs, and I appreciate everything that was done to ensure that my son received the extra support that he needed.

My son is now in year 9, and I have now been informed that funding for him has been withdrawn due to cuts in the disability funding areas. The school has been very supportive of my son and his needs, and this year due to the withdrawal of the funding we had to move him to another class ...

My question is, and I would like to know, why this funding was withdrawn. My son ... needs to have additional one-on-one support ... which is vital for him getting through school, especially during these very difficult years. I am very concerned that he may slip through the loopholes in the system. We tried so long in the early primary school years to get this support, and for a long time we were always knocked back. It was only through your assistance and that of Carlo Furletti that we were able to get the funding. I feel it is unfair that this should now be taken away when he needs it the most.

I hope that you may be able to assist me in any way.

I urge the minister to investigate why Christopher's funding has been cut and to ensure that the money is given back to Doncaster Secondary College to ensure that this student does not fall through the cracks but completes year 9 — and year 12 as well. He is having problems and is finding it very difficult. I urge the minister to investigate and provide the funding that Christopher needs to ensure he completes year 12.

San Remo caravan park: management

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — I draw to the attention of the Minister for Environment the plight of the occupants of the foreshore caravan park at San Remo, many of whom live in the eastern and south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. I am seeking the minister's agreement to have his department thoroughly investigate the practices of the management at that

caravan park, which I fear and regret is mercilessly ripping off the occupants.

The foreshore caravan park at San Remo is located on Crown land and is one of three caravan parks in the town. Since February last year the management of the caravan park has been in the hands of a company called Copperleaf Pty Ltd. It is a family company run by Mr Andrew Anthony, who also owns the freehold of a separate caravan park in the town.

Mr Anthony has managed to turn the foreshore caravan park into a goldmine. He took over just after a substantial fee hike in late 2004, but he has outdone that fee hike by imposing two subsequent and steep increases of his own. The situation now is that between mid-2004 and mid-2006 fees at the foreshore caravan park have risen 71 per cent. They have gone up from \$1740 for a standard site to \$2990. At the time he took over, Mr Anthony claimed he would invest the increased fees in new facilities and improvements. This is laughable. The maintenance of the park has gone backwards, and I am aware of complaints, for example, that the ladies toilet had a broken lock which took months to be fixed.

As if all that were not bad enough, Mr Anthony has introduced a suite of other charges. I have no complaint about his introduction of a 3 per cent EFTPOS and credit card fee, as it could be argued that that is standard business practice, but on top of that he has introduced a new \$30-per-quarter charge if occupants, some of whom have been there 20 years or more, wish to pay their fees quarterly rather than giving him the money up front. In addition, Mr Anthony has introduced a new 5 per cent commission on van sales for which he must be the sole agent.

But it still gets worse. In 2007 he will introduce premium ratings. This is a fictitious means of extracting even higher fees from the residents of a caravan park where there is very little difference between sites, although it is true that some sites are closer than others to the ladies toilets with the bung lock. This is a rip-off by someone who went bust in the town years ago and still owes money all over the place. It is of great concern.

I am also concerned about the way the lease was transferred to him. Apparently it needed to be advertised publicly, but was only done so on the Internet for 12 minutes before he secured it. His tactics at this caravan park are deplorable. The way the lease was transferred is very dodgy. I look to the minister for a comprehensive investigation by his department.

Freedom of information: government performance

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Attorney-General. The matter I wish to raise with him involves the government's continuing abuse of freedom of information (FOI). Given that the Attorney-General is responsible for freedom of information and has been since the Bracks government came to power in 1999, one would have thought he would have implemented measures and taken appropriate steps to ensure that all government departments fully comply with the spirit of freedom of information.

Today the Ombudsman released his own-motion review of the Freedom of Information Act. The Ombudsman slammed the Victorian government for its continued abuse of the freedom of information (FOI) process. The Ombudsman wrote that many FOI requests demonstrated undue delay. In several cases examined, the reasons given to claim any exemptions were misleading, and departments which asserted that requests were unclear or voluminous did so with little or no justification. A case in point was a government department's refusal to include the cost of hire furniture in a request about expenditure on office equipment and furniture, as it was not owned by the department.

In 1999 the Labor Party promised to ensure that all FOI requests would be responded to within the legal time. The Ombudsman identified that delays in responding to FOI requests was a critical problem under the Bracks government. Only 56 per cent of all FOI requests to government departments were responded to within the statutory time frame of 45 days.

The second worst offender was the Attorney-General's own department; the worst was the Department of Human Services. I also note that the Ombudsman's report states that over 20 per cent of all FOI applications take more than 90 days for government departments to process, which is double the legal time. Labor's demonstrated broken promises regarding freedom of information add to the long line of broken promises since it came to office. In one case a request was sent to a minister's office, and that minister sat on the request well beyond the time limit until a spin doctor had come back from holidays to deal with the press reaction. In another case an internal review took 160 days so that the minister could have a spin doctor prepare a response to a possible parliamentary question.

I ask the Attorney-General to honour the Labor Party's election promise to ensure that all FOI requests are responded to within the required time and that the

Freedom of Information Act is administered in such a way as to ensure the spirit of that act is maintained.

Local government: family day care funding

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Minister for Community Services. I seek her action to address the federal government's withdrawal of family day care funding from both the Melton and Moorabool councils, which is a cruel hoax on the families within my electorate — for example, in the shire of Moorabool, the federal government is withdrawing \$54 000 from family day care. It is withdrawing services that are absolutely necessary for families in this area. It is also withdrawing a similar amount of money from the shire of Melton. Those families within that area will face an uncertain future regarding where to get family day care.

Those services will need to be replaced, and that money will need to be replaced. Essentially the federal government is putting the responsibility for providing those services back onto the ratepayers of Melton and Moorabool. It is a substantial amount of money for those communities to find, and it shows the absolute cruelty of the federal government in withdrawing vital services from growing families in my electorate that need support to survive the onslaught of high taxes and charges it imposes, such as the GST, the cost of petrol and other inflationary costs. It is absolutely imperative that women are supported with family day care, but the federal government is withdrawing those services. It is cruel and heartless. The federal government has no understanding of the pressures on working families that are served by the interface councils. It does not care what happens to those families, and it does not support them. This another example of where the community has to step in and do the work of the federal government.

This is a mean action by the federal government. It means that councils will have to pick up those federal responsibilities. I seek the minister's assistance and action in addressing that withdrawal of support for family day care — whether she takes it to Canberra or takes other action locally — to make sure that families in Melton and Moorabool receive the services they need.

Responses

Mr HAERMEYER (Minister for Manufacturing and Export) — The member for Bass raised a matter about power supply outages in Lang Lang for the attention of the Minister for Energy Industries in the

other place. I will make sure that is passed on to the minister.

The member for Carrum raised a matter for the Minister for Transport relating to a pedestrian crossing at Patterson Lakes. She asked that VicRoads go out and review safety around that crossing. I will ensure that her request is passed on to the minister.

The member for Swan Hill raised a matter for the Treasurer, asking him to withdraw the sale of Snowy Hydro Ltd pending a parliamentary inquiry and expressing the view that water should be kept in public hands. I will draw that to the attention of the Treasurer, but I point out to the member for Swan Hill that effectively the sale of Snowy Hydro is not something this government has a final say in, because it is a minority shareholder in Snowy Hydro. The majority shareholder is the New South Wales government. I understand that action is also supported by the federal government. Ultimately Snowy Hydro will be sold, no matter what the position of the Victorian government is. Our position rests on whether we have a say in what the outcome of that sale is or we do not, so we do not really have the capacity to do what the member for Swan Hill asks. Nevertheless I will pass the matter on to the Treasurer.

The member for Mordialloc raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for WorkCover and the TAC in the other place relating to a cooling tower at the Optus Vision building and some health issues pertaining to that. I will ensure that is passed on to the minister.

The member for Bulleen raised a matter for the Minister for Education Services, asking her to investigate a matter concerning disability funding at Doncaster Secondary College. I will ensure that is passed on to the minister.

The member for Mitcham raised a matter for the Minister for Environment asking that he investigate management practices at the foreshore caravan park at San Remo. I will ensure that that is passed on to the appropriate minister.

The member for Kew raised a matter for the attention of the Attorney-General, asking him to ensure that government departments comply with the spirit of the Freedom of Information Act. I might point out to the member for Kew that under the previous government the Freedom of Act effectively was administered in a very different spirit from the way it is under this government.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HAERMEYER — I remember the dark, sinister days of the Kennett government.

Mr McIntosh interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order! The member for Kew!

Mr HAERMEYER — I point out that the Freedom of Information Act is a far more open act than it ever was under the Kennett government. Nonetheless I will pass the matter raised by the member for Kew on to the Attorney-General.

The member for Melton raised a matter for the Minister for Community Services asking her to address the withdrawal by the federal government of family day care funding from the Melton and Moorabool councils. I will ensure that that is passed on to the Minister for Community Services.

The member for Yan Yean addressed a matter to the Minister for Environment, seeking reassurance that the government will never drown the Watsons Creek for catchment purposes. Having represented that area in the past, I have to say that it is an absolutely magnificent pristine area of bushland that should never be flooded. I will certainly raise the matter to the attention of the minister.

Finally, the member for Mornington raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. He is asking him to effectively instruct the police to withdraw a speed camera traffic infringement notice. I do not think that in the now some 14 years I have been in this Parliament I have ever heard a member ask a police minister to pull an infringement notice. Under our system of government in this state we do have a view that politicians do not get involved in who gets charged and who does not and under what circumstances. This is a completely extraordinary set of circumstances.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HAERMEYER — A member of Parliament has come in here demanding that a minister pull an infringement notice — pull a fine — for a constituent. This is an outrageous set of circumstances. I understand that his constituent has approached the police and that they are of the view that the fine should stand. At the end of the day he has the option to take that through the courts. It is not for this Parliament or any minister to get involved in the judicial process.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HAERMEYER — I invite the member for Kew to contradict what I have just said. I will certainly refer it to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, but I have to say that I would be absolutely dumb struck if any minister were so stupid as to instruct the police force to withdraw a fine.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Barker) — Order!
The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 10.33 p.m.

INCORPORATION BY MR INGRAM (GIPPSLAND EAST)

Thursday, 1 June 2006

ASSEMBLY

1643

To the Parliament of the State of Victoria assembled,

The undersigned citizens appeal to the Victorian Parliament to suspend the sale of Snowy Mountains Hydro Ltd. This iconic enterprise was a stepping-stone on our path to nationhood and was seen by all the world as a marker of our aspiration. It is part of the glue that binds us.

Handing control of this central pillar of our water and power supply to those whose interests cannot be guaranteed to reflect our own, at a time of climate, water and energy uncertainty such as we have never seen, is imprudent at best, and could so easily end in bitter regret.

That the sale is proceeding, apace, with so little public understanding, is wrong. Such an action demands rigorous and transparent analysis by people of vision, with unquestionable objectivity, undistracted by unrealistic time limits, short-term budgetary considerations or vested interests.

We ask you to suspend the process to give pause for that analysis and time for free and open debate of this manifestly non-partisan issue in all Parliaments of the Nation. Water is far too fundamental and precious a resource to be put in jeopardy with so little forethought.

A wise and sensitive response to the wide-spread and growing public anxiety about this sale would attest to the strength of our democratic system and serve to enhance the unwritten compact between parliament and people that has allowed this country to work so very well.

Our warrant for this appeal is that we are all so very fortunate as to have been born into, or welcomed by, this wonderful place we call home.

Yours Sincerely,



Les Murray, Poet



The Right Hon Malcolm Fraser AC CH, Former Prime Minister

Donald Hazelwood AO Concertmaster Emeritus SSO	The Hon Gordon J. Samuels AV CVO QC Former NSW State Governor	Tom Uren AO Former Federal Minister	Henri Szeps Actor
John Bell Actor, Bell Shakespeare	John Menadue AO Former Public Servant	Cate Blanchett Actor	Richard Wallace Mayor Snowy River Shire
Siobhan McHugh Author and Historian	Max Talbot FIE Aust. Former Engineer Snowy Hydro Ltd	Bernie Fraser Former Reserve Bank Governor	Ian Barker QC
Geraldine Brooks Author	Rachel Siewert Senator	Peter Cockbain President of the Institution of Engineers	Professor Ian Frazer Scientist & Australian of the Year
Julian Burnside QC	Peter Andren MHR for Calare	The Hon Justice Marcus Einfeld AO QC	Mayor Paul Stephenson Goulburn Mulwaree Council
Paul Barratt AO Fmr Secretary, Commonwealth Dept of Primary Industries and Energy	Dr Alison Broinowski Writer, Fmr Diplomat, Visiting Fellow at ANU & UNSW	Bob Wilson Chief Commissioner of Water Resources Former GM of Sydney Water	Richard Broinowski Fmr Diplomat, Adjunct Prof University of Sydney
Andrew Butfield Civil Engineer	Craig Ingram MLA for Gippsland East, Victoria	Jonathon Biggins Writer	Bob Ellis Author
Alistair Mant Author, Adjunct Prof. Swinburne Univ	Dr Peter MacDonald Physician Mayor Former MLA NSW	John Button Former Federal Minister	Russell Savage Victorian MLA for Mildura
Richard Lepplatrier Architect	John Hatton AO Former MLA	Jeff Angel Director, Total Environment Centre	Peter Sculthorpe AO OBE Composer
The Right Hon J.D. Anthony AC AH Former Deputy Prime Minister	Vin Good Former Snowy Commissioner	Faith Bandler AM Author	Lady Southey AC
Professor Ian Lowe AO Scientist, ACF President	Tony Windsor MHR for New England	Bob Ellicott QC	Lyn Allison Senator
Professor Mick Dodson AM ANU Inst for Indigenous Australia	Professor Robert Manne Dept. of Politics, La Trobe University	Ted Mack Fmr Independent Mayor, MLA, MHR	Natasha Stott-Despoja Senator
Bill Hayden AC KSJ Former Governor General	Andrew Bartlett Senator	David Malouf Author & Poet	Signed on behalf of each of those listed above who pledged their names to me as convenor of this letter to the Parliament and the people Victoria, on this day the 1 st of June 2006.
Jack Munday AO Former Union Leader	Glenn Murcutt Architect	Sheila Swain AM Former Mayor & CAE Head	



Douglas I Nicholas MIEAust, Convenor

Victorian General Government Sector Income and Expenses
Comparison of budget with actual 1999/00 to 2006/07
(\$ Million)

	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Budget forecast								
Revenue	19489.6	22180	23465.5	25281.7	26598.4	28964.7	30623.6	32442.1
Expenditure	19360.9	21588.5	22957	24760	26353.9	28435.9	30258.9	32125.3
Surplus	128.7	591.5	508.5	521.7	244.5	528.8	364.7	
Actual								
Revenue	22029.5	23796.3	25363	26630.5	28343.8	29825.1	31198.9	
Expenditure	20370.9	22580.1	25089.6	26394.6	27353.7	29030.2	30749.4	
Surplus	1167.4	1216.2	273.4	235.9	990.1	794.9	449.5	
Difference (Actual minus budget)								
								Total
Revenue	2570.2	1616.3	1897.5	1348.8	1745.4	860.4	575.3	10613.9
Expenditure	1531.5	991.6	2132.6	1634.6	999.8	594.3	490.5	8374.9

Source: Annual Financial Reports for the State of Victoria except for 2005/06 and 2006/07 data which are drawn from 2005/06 and 2006/07 Budget Papers No. 4.