

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Tuesday, 10 June 2008

(Extract from book 8)

Internet: www.parliament.vic.gov.au/downloadhansard

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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The Hon. J. W. THWAITES (to 30 July 2007)

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Lim, Mr Muy Hong	Clayton	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

¹ Resigned 6 August 2007

² Elected 15 September 2007

³ Resigned 2 June 2008

⁴ Elected 15 September 2007

⁵ Resigned 6 August 2007

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Tuesday, 10 June 2008

The SPEAKER (Hon. Jenny Lindell) took the chair at 2.04 p.m. and read the prayer.

RESIGNATION OF MEMBER

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to announce that on 2 June I received the following letter of resignation from the member for Kororoit:

I write to advise you of my resignation as member for the electorate of Kororoit effective from today.

It has been a great honour to serve as a member of the Victorian Parliament for nearly 16 years — representing Yan Yean from 1992 until 2002 and Kororoit from 2002 until today.

I have also had the great privilege of serving for seven years as a minister in the Bracks government.

The value of my contribution in public office is for others to judge, but I would like to believe it has been a positive one.

I have made many friends on all sides of the political fence and have enjoyed my time in Parliament immensely. But I know that now is the right time for me to draw this phase of my life to a close.

I wish you, and all my colleagues on both sides of the house, well for the future.

I particularly want to thank the people of Kororoit and Yan Yean for the trust and confidence they have afforded me in allowing me to represent them.

As a consequence of the resignation, on 3 June I issued a writ for a by-election for the electoral district of Kororoit to be held on 28 June.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Water: north-south pipeline

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the government's promise made before the 2006 state election that it would not pipe water from the north, and I ask: was that a lie?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — As I have indicated on a number of previous occasions, the proposal for the food bowl project came from the region itself. People would have seen last week the advertisement which was placed in a number of papers and paid for by the food bowl group. A number of organisations signed on to this advertisement, including of course many in companies that operate in the region. People like Alister Purbrick, the CEO (chief executive officer) of Chateau

Tahbilk; Ken Wood, dairy farmer and company director; Stephen Mills, dairy farmer; Dudley Bryant, president of the Northern Victorian Irrigators, Barry Croke, the chair of Irrigation Australia; John Corboy, the CEO of Corboy Fresh Fruits, Andrew Prentice — —

Mr Baillieu — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. Was his promise a lie or was it not?

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The Premier is being relevant to the question, and the taking of a point of order is not an opportunity for the Leader of the Opposition to repeat the question.

Mr BRUMBY — As I am explaining to the Leader of the Opposition, the proposal which came to the government post-2006 came from the region itself. As the advertisement shows, people throughout the region, including Andrew Prentice, CEO of Eastfield Orchards; Oz Pac Australia Pty Ltd; Michael Zurcas, CEO of Zurcas Coolstores; Russell Pell, chair of the Central Goulburn Modernisation Committee; Geoff Akers, member of the Northern Victorian Infrastructure Renewal project; Peter McCamish, director of Water for Rivers; Nigel Garrard, managing director of SPC Ardmona; Richard Guy, former chairman of the Bendigo Bank and chairman of the Northern Victorian Infrastructure Renewal project; Colin Rees, Mangalore Airports; Stuart Rea, dairy farmer; Peter Bicknell, senior partner, M B & M Accountants; John Pettigrew, member of Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority; Suzanna Sheed; Ron Stewart — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — There are others of course. Rocky Varapodio of Varapodio Orchards; Ross McPherson, the chairman of McPherson Media Group; Gavin Pogue, valuer; Lisa McKenzie, CEO of Fairley Leadership; Adam Furphy, company director, making one of the great products which is being produced out of central Victoria.

In addition there are a whole range of broader, state-based organisations that have also indicated their support for this project: Linfox, Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, SKM, the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Transfield Services, GHD, Tourism Task Force Australia; Industry Funds Management, Earth Tech, the Australian union of workers, the National Union of Workers, Lucas Water, the Transport Workers Union of Australia, Excelior and Comdain.

I would have thought those organisations and companies represent the interests of hundreds of thousands of people. From the food bowl group a proposition was developed which was put to the government. Because of the rapid deterioration in rainfall across Australia and the urgency to tackle these issues, we listened to the community and embraced this project.

As I said last week, a number of the claims that are being made about this project by the Plug the Pipe group are not true and are not accurate. I have here, for example, in addition to the comments of Mike Dalmau, the words of Plug the Pipe campaign representative Ken Pattison. He said:

We believe irrigators will lose 10 per cent of their water from the food bowl plan.

That is the claim being made by the food bowl group.

In a press release of 3 October 2007 the Victorian Farmers Federation said:

The Victorian Farmers Federation does not dispute a report that shows a \$1 billion investment in infrastructure could create projected water savings of 225 gegalitres.

Further in the same press release, the VFF said:

Any savings in excess of the 225 gegalitres should be shared equally between farmers and the environment.

The VFF concludes by saying:

In recent talks with the government, the VFF identified three projects that could provide up to 250 gegalitres of water savings in the Goulburn-Murray Irrigation District for future investments.

So on one hand there is the claim made by Plug the Pipe and on the other hand there is the response by the VFF. Who is telling the truth?

The reality is this is a project which will generate significant water savings at a minimum of 225 gegalitres. It will mean more water for the environment, including for environmental flows in the region. It will mean more water for farmers, and of course it will mean one-third of those savings, up to 75 gegalitres, being available for Melbourne. The efforts of the food bowl group to take a stand in its community and support a project which will have significant long-term benefits is to be commended.

Toyota Australia: hybrid car

Mr NOONAN (Williamstown) — My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to the government's commitment to the sustainability of Victoria's

automotive industry, and I ask: can the Premier update the house on any recent announcements that demonstrate the government is delivering on that commitment?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I can, and I thank the member for Williamstown for his question. This morning I was pleased, with the Minister for Industry and Trade and the president of Toyota Australia, Max Yasuda, to announce with them that Toyota will be producing hybrid Camrys at its Altona plant from 2009 with the first hybrids to be available from 2010. This, if you like, is a green-letter day for the car industry in our state. It is one of the threshold changes which I believe the industry needs to make, and this decision today by Toyota is great news for the car industry in our state and for the car industry in Australia. It is great news for consumers, who will have the choice in 2010 to buy a locally produced hybrid vehicle and to get all of the financial benefits that come from that in improved fuel consumption. It is a great outcome, too, for the environment. So from the point of view of industry, from the point of view of the hip pocket — from the savings for consumers — and the point of view of the environment this, I think, is a fantastic decision for our state.

The decision by Toyota was announced jointly today at functions in Nagoya being attended by the Prime Minister of Australia, the federal Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Kim Carr, and the president of Toyota, Mr Watanabe; the joint announcement was made here.

There is no doubt in my mind — I have said it before in this place, I have said it in many speeches publicly — there is no doubt that across Australia and around the world consumers are voting with their feet; they want to be able to help the environment, to improve the environment and to play a part in tackling climate change. But consumers in Australia have never had the opportunity to purchase a locally made hybrid vehicle, so this is a threshold moment, I believe, for the industry in Australia. To put this in perspective, if you are driving a traditional Camry, your fuel consumption is in the order of 9 to 10 litres per 100 kilometres; around the city in the hybrid Camry it will be 7 or less. It is a quantum shift in fuel consumption.

We provided support to Toyota. I think it is fair to say that when it first discussed this matter with us last year this was very much a borderline issue for Toyota, and it is the support which has been provided by the Victorian government and by the federal government that has really swayed the balance in favour of the Toyota decision. The Victorian government will purchase up to

2000 new Camrys, and I hope many public servants across the Parliament here will buy them. I have had many members of Parliament say to me privately that they would love the opportunity to be able to buy a locally made hybrid, and I know amongst ministers there will be strong demand for the hybrid Camrys.

This issue was first raised with the government last year. It was then raised formally with me and Minister Theophanous in January of this year. As a consequence it is a matter that I have discussed on a number of occasions with the Prime Minister, with Senator Carr and with the federal Minister for Trade, Simon Crean. I know it is a matter that has been prosecuted strongly by the Prime Minister. I think the outcome today, as I have said, for the car industry, for Toyota, for manufacturing jobs, for the environment and for consumers, who will be able to save significant amounts of money through improved fuel economy, is fantastic.

I put on the public record today my thanks obviously to Toyota for its confidence and faith in Victoria. I want to thank too the Prime Minister for the significant commitment that the federal government has made towards this project. I want to put on the record too the work that the two industry ministers — Mr Theophanous in the other house and Senator Carr — have also put into this. I think it is a fantastic outcome; it is one that I am personally very proud of. It sets our industry in the right direction.

Importantly, Toyota having made this decision, a new-generation Camry will come out in 2010–11. The medium and long-term significance of this is enormous, because if this is successful, I think we will see a larger commitment by Toyota to Altona, to our state and to hybrid vehicles. As I said, that will be great for investment, great for jobs, great for the environment and great for motorists.

Latrobe Regional Hospital: funding

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer the minister to recent statements by the chairman of the Latrobe Regional Hospital staff group, Dr George Owen, revealing that a substantial proportion of the elective surgery lists have been cancelled at the hospital every day for the past month because of government underfunding. Will the minister take responsibility for this chronic underfunding, and what excuse does he have to offer those patients who have had their surgery cancelled?

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Health) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. This

government is very proud to have provided the Latrobe public hospital with record funding in each and every year of our term in office. There is 65.4 per cent additional funding under this government, from this side of the house, as opposed to what was provided by those opposite, who privatised this hospital and were happy to have it fall over, only to be picked up by this government and supported in record terms.

I say to the Leader of The Nationals that it is my view that the Latrobe Regional Health Service — the management, the staff, right across the board down there — do a fine job in treating record numbers of patients in that growing part of country Victoria. They are able to treat record numbers of patients because this government has given them the record funding that they need.

I have been very pleased to visit the Latrobe Regional Health Service on numerous occasions this year and last year, and indeed in a previous role in the last Parliament. To give the honourable member opposite and others a sense of our government's commitment to this fine health service, since 1999 we have invested around \$22.5 million in capital works at that health service: a contribution of \$11 million to the cancer centre, \$8 million for various mental health redevelopments, \$2.1 million for medical equipment, and more than \$1 million for other infrastructure programs. This year alone I visited there on 19 March to open a new \$460 000, six-bed short-stay unit.

Mrs Shardey interjected.

Mr ANDREWS — The member for Caulfield has got a lot to say about this.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will ignore interjections, and I ask the member for Caulfield to stop interjections. If she has a question, she has an opportunity to ask it.

Mr ANDREWS — What is beyond any doubt is that this government has supported the Latrobe Regional Health Service, and it will continue to support it in the important work that it does. A six-bed, short-stay unit was opened on 19 March earlier this year.

Mrs Shardey interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Caulfield.

Mr ANDREWS — Also I announced earlier this year \$350 000 for interim works to provide more beds in the emergency department. It is a very busy

emergency department and one that is worthy of additional support. That is why as a government we have provided that additional support, to increase treatment capacity —

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question. The question related to the cancellation of elective surgery and the consequent impact upon patients who were not having that surgery undertaken upon them. I would ask you to have the minister answer that question.

The SPEAKER — Order! I am going to find it very difficult to uphold the point of order. The question clearly was a two-part question, which under standing orders possibly should not have been allowed. However, the Leader of The Nationals asked two distinct questions, and I believe the minister is being relevant.

Mr ANDREWS — As I was saying, in relation to record support by the government of this fine health service, which does a great job supporting families in that local community, there is \$350 000 for interim works to expand the capacity of what is a busy emergency department. Further to that, just this year I have been pleased to announce additional support for medical and other equipment across the health service with an allocation of more than \$600 000.

What is absolutely clear is that this government has stood behind Latrobe regional health service, providing it with the record funding it needs to treat more patients and provide better care. It is my expectation that the health service will continue to provide high levels of care and treat record numbers of patients with record support by and record funding from the Brumby Labor government.

Water: food bowl modernisation project

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — My question is to the Minister for Water. I refer the minister to the fact that some opponents of the Brumby Labor government's northern Victorian irrigation renewal project are making false assertions about the modernisation and the pipeline. Can the minister outline to the house the true benefits of this project?

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Water) — I thank the member for Macedon for her question, because this is an opportunity to remind the house of the benefits that this project will bring to all Victorians. It has taken a Labor government to invest \$1 billion in stage 1 of the food bowl modernisation project and to attract up to

\$1 billion in additional funding for stage 2 of this vital project for regional Victoria.

Far from the claims made by some who are opposed to this project being true, the truth, as all honourable members know, is that this project is in fact a vote of confidence in northern Victoria and the future of northern Victoria through its providing for irrigated agriculture and irrigated horticulture so that producers are able to export their products to markets around the world and have an optimistic, forward-looking future in the decades ahead. That is exactly why the Brumby government has embraced this proposition from regional Victoria, because by investing in irrigation upgrades we can achieve savings and share in those savings with the groups and organisations that are involved in funding those irrigation investments in the first place.

Firstly, in relation to the savings, because a lot has been said about the savings, let us be absolutely clear on the issue. The government's belief that these savings can be made is based not just on the average inflows over the last hundred years; the government's commitment to and belief in these savings and the belief of supporters of this project are based on the average inflows over the last 10 to 15 years, over the period during which we have been experiencing one of the worst droughts in the nation's history. So even with those average inflow scenarios over the last 10 to 15 years, we know these savings can be made and we know this irrigation infrastructure can be improved to support savings of that magnitude.

In relation to the claim that somehow Melbourne is stealing water from regional Victoria, the facts are these: Melbourne's investment in 75 gigalitres of water will cost Melbourne water users \$300 million. For that \$300 million we will receive something like just under 20 per cent of the water. Irrigators in the region will invest \$100 million, and in return they will receive in excess of 40 per cent of the water savings that are generated as a consequence of the project. Contrary to the claims of the member for Rodney, irrigators will have more water as a consequence of this investment, not less.

In relation to the claims that somehow Melbourne will take more than 75 gigalitres of water, the facts are these: Melbourne's legal entitlement to water under this project will be capped as part of its bulk entitlement, and the operation of the pipeline and the manner in which the water savings will be delivered will ensure that Melbourne cannot take more than 75 gigalitres in any year. The claim that has been made in relation to this project is that Lake Eildon will somehow have less

water as a consequence of this investment. The facts are these: Lake Eildon will have more water on average as a consequence of this project, not less, and the reason Lake Eildon will have more water is that Lake Eildon will store the savings which occur as a consequence of this project before they are distributed amongst the various project proponents.

The truth is that the claim has been made that somehow Lake Eildon will become a closed reservoir or a closed catchment. The truth in relation to this claim is that nothing could be further from the truth. All of the recreational uses — the boating, the fishing and the other activities that occur at Lake Eildon — will continue to occur as a consequence of this project just as they always have.

There have been claims made in relation to this project that somehow some of the geotechnical survey work that has been conducted in relation to the Sugarloaf interconnector has been conducted without the appropriate commonwealth approvals. The fact is that every piece of geotechnical survey work that has been done has been done with the express commonwealth approvals that are required. Those things have been in place. Honourable members opposite know that to be true, despite the assertions and the claims that they have made in this place.

The truth is that this project is a vitally important project for northern Victoria. This project is a vote of confidence by both the state and commonwealth governments that this is a region that has a strong and prosperous future, but only if all share in the investment that is required to underscore the ongoing future competitiveness of irrigated agriculture and horticulture. That is exactly what this government is doing. That is exactly why we have made this investment. It has taken a Labor government to do it. It has taken a Labor government to invest in \$2 billion worth of infrastructure upgrades to underscore the future of this vitally important part of this state.

Australian Labor Party: Kororoit candidate

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to allegations by Craig Otte, a former electorate officer to the then member for Kororoit, that Natalie Suleyman, a Brimbank city councillor, broke the law by giving a false report to police, leading to the failed prosecution of Cr Samir Tabban, and I ask: what action has the government taken to ensure these claims that Cr Suleyman broke the law were fully investigated, or did the government take steps to prevent such an investigation from proceeding?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I am not aware of the matter which has been raised by the honourable member. If a matter such as that raised by the honourable member for Kew did occur and was raised, it would be a matter for the police.

Agriculture: food bowl modernisation project

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — My question is to the Minister for Agriculture, and I ask: can the minister explain the benefits of the food bowl modernisation project to agriculture in northern Victoria?

Mr HELPER (Minister for Agriculture) — I thank the member for Yan Yean for giving me this opportunity to add to the answer by the Premier and the answer from the Minister for Water in terms of the benefits of the food bowl modernisation to irrigators and to agriculture in northern Victoria.

Let me just put one point on the record — that is, the irrigation system in the Goulburn system is antiquated. It is a 90-year-old system that is antiquated and desperately needs investment. It is an investment that should have come during the years of the previous government. It takes a Labor government to secure the funding for this particular project and it takes a federal Labor government to commit up to stage 2.

In terms of the benefits that the modernisation will bring to agriculture, as has been outlined by the Minister for Water, there is obviously 75 gigalitres of water that will be available to irrigators to be generated by the savings of stage 1 — 225 gigalitres of savings in stage 1 to be shared between irrigators, the environment and Melbourne water users.

The Victorian Farmers Federation has indicated that it thinks that there is a possibility of greater water savings than that, and we look forward to realising those greater savings and using them to the benefit of, in part, agriculture also. Simon Ramsay, the president of the Victorian Farmers Federation, in a recent media release equated 75 gigalitres of productive water to \$63 million worth of dairy and horticulture production in the district. So 75 gigalitres equals \$63 million of agricultural production in the food bowl. I think the president of the Victorian Farmers Federation was somewhat conservative in that evaluation, but at that very base evaluation irrigators in northern Victoria will be \$63 million better off — or their production will be \$63 million higher — as a consequence of the investment that the state government and Melbourne water users are making in the food bowl modernisation.

I will now come to why I suggest that figure is somewhat low. If we go to the food bowl modernisation project steering committee, which is made up of representatives from the Victorian Farmers Federation and many other august individuals, its report of November 2007 puts the gross value of increased agricultural production for stage 1 and stage 2 at \$1.634 billion. Agriculture in Victoria and in the northern irrigation area will benefit tremendously from the investment that is being made.

The government is very keen to ensure that we maximise the benefits that flow to agriculture from the investment we are making from the 75 gegalitres of additional water — from the investment that is coming predominantly from outside of the region to modernise this antiquated irrigation system that was neglected by the previous government. That is why we are investing through the Future Farming strategy, released a few weeks ago, \$2.3 million to ensure that farmers can capture the benefits of the irrigation modernisation. This project is one that is fantastic for agriculture. This project is one that will modernise the irrigation system, which has been so sorely neglected by previous governments for such a long time.

Public transport: western suburbs

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to comments made by the former member for Kororoit on 3 June in the *St Albans, Deer Park, Caroline Springs Star* that:

We, in the past, have allowed people in the inner city to dictate our transport needs.

Is it not a fact that the government has ignored and neglected public transport in the western suburbs?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I think the former member for Kororoit was making a very important point — that is, that in the context of the government's considerations in relation to the Eddington report it is important that the government keep a clear focus on the needs of the outer suburbs. I saw the article to which the honourable member refers, and if my memory is correct the former member for Kororoit was referring to the Eddington report and was making a very important point about this report, which is before government and out for public consultation at the moment until mid-July. There will then be a full consideration of that within government, and all of the transport matters raised by Sir Rod Eddington in his report will be considered.

I reject the proposition put by the shadow Minister for Public Transport. The fact of the matter is we have

invested significantly through Meeting Our Transport Challenges, which is a \$10.5 billion investment over 10 years. We have put in place the new early bird system — free travel on public transport before 7.00 a.m. Victoria is the only state that has provided free travel. We have reformed the timetabling arrangements, which means that 200 additional services are being provided across the suburbs of Melbourne, and we have ordered new trains.

The fact of the matter is that because of the unprecedented population growth that we are experiencing and the high price of petrol there is unprecedented demand for our public transport service. During the 1990s there was basically no growth in public transport patronage. Patronage is presently growing by 12 per cent per annum. You can go back to last year and the year before and see that we are enjoying the biggest population boom in the state's history. It is bigger than the gold rush, bigger than the post-war migration boom. That degree of confidence and growth in our state, combined with high petrol prices, is driving strong demand in the system.

I think what the people of Kororoit can be confident about is that if it is a choice between a Labor government, our government, and any other sort of government, the only government that can be trusted to make those investments in infrastructure services — in transport, schools, hospitals and preschool centres; all of those things throughout the western suburbs — is a Labor government.

Rail: north-eastern Victoria

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — My question is for the Minister for Public Transport. I ask the minister to outline to the house details from the recent announcement of the north-east rail revitalisation project.

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Public Transport) — I thank the member for Seymour for his question and for his interest in and support for this very important project. As has been mentioned already, it takes Labor governments to make changes in a whole series of areas right across Victoria. It certainly takes a Labor government to invest in regional rail, which we have seen since we came to office. Regional fast rail has been delivered by this government. The \$133 million buyback of the regional freight network, which was completely destroyed by the previous government, took a Labor government. The Mildura freight line upgrade — it took a Labor government to respond to that. And of course the gold lines are being upgraded,

as announced in the previous budget. It takes a Labor government to invest in regional rail.

On Friday, 30 May, I was very proud and pleased to be with the Premier when he announced the next commitment we are making to regional rail in Victoria, very proud — along with the members for Seymour, Murray Valley, Benambra and Benalla. They were also very proud of the commitment that we were making.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms KOSKY — He was very proud. I saw him outside after the announcement, and he endorsed the initiative.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister should not have to raise her voice to be heard. I ask all members to cease the constant chatter and constant interjections.

Ms KOSKY — This is an incredibly exciting project, not only for the people of Wodonga but for people right along the north-east rail corridor. It is a \$501 million investment in the upgrading of the north-east rail corridor, and it will deliver huge benefits for both passenger services and rail freight services. It is an example of what you can do not only with one Labor government but with two Labor governments, both federal and state. It is about the cooperative nature of the relationship, and this is a nation-building project.

I also want to congratulate the Australian Rail Track Corporation, which has entered into a 45-year lease with our government to run and make investments in the corridor along with the Victorian and federal governments.

What will this project deliver? It will provide the conversion of the 200-kilometre broad gauge track between Seymour and Albury to standard gauge; it will duplicate the standard gauge for rail freight; and it will upgrade the standard gauge line between Melbourne and Seymour. It will provide new platforms for Seymour and Broadmeadows and improve the existing platforms at Avenel, Euroa, Violet Town, Chiltern and Springhurst. It will provide a new station at Wodonga and remove the rail line from the centre of Wodonga. Doing that will also open up a large amount of land in the heart of Wodonga, which is very important to the people in Wodonga and will greatly improve rail safety by removing level crossings throughout that corridor. It will provide a massive investment right along that rail corridor — not only whilst the works are being done but also once the works have been completed.

In terms of passenger services, it is also great news for Seymour, for Wangaratta, for Benalla and for Albury-Wodonga. They will have access to both V/Line and CountryLink services. That is five return services each day along the north-east corridor. They will be faster — the train will travel up to 130 kilometres per hour — more comfortable and more reliable, and it will take around half an hour off the length of that trip. I know that the people along the corridor are delighted with this news.

But of course this news is not just supported by this side of the house. We have had wide praise for this announcement. The Wodonga mayor, Rodney Wangman, after he had finished hugging the Premier and me, said that this announcement realises a rare opportunity to renew the heart of Wodonga. He went on to say that the commencement of this project will be an historic occasion for Wodonga and a great day for residents. Towong mayor, John Mitchell, said that making the line standard gauge is a huge step, not just for Victoria but for Australia. It is not just people in Victoria who are supporting and praising this project. The mayor of Albury, Cr Stuart Baker, said:

It's great news for Wodonga, and a really great boost for regional Victoria and southern NSW.

It is a fantastic project. It is a nation-building project, and it is a fantastic example of the cooperation you can have between the states and the federal government when they are focused on investing in regional rail in particular but also on services that people care about. I am very proud and delighted that, with the Premier, we were able to make this announcement on behalf of the Labor government.

Premier: Kororoit electorate by-election

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Given that the people of Kororoit face a snap by-election in just 18 days and that the Labor Party still has not selected a candidate, will the Premier now confirm that he is this weekend travelling overseas to San Diego and Seattle, returning only a few days before the poll, demonstrating yet again that the Premier takes the people of Kororoit for granted?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — What is important to people in Melbourne, Victoria and the western suburbs generally is the state of our economy and the investment the state government makes in health, education and community safety. What is important to families in the western suburbs? Jobs are pretty important. In the calendar year 2007 the state which generated more jobs than any other state in Australia

was Victoria. We can also say of building approvals that in the period to April this year the highest value of building approvals — —

Dr Napthine — Answer the question.

Mr BRUMBY — I am answering the question; I was asked about the western suburbs, and I am answering it.

The SPEAKER — Order! The conversation between the member for South-West Coast and the Premier is most inappropriate. I ask the member for South-West Coast not to interject in that manner, as I have asked him earlier in question time.

Mr BRUMBY — Regarding building approvals, in the year to April Victoria had the highest number of building approvals in Australia; regarding skills, we will have more apprenticeship and traineeship completions — 42 600 — in the year ending June 2009 than any other state; and of course we have strong population growth. On top of all that we had the announcement today at Altona — an historic announcement, a landmark announcement, a green-letter day for the industry — which will generate more investment and jobs throughout the western suburbs of Melbourne. In terms of education, we have made a substantial investment in schools in the electorate. In the health area we have invested substantially in Sunshine Hospital.

At a function I think close to a month ago, with the Minister for Environment and Climate Change in the other place, Gavin Jennings, who is also the Minister for Innovation, I announced that consistent with what we have done over the last eight years we have been in government — it has been the practice for the Premier and the Minister for Innovation to attend — I will be attending the BIO conference in the United States of America. I will be away for one week, and as I said, that is consistent with the approach that was taken by the Premier and the Minister for Innovation in the past.

We have a good story to tell about the western suburbs of Melbourne. That is the fastest growing metropolitan area anywhere in Australia. We are investing in education, in health and in additional police throughout the area. In relation to additional police, there are 177 uniformed police serving in the Brimbank police service area — that is, an additional 40 uniformed police. Since the election of our government there has been a 21.8 per cent fall in the crime rate in that area. We have a good record in this area, and we intend to build on it in the future.

Regional and rural Victoria: government initiatives

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — My question is to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development. Can the minister advise the house about the Brumby government's policies to attract new investment to regional and rural Victoria and outline any alternative policy ideas?

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Regional and Rural Development) — I thank the member for Ballarat West for her question. As we have already heard this afternoon in the house, the Brumby Labor government has made massive investments in water and rail infrastructure, and you just have to look at the record of this government in attracting regional development to see the great results. Since October 1999 this government has attracted \$9 billion worth of facilitated investments in regional and rural Victoria. That has directly resulted in more than 16 480 new jobs in our regions. These are the sorts of results you get when you have a government that has the policies and programs in place to support investment and jobs in our regions, rather than treating our regions like the toenails of the state, as the Leader of the Opposition and his new sidekick did when they were in government.

Mr Eren interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Lara!

Ms ALLAN — Just last week the government demonstrated once again how it has the policies and programs in place that will continue to support our regions. Last week the Premier launched in Ballarat, with the member for Ballarat West, our Moving Forward update. This is a \$68 million package of initiatives which builds on the \$502 million Moving Forward action plan that was released in November 2005 and is the key plank of the government's regional action blueprint. This update refocuses Moving Forward initiatives and delivers new ones across five key priority areas.

It delivers \$25.2 million for new infrastructure; \$8.1 million to support and expand regional industries; over \$7 million for skills development; and over \$10 million to support communities to cope with the ongoing effects of drought and a changing climate. We have also given a significant boost to the planning capacity of our state's 48 regional and rural communities, which includes the landmark \$15.9 million regional planning initiative. This is going to help our regions prepare for the extra population

growth that is expected as Victoria accommodates an extra 1 million people by 2020.

It has been great to see how the Moving Forward update has received strong support from across the state. The Municipal Association of Victoria said that the new direction in regional planning was great news for local government. The regional cities group, representing the 10 largest provincial local government areas across Victoria, said the package 'proves the Brumby government has not turned its back on regional Victoria'. The leader of the group, Cr Robert Paino from the Rural City of Wangaratta, went on to say:

Regional Cities Victoria gives its strongest endorsement for the Moving Forward update and looks forward to continuing to work with the government ensuring regional Victoria remains the best place to live, work and invest.

Those comments were from the mayor of Wangaratta and the leader of local government communities across Victoria — which is so much more than we can say for the Liberal-Nationals coalition.

The member for Ballarat West asked me about other policy ideas. While the Brumby government has been working hard investing in new infrastructure projects and attracting new investments into our region, the coalition has produced nothing despite actually promising to deliver something. Back in April the Leader of The Nationals said he would present a list to the government by the end of May. Apparently he had been listening to regional and rural communities. Here we are in June, but nothing has come of the Leader of The Nationals' empty words and empty commitments. Once again on that side of the house the policy cupboard is bare.

As this house has heard a number of times already today, it is only Labor that will invest in regional communities. It is only Labor that will work with regional communities to invest in those things that matter, and it is only Labor that will continue to work to make regional Victoria the best place to live, work, invest and raise a family.

RULINGS BY THE CHAIR

Member for Narre Warren North: comments

The SPEAKER — Order! At the conclusion of the adjournment debate on Thursday, 29 May, the member for Kew raised with me a point of order with regard to a matter raised by the member for Narre Warren North. I have carefully considered the contribution made by the member, and I uphold the point of order. I have formed

the view that by naming a member for South Eastern Metropolitan Region in his contribution, the member for Narre Warren North has impugned a member from the other place. I ask him to apologise to the house.

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — I apologise.

NATIONAL PARKS AND CROWN LAND (RESERVES) ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) introduced a bill for an act to amend the National Parks Act 1975, the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978, the Forests Act 1958 and the Mineral Resources (Sustainable Development) Act 1990 and for other purposes.

Read first time.

LAND (REVOCAION OF RESERVATIONS) (CONVENTION CENTRE LAND) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to provide for the revocation of reservations of various parcels of land in the Yarra River Wharf and Polly Woodside areas and for other purposes.

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — I ask the minister for an explanation of the bill.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — The member might not have noticed it but the government is building a convention centre down on the Yarra River. This bill provides for the revocation of reservations of various parcels of land in the Yarra Wharf and the Polly Woodside areas in order to construct the convention centre.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (ELECTIONS) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Local Government) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Local Government Act 1989 and the City of Melbourne Act 2001 to facilitate the holding of local government elections and for other purposes.

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill.

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Local Government) — This bill will amend both of those acts to deal with a range of electoral matters including caretaker provisions, nominations, candidates nominating in person or by statutory declaration where they are unable to, enrolment of corporations, issues around single car parking spaces and moorings, and new offences pertaining to candidates, scrutineers and voters who make false declarations. They are very good amendments.

Mr K. Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! Outside the chamber the member for Bass can do as he pleases.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

SUPERANNUATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Emergency Services Superannuation Act 1986, the State Superannuation Act 1988, the Transport Superannuation Act 1988 and the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority Act 1996 and for other purposes.

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — I ask the minister for a brief explanation.

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission) — Now I have the undivided attention of the house, the primary purposes of this legislation are to provide access to post-retirement accumulation products and services to members of the former SSF (State Superannuation

Fund), to make some changes and clarify some arrangements in relation to the responsibilities of the ESSS (Emergency Services Superannuation Scheme) board, and also to facilitate the introduction of some of the flexible workplace practices that are a consequence of the recent Victoria Police enterprise bargaining agreement.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

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 41 to 43 and 168 to 175 will be removed from the notice paper on the next sitting day. A member who requires the notice standing in his or her name to be continued must advise the Clerk in writing before 6.00 p.m. today.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Bass electorate: health services

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

With the withdrawal of local doctors to operate the accident and emergency service for the Bass Coast, the demise of the Warley Hospital on Phillip Island, the rapid increase in growth and ageing population, the increasing tourist population and the proposed desalination project has put and will increase further pressure on the local hospital and ancillary services of this community. To provide specialist services within this community instead of travelling to Melbourne or Traralgon. This has also put extreme pressure on the Rural Ambulance Service to cover the lack of hospital services in this area.

We, the undersigned concerned citizens of Victoria, ask the Victorian Parliament and the Minister for Health to support our petition for funding the upgrade of the health services in the Bass Coast region.

By Mr K. SMITH (Bass) (77 signatures)

Water: desalination plant

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of Victoria points out to the house that, given the lack of information and consultation with the public, we are totally opposed to the proposed desalination plant on the following grounds:

Desalination is an energy intensive and unnecessarily costly means of addressing water shortages. Any renewable energy offsets need first to be directed to reducing the impact of current levels of energy use.

The construction of the plant poses potential risks to marine and marine park environments.

Aboriginal heritage sites are also at risk. Detailed environmental effects studies have not been undertaken.

Inappropriate siting of the plant has potential detrimental effects on coastal space, with the likelihood of destroying the very values which attract visitors and residents to Bass Coast.

The development is at conflict with state and local government policies, especially marine protection, Victorian coastal strategy, Victorian coastal spaces study and Bass Coast strategic coastal framework.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria directs immediate consultation between government and the local community's representative committee to address the issues as listed above.

By Mr K. SMITH (Bass) (175 signatures)

Water: catchment logging

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

We, the undersigned, draw to the attention of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria that logging of high conservation forest is occurring at the Armstrong Creek catchment.

We the people, are outraged that at a time when Victoria is experiencing its most severe drought, logging of this catchment is reducing our water supply.

We are equally concerned at the fact that logging of this catchment is destroying the habitat of Victoria's endangered faunal species, the Leadbeater's possum.

We, therefore, call on the Victorian government to immediately cease logging of the Armstrong, Thomson, Cement, McMahons and Starvation catchments.

By Ms LOBATO (Gembrook) (353 signatures)

Maffra Secondary College: funding

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the residents of Maffra and district draws to the attention of the house its extreme disappointment that the state government has not honoured its pre-election commitment to fund major redevelopment at Maffra Secondary College. The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria calls on the state government to honour its commitment in this financial year, as publicly stated in a recent media release.

By Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) (85 signatures)

Tabled.

Ordered that petitions presented by member for Bass be considered next day on motion of Mr K. SMITH (Bass).

Ordered that petition presented by member for Gembrook be considered next day on motion of Ms LOBATO (Gembrook).

Ordered that petition presented by member for Gippsland East be considered next day on motion of Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East).

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 7

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) presented *Alert Digest No. 7* of 2008 on:

- Children's Legislation Amendment Bill**
- Courts Legislation Amendment (Juries and Other Matters) Bill**
- Crimes (Controlled Operations) Amendment Bill**
- Melbourne Cricket Ground Amendment Bill**
- Unclaimed Money Bill**
- Wildlife Amendment (Marine Mammals) Bill**

together with appendices.

Tabled.

Ordered to be printed.

Police Integrity Bill

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) presented report, together with appendices, a minority report, an extract from the proceedings and transcripts of evidence.

Tabled.

Ordered that report, minority report, appendices and extract from the proceedings be printed.

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 — Order under s 17D granting a lease over Mordialloc-Mentone Beach Park Reserve

Major Events (Crowd Management) Act 2003 — Order declaring a managed access area under s 7

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

Bass Coast — C84

Greater Bendigo — C106

Greater Shepparton — C79

South Gippsland — C44

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Conveyancers Act 2006 — SRs 48, 49

Estate Agents Act 1980 — SRs 39, 46

Fair Trading Act 1999 — SR 45

Magistrates' Court Act 1989 — SR 43

Public Transport Competition Act 1995 — SR 42

Sale of Land Act 1962 — SR 47

Trade Measurement Act 1995 — SR 38

Trade Measurement (Administration) Act 1995 — SR 38

Transport Act 1983 — SRs 40, 41

Travel Agents Act 1986 — SR 44

Wildlife Act 1975 — SR 50

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Minister's exception certificate in relation to Statutory Rule 43

Ministers' exemption certificates in relation to Statutory Rules 38, 39, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50.

The following proclamation fixing an operative date was tabled by the Clerk in accordance with an order of the House dated 19 December 2006:

Justice Legislation Amendment Act 2008 — Sections 6, 13(2), 17, 18, 21, 22 and 25 — 3 June 2008 (*Gazette S148, 3 June 2008*).

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent to:

2 June

Justice Legislation Amendment Bill

3 June

Children's Legislation Amendment Bill
Constitution Amendment (Judicial Pensions) Bill
Courts Legislation Amendment (Associate Judges) Bill
Energy and Resources Legislation Amendment Bill

Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill
Public Sector Employment (Award Entitlements) Amendment Bill
The Uniting Church in Australia Amendment Bill

APPROPRIATION MESSAGES

Messages read recommending appropriations for:

Courts Legislation Amendment (Juries and Other Matters) Bill
Unclaimed Money Bill
Wildlife Amendment (Marine Mammals) Bill;

and further appropriation for:

Gambling Regulation Amendment (Licensing) Bill.

DRUGS AND CRIME PREVENTION COMMITTEE

Membership

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — By leave, I move:

That Ms Beattie be appointed a member of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee.

Motion agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Program

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — I move:

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 4.00 p.m. on Thursday, 12 June 2008:

Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill

Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill

Gambling Regulation Amendment (Licensing) Bill

In moving the government business program this week, I clearly indicate to the house that this week will be the week for resolving both the appropriation bill for the Parliament and the general appropriation bill, otherwise known as the budget.

We are setting aside in this week sufficient time to deal with not only those two important pieces of legislation but also the Gambling Regulation Amendment (Licensing) Bill, a bill which I expect will trigger a degree of interest from both sides of the chamber. In that context, to get the budget and the parliamentary appropriation bill through the lower house we have included only one extra bill, although it is an important one which will probably attract a large speaking list — that is, the Gambling Regulation Amendment (Licensing) Bill — on the government business program.

There is plenty of time. In the last parliamentary sitting week I indicated that budget responses should be given that week and during this parliamentary week, so people have had plenty of opportunity to understand when that occasion would arise. Having it on the government business program will see the appropriation bill, or the budget bill, proceed to the upper house at the conclusion of this parliamentary week.

On the off-chance that we complete all of those pieces of legislation before 4.00 p.m. on Thursday, we will then proceed to commence debate on the Cancer Amendment (HPV) Bill, but I do not expect that that will be the case. I just signal those arrangements should we have completed the government business program before Thursday at 4.00 p.m. I commend the motion to the house.

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — The opposition does not oppose the government business program and notes the desire of the government to have debate on both appropriation bills completed by the end of this week. That has been flagged by the Leader of the House for the opposition since both bills were second read in this place.

We have a number of concerns about the business program in relation to the Gambling Regulation Amendment (Licensing) Bill. The concern principally relates to the fact that the government has indicated an unusual step — that is, that if all three bills are completed by 4.00 p.m. on Thursday we will be moving on to the Cancer Amendment (HPV) Bill. While not unknown, it is certainly unusual that the Leader of the House has flagged that there is a reserve chute. Given the fact that the Leader of the House has flagged there is a reserve chute if we run out of business before 4.00 p.m. on Thursday, a request by the opposition for an opportunity for a second opposition speaker to be given an extension of time on the gaming bill is certainly not unreasonable. The first I heard about the Cancer Amendment (HPV) Bill was when the

Leader of the House just mentioned it. I repeat my request: given the significance of the Gaming Regulation Amendment (Licensing) Bill and the fact that it covers not only the portfolio responsibility of gaming but also touches to a large extent on the portfolio responsibility of racing and sets up a framework relating to wagering in relation to the racing industry — a separate and distinct portfolio responsibility — it is certainly not unreasonable for the opposition to ask for a formal extension of time for the shadow Minister for Racing, the member for South-West Coast, to provide a detailed and adequate response to that bill.

The member for Malvern, the shadow Minister for Gaming, will respond in detail on the bill, but the member for South-West Coast has raised with me a number of deep and profound concerns that need to be elaborated on in the debate. The purpose of debate is to raise these sorts of matters for the benefit of not only the people in Parliament but also the people of Victoria; however, because of the 10-minute time frame that will have to be somewhat truncated and curtailed. Accordingly a request by the opposition for an extension by perhaps 10 minutes to give a total speaking time of 20 minutes to the member for South-West Coast is certainly not unreasonable, given the fact that the government is already flagging that there may have to be a reserve chute if we complete our speaking obligations by 4.00 p.m. on Thursday — that is, a move towards debating the Cancer Amendment (HPV) Bill. That is no doubt a very important bill, but given the fact that the gambling bill has been brought on by the government for this week, a 10-minute extension in the total time for debate on these matters is not completely beyond the pale.

I also mention again that the Water Amendment (Critical Water Infrastructure Projects) Bill has now been on the notice paper since December of 2006, shortly after the last state election. This bill was put on the notice paper and was due to be debated, given its apparent importance in relation to water infrastructure projects, and dealt with by the government. That bill remains undebated in this chamber some 18 months later, and that is a matter of profound concern. The government should either proceed with that bill or do what it has done with other bills and have it removed from the government's business program. I also note from the government business section of the notice paper that debate is pending on a petition presented by the member for Bellarine in relation to Alicia Withington, who seeks some amelioration of the costs associated with brain surgery and retaining her family home. I seek an indication from the government of

when the very important debate in relation to that person will be dealt with by this chamber.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — On behalf of The Nationals I say that we will also not be opposing the government business program, but I also relay the concern raised by the member for Kew just a couple of minutes ago that the bill listed on the notice paper as order of the day 4, the Cancer Amendment (HPV) Bill, could be debated this week.

I again put on the record the fact that members of The Nationals appreciate the notification given to them by the Leader of the House. Through that process we get to know what bills we will be debating. The reason for that is that country members need the opportunity to bring down what files or other information they need for the bills that are to be debated. I also note order of the day 9 on the notice paper concerns Assistance for Alicia Withington, which would be a very worthwhile debate. If we had been given notification of that, members could have brought down appropriate files or other information to allow them partake in a fulsome way in those debates. Such debates in this house are important.

The three bills that have been outlined to be debated this week include the budget, or the appropriation bill. The Nationals have one speaker to go; I understand the Liberals have eight; the next one on the list and who is yet to speak is the Independent; and according to the Leader of the House, many Labor members want to speak on the budget. I hope they can all get through this week so that debate on that bill can be completed.

There will be a few speakers on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. It is a very important one, because after all it is about the running of this house and about the Auditor-General, and comments will be made on that. As outlined by the previous two speakers, the Gambling Regulation Amendment (Licensing) Bill provides for very broad-ranging changes. It changes electronic gaming, scratchies, keno, the gallops, harness racing and greyhounds. I am not sure whether camels are in that legislation, or whether it will cover flies. I know that people in Australia love to bet on anything, including two flies running up a wall, but I am not sure whether that is covered by this bill. But, as outlined by the member for Kew, the shadow Minister for Gaming and also the shadow Minister for Racing wish to make many comments, and they deserve an appropriate extension of time to allow that to happen.

It is important to again put on the record the fact that we in The Nationals are very disappointed that order of the day 8, the Water Amendment (Critical Water

Infrastructure Projects) Bill 2006, is still listed under government business. Amendments came down from the Legislative Council, and the bill was pushed into this house with urgency. With the inflammatory statements that have been made by the Premier and others around the state, we think it is appropriate that that bill be debated. It will give members on all sides a chance to put on the record how they feel about a lot of these critical water infrastructure projects that are happening across the state.

As you know, Acting Speaker, agriculture has a big impact on the employment and economic fortunes of Victoria, and it is important that we have the appropriate water infrastructure to make that impact. The Wimmera–Mallee pipeline is a project that is moving along very well. Again concerns have been raised, even by the Auditor-General, about the cost blow-out, but it is good to see it being built. There are many other projects, though, that need to be talked about.

The food bowl upgrade is supported by all sides of politics, but it is the north–south pipeline, which will take water from the north despite the Labor government promising during the election campaign that it would not be taken, that is upsetting people across Victoria. That pipeline would not have to be part of the project if the government would put up another \$300 million.

On behalf of The Nationals I say again that we are not opposed to the government business program but relevant points have been brought up, particularly by the member for Kew, about an extension of time being allowed to those shadow ministers, and they should be supported.

Mr HODGETT (Kilsyth) — I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on the government business program motion, which we do not oppose. We note the government's desire to get both appropriation bills through this house.

The Leader of the House has flagged that there is a reserve bill; I note and support the comments of the member for Kew — it shows that the government has a bit of trouble getting the program right.

In the last sitting week a number of members had their contributions on the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Bill, the National Gas Bill and the State Taxation Acts Amendments Bill cut short. They were disappointed to be cut short by the 4 o'clock guillotine, when all could have made valuable contributions to debate on those bills. Likewise it has been said that a number of members will want to speak on the

Gambling Regulation Amendment (Licensing) Bill. We seek assurances from the Leader of the House that members will have ample opportunity to make contributions to that debate.

Perhaps the reserve bill should be the Water Amendment (Critical Water Infrastructure Project) Bill 2006, which was the bill for which we were dragged back into Parliament in December 2006, after the election, to debate what was called a 'critical' bill. For the benefit of the government, I thought I would outline the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of 'critical':

Having a decisive importance in the success or failure of something crucial.

Perhaps the government's definition of 'critical' is not the same as the one found in the Oxford dictionary. The government's assertion was false as its definition of 'critical' does not accord with the community's definition.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Minerals and energy: investment

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Energy and Resources) — Currently in Victoria there is a rapid increase in capital investment in Victoria's minerals and energy industry. According to estimates by the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics, at the end of April 2008 the total committed capital expenditure on mineral and energy development projects in Victoria was \$2.2 billion compared with \$435 million at the end of October 2007.

The value of committed mining projects increased from \$120 million to \$329 million and comprised a gold mine development at Ballarat and the second stage of the mineral sands development in the Murray basin. As of April 2008, Victoria accounted for 1.3 per cent of the total value of committed mining projects in Australia compared with 0.5 per cent in October 2007.

The value of committed energy projects also increased sharply from \$315 million to \$1.85 billion. This is 4.8 per cent of the total for Australia, and includes the Kipper gas project — a project to which \$1.3 billion has been committed; and the Longtom gas project — a \$195 million commitment. These figures demonstrate that Victoria's minerals and energy sector is strong and getting stronger.

Planning: Glenelg

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — I condemn the lazy Minister for Planning in the other place for failing to respond in a timely manner on two important planning issues in the Glenelg shire which are really hurting many families in the Portland area.

Firstly, landowners with land between Narrawong and Portland in the area covered by development plan overlay 7 (DPO7) have been in planning limbo since mid-2006. They are unable to develop or subdivide their own land or even build a house or garden shed on it. The minister is directly responsible for the creation of DPO7 and can fix the problem immediately but does nothing. The minister told Parliament in February that this was 'a matter of absolute priority'. Some six weeks ago the Glenelg Shire Council advised the minister on DPO7 but still there has been no action. The families affected by DPO7 deserve a response from the minister so they can get on with their lives.

Similarly, the minister called in a planning application for residential development in Rosdell Court in August 2006. Two years later he has made no decision on this planning application. This land was sold by the state Labor government in 2001 with a residential zoning, but when the owner sought a residential subdivision development the planning minister called the application in. It is two years later and he has done nothing to resolve the matter. This is a slow, lazy minister and the failure to deal with these issues is ruining people's lives and dreams and is sending many into near bankruptcy.

Ian Robins

Mr PALLAS (Minister for Roads and Ports) — I rise to acknowledge the impending retirement of one of Victoria's leading local government chief executive officers, Ian Robins, after 37 years of service in the sector. Since commencing in 1971 Ian has worked in several municipalities. In 1994 he was appointed director, engineering services, at the then Werribee City Council. After the local government restructures, in November 1995 Ian was appointed chief executive officer (CEO) of the Wyndham City Council. Ian has held that position for the past 12 years, a period which has seen enormous change in the city.

The exciting challenges he faced as CEO of Wyndham included: opposing the establishment of the toxic waste dump in Werribee and seeing the upgrade of the Princes Freeway between Melbourne and Geelong. Ian has also been heavily involved in the leadership of a wide range of sector and regional issues too numerous

to mention as he has competently asserted the needs of the fastest growing municipality in Victoria.

Ian is widely known and respected amongst past and present senior government department heads. His strategic and keen analytical skills has left a lasting impression on all senior bureaucrats. His skills in conducting successful advocacy campaigns on behalf of Wyndham's community are legendary and have united the community on several key issues. He leaves a leadership legacy at Wyndham that will be difficult to match. Wyndham is a beacon council in Victoria's local government as a result of Ian's vision, communication and commitment to the success of the council.

Latrobe Regional Hospital: funding

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) — The Brumby government must act upon concerns raised by health-care professionals and the community in regard to service delivery failures at Latrobe Regional Hospital (LRH). Recent public comments attributed to local orthopaedic surgeon Dr George Owen highlight the stress and frustration felt by many in the Morwell electorate. Dr Owen courageously spoke out strongly against the Brumby government's underfunding of LRH and the implications this has created, particularly for those patients requiring elective surgery. On average Dr Owen would perform 12 operations per week, but this is currently down to 3, as the majority of government funding has already been dispersed. There have been a number of patients who have had their surgery cancelled on multiple occasions, which has caused significant angst to staff at LRH and, of course, patients and their families. Staff at LRH are generally highly respected by the community, which understands the enormous commitment and dedication that these people exhibit on a daily basis. However, the Brumby government has failed to act upon the increasing demand for services at LRH, which has led to a decline in standards.

According to the latest *Your Hospitals* report, we have seen total admissions increase by 1440, triage category 3 patients seen within 30 minutes fall by 6 per cent to 76 per cent, and those admitted to a bed within 8 hours fall from 73 per cent to 50 per cent in a six-month period. Despite the availability of surgeons, nurses, beds and patients there is limited elective surgery currently being undertaken because this uncaring Brumby government does not understand the funding requirements for Latrobe Regional Hospital.

Kalkallo fire brigade art show

Ms BEATTIE (Yuroke) — It was with great pleasure that I, along with the hardworking member for Seymour, attended the annual Kalkallo fire brigade art show on Friday evening. Now in its 12th year, this art show has become extremely popular in the local community, and, as in the many years before, it has again impressed visitors with a variety of exceptional artwork. This annual art show provides a great opportunity not only to showcase the terrific array of local talent but also to demonstrate the wonderful creative drive and energy within the community.

I would like to thank the sponsors and the Clarke family, who give their property over for the weekend for this wonderful art show. Also there were over 60 artists who exhibited works, including well-known locals Betty Maher and Deb Evans. I would like to congratulate the captain, officers and members of the Kalkallo fire brigade for again putting on a highly valued community event. In particular I would like to congratulate Ned Pannuzzo, the captain, and Kerri Burns for their outstanding contribution to organising this art show. I understand that this year the funds raised will go towards buying a breathing apparatus which will be used at the Beveridge satellite station. It will be great for the local community.

Rail: Lakeside station

Mr K. SMITH (Bass) — The Premier's answer today at question time regarding public transport had me not quite understanding where he was at, because the government has not done anywhere near enough for public transport. At a time when petrol costs are spiralling and people are using public transport more and more we have a government encouraging people to use public transport, yet it will not support the people of Pakenham by building a new station on land that has been provided by the council and the developer at Lakeside near Pakenham. The Delfin Lakeside development has been constructed over the past six or seven years, and if people who are on that estate want to catch a train they have to go to Pakenham station, approximately 5 kilometres away. The people in this very successful and fast-growing development are not able to get used to public transport, and a large number have had to invest in a second car instead of being able to walk to a station a maximum of a kilometre away.

What is wrong with this government when it knows that the railway station has to be built? The government's own VicUrban has encouraged further development in the area where people could use the trains if there was a station; 2012 or 2015 is too late.

People will have established their own travel patterns in lieu of using public transport. This is a disaster for these working families living in that estate and in the new estate to be built at the Arena area.

Alexandra Truck, Ute and Rod Show

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — I rise to congratulate the organisers of the Alexandra Truck, Ute and Rod Show on a fantastic weekend of activities over the Queen's Birthday weekend. The event was a great success and has been running for 12 years. This year the event attracted between 12 000 and 13 000 people and included on the Saturday night a hoedown for country music lovers as well as a popular Alexandra Speedway event. The truck, ute and rod show brings many visitors to the area and provides a great showcase of local talent and industry, including the second largest woodchop in the state and a popular quilting exhibition as well.

On behalf of the Alexandra community I would like to thank the Minister for Regional and Rural Development for providing a \$10 000 grant from the Provincial Victoria local events program to assist the organising committee with putting on this major event that sees at least six times the town's population come to Alexandra. Reports of accommodation being booked out were fantastic. It is a very important fundraiser for the many local groups that get behind this event.

Andrew Embling

Mr HARDMAN — It is fitting that on this weekend Andrew Embling, who is one of the hardworking organisers of the truck, ute and rod show, was awarded an OAM (Medal of the Order of Australia), recognising his outstanding work for the community. Andrew Embling works tirelessly for his community, and he is a very deserving recipient of this honour. It is great to see that people like Andrew, who work so hard to ensure local rural communities thrive, are recognised in this way. There would be few community groups in the Alexandra district that have not benefited from the efforts that Andrew makes. On behalf of all the people of the Seymour electorate I say thank you and congratulations to Andrew on his well-deserved OAM.

Maroondah Hospital: funding

Mrs VICTORIA (Bayswater) — We have an increasing crisis in our hospitals, and this government is trying to hide it. The *Your Hospitals* report took a back seat to the federal budget, and the Auditor-General's report on patient safety proved how bad things are becoming. Maroondah Hospital is still well below its

target of having 80 per cent of emergency patients transferred to a hospital bed within 8 hours, currently sitting at a meagre 58 per cent. Patients must wait almost two years to see a public dentist in Maroondah — among the longest waiting periods in the metropolitan area. Maroondah patients also must wait up to 30 months for denture care.

Prior to the last federal election those opposite blamed the Howard government for this crisis. What has the Rudd government done in seven months? Nothing, except make grandiose symbolic gestures that do not help everyday battlers. Perhaps the public is not aware of recent reports that hospitals have been falsifying numbers and changing figures in order to meet *Your Hospitals* targets to receive bonuses. Nothing is being done to detect or prevent this data changing. It just demonstrates how desperately additional funding is needed when professional providers have to stoop so low. The Brumby Labor government needs to stop trying to deceive the public and, more importantly, start providing Victorians with the services their ever-increasing debt is capable of paying for.

Wantirna Primary School: logo

Mrs VICTORIA — Congratulations to Pam Hill, the inspirational principal at Wantirna Primary School, and all her staff, students and parents for developing a brilliant new logo for their school. The logo demonstrates the nurturing environment this community-minded school offers its children and its families.

Ken Eckersall

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — I rise today to congratulate Mr Ken Eckersall on recently receiving the Clare Wositzky award for his terrific dedication to Amnesty International and to the pursuit of human rights for many of society's most vulnerable. The prestigious Clare Wositzky award is named after one of the principal founders of the first Amnesty International group in Australia formed on 28 November 1961. Ken has received the award in recognition of his 27 years of service to Amnesty International, including almost a decade as a convenor of the local Eltham group. In that time Ken has raised thousands of dollars for Amnesty International, written a history of the Eltham group to commemorate its 25th year and written over 2000 letters to world leaders on behalf of people or groups whose liberty is under threat.

Ken Eckersall is an active resident who contributes much more to his community than he takes out. This prestigious award is a small but welcome recognition of

a tremendous life of dedication to justice and humanitarianism — a life which I am sure will continue and an activity which will continue for many decades to come. I congratulate Mr Eckersall on his achievements and thank him very much for the work he has done for Amnesty International.

Baroona Youth Healing Place

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — Last Friday I had the pleasure to attend the opening of the Baroona Youth Healing Place near Echuca. Baroona is an initiative of the Njernda Aboriginal Corporation and was constructed in an effort to reduce delinquency and drug and alcohol abuse within the local Aboriginal communities. Declaring itself a residential rehabilitation program, Baroona is a place in a bush setting where young Aboriginals can go and reconnect with the land and re-establish a relationship with the natural world. The Baroona farm is 8 kilometres from Echuca, yet feels completely removed from time and refreshingly unencumbered by the constraints of modern life. It is spread across 320 acres of land on the Murray River and will shield the youths who attend the facility from unhealthy, modern and addictive distractions.

Participants of the program will arrive after they have completed their drug or alcohol withdrawal process at an approved unit. Once at Baroona they will have their individual needs recognised and will be encouraged to create their own healing journey by identifying individual strengths, networks, cultural identities and healing techniques. One-on-one counselling at Baroona will be augmented with group work revolved around education, healthy lifestyle choices, traditional and contemporary healing techniques, personal development, sports, arts and crafts. I congratulate Njernda on taking such a strong stance against drug and alcohol abuse.

Doug Poad

Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) — In a tremendously sad fortnight, two long-time, dedicated and much-loved Labor members have passed away. Doug Poad joined the ALP some 42 years ago, and it was my distinct pleasure to present him with his 40-year medallion in 2006. Doug finally succumbed to prostate cancer in late May when this most debilitating disease saw him suddenly decline. A secondary school history teacher by profession, Doug was never short of an opinion on topical issues. He kept himself informed right to the very end. Only a few weeks ago he rang ABC radio with a comment on a contemporary issue. He had a profound belief in social justice and always took a

strong interest in indigenous issues. Until recently Doug was working on another publication on this subject, travelling to Canberra for further research notwithstanding his health concerns. On behalf of all branch members in Frankston, I offer my deepest sympathies and sincere condolences to Margaret and all of Doug's family.

Fay O'Reilly

Dr HARKNESS — Fay O'Reilly was also a branch member with an extraordinary, generous spirit and a terrific sense of humour. In her younger days Fay was a dancer at the Tivoli. She was a frequent visitor to a local hotel in Frankston which has steps at the back leading down to the car park. Whenever she left the building, she would pause at the top of the steps, break into song and take a bow. At 82 years Fay maintained an interest in current affairs and issues of the day. An extremely kind person, Fay was always thinking of others. She had become very proficient at the skill tester game at Karingal Hub shops, often winning toys which she would then give away to children and families. I very much enjoyed our conversations, irregular as they may have been, and welcomed her company at functions when she was able to attend. Best wishes to Fay's husband Pat, son Lance, and Fay's other family and friends.

Government: performance

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — This statement condemns the Brumby Labor government for its continuing failure to provide Victoria with an economic direction. The March quarter 2008 national accounts figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics last week again reinforced Victoria's continuing status as a second-tier state economy under state Labor, and showed Victoria again lagging significantly in the national economy. The national accounts reveal that Victoria has been the hardest hit of any state by the current economic downturn caused by the international credit crunch and rising global oil prices. Victoria's state final demand growth for the March quarter — the total demand for goods and services from households, governments, business investment and exports — slowed dramatically from 1.8 per cent growth in the previous quarter to 0.6 per cent, which was the equal lowest of any state along with Tasmania. In comparison South Australia grew by 1.5 per cent; Western Australia, 1.4 per cent; Queensland, 1.1 per cent; and New South Wales, 0.7 per cent.

On an annual basis Victoria's state final demand grew 4.3 per cent in the last 12 months compared to 4.8 per cent growth nationally. Victoria has now been below

the national economic growth figures for seven of the past eight years under Labor. Worse still, Victoria's export industries' volumes also fell by 0.7 per cent over the March quarter — the second consecutive quarter of negative export growth. Under Labor export volumes have now declined by 16 per cent on the levels achieved in 1999, representing a serious deterioration of our export capacity.

Ascot Vale Special School: multimedia resource centre

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I had much pleasure on 20 May to attend the Ascot Vale Special School to launch the new multimedia resource centre. The Ascot Vale Special School is a terrific school in my electorate. The day was very well organised by the teachers and some of the parents of the school as well as the students. The project was funded not only by the school but by considerable funding from the Jack Brockhoff Foundation and the Essendon Lions Club. Both of these organisations are well known for contributing to the community and to charitable institutions.

It was a great afternoon. I think the students showed very quickly how they had mastered the skills of some of the computer technology they were using not only in relation to their academic work but also in playing computer cricket. If they can play as well on the field, there are a few stars of future cricket teams at Ascot Vale Special School. I congratulate the staff on the great deal of work they did to get the project up and for their capacity to encourage strong community support from the local community and the broader community. It was a great day, and I look forward to great things in the future from the Ascot Vale Special School and its new multimedia resource centre.

Tourism: airline services

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — Tourism plays a vital part in the economy of Victoria and to the success of many Yarra Ranges businesses. Hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent by businesses promoting their venues to Japanese and other overseas tourist markets. The long lead times for bookings to flow from inbound tourism companies and the need for continuous and consistent promotions adds to the heavy costs of pursuing overseas tourists. Melbourne had seven direct Qantas flights to Tokyo each week. These were cut back to three. Last Friday Qantas announced it would cease all direct flights between Melbourne and Tokyo in September. Where is the Minister for Tourism and Major Events? Not one word has been reported that he will initiate urgent talks with Qantas — no press

releases, no added support for the tourism industry. It is well recognised in the tourism industry that Japanese travellers are reluctant to transfer between flights when travelling. Of those who travel to Cairns and the Gold Coast, more than half do not continue to other Australian destinations.

The state tourism minister is doing nothing. The federal tourism minister has called a meeting of government bureaucrats and industry leaders to develop a strategic response, whereas the Queensland government in comparison is negotiating and has gained Jetstar flights to Tokyo five times a week and has committed an emergency extra \$4 million to promote tourism to the state and to counteract the cuts to services to Cairns and the Whitsundays. Heaven help any operator that has built their business around the inbound tourism industry. This part-time minister for tourism is there for cutting the ribbons and for photo opportunities, but where is he when the going gets tough? He is nowhere to be seen. Bring back the previous minister!

Heidelberg United Football Club

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — Today I rise to pay tribute to the Heidelberg United Football Club, also known as Alexander the Great. The club was founded in 1958 by Florinian immigrants. Three years earlier those credited with founding the club had begun their own social club, the Clifton Hill social club. Their successful gathering attracted mostly Florinians as well as Greeks. In 1957 discussions to establish a Greek-Macedonian soccer team commenced. This idea for the team is tributed to Markos Economidis from Kato Kline, Florina. Markos managed to convince the committee of the Clifton Hill social club to contribute the funds required to purchase the necessary equipment for the team. The inaugural game was played on 13 September 1958, attracting 400 spectators. In September 1959 the club was successful in being admitted into the Victorian provisional league after having previously been denied entry earlier that year.

By this time the club had managed to build a strong and skilful squad of 21 players, who were almost unbeatable in their category in Victoria. During the inaugural appearance of the provisional league competition Alexander the Great was declared the undisputed champion of the league by easily winning 34 points and scoring 113 goals. In 1966 the club was promoted to State League, and in 1935 the club won Victorian State League championship under the coach Manolis Poulakakis. In 1977 the club was a founder member of the Philips National Soccer League. In 1978, after various discussions with the Heidelberg City Council, the club was moved to Olympic Village.

Roads: Sandringham electorate

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — The failure of the Brumby government to invest huge budget surpluses and massive revenue from road traffic cameras in traffic solutions to ease congestion and reduce danger and carnage on our roads and to match community infrastructure with population growth in Victoria of over 1000 people a week is causing great concern within my electorate. One mother, Gail McKenzie, noted recently:

Black Rock's demographics are changing. We now have a growing population of young families and the shopping strip is always busy with families, children and elderly people crossing Bluff and Balcombe roads, which is a delight to see, but I am concerned for their and my loved ones' safety. Traffic speed off Beach Road, particularly between peak hours in the morning and evening —

is a matter of particular concern.

When they enter onto Bluff Road they are met by either pedestrians trying to cross and/or cars attempting to parallel park or pulling out of spaces, which causes congestion. I have witnessed several incidences of road rage from drivers to each other and also tooting of horns at pedestrians who are putting this lives into their hands attempting to cross the road.

The failure of the Brumby government to address traffic build-up, to provide appropriate traffic remediation and face the necessity to install pedestrian lights at multiple locations in the Sandringham electorate, including Bluff Road, Black Rock in the shopping centre precinct and also the black spot at the intersections of Reserve Road with Tulip Street and Park Road and other locations on Bay Road, Balcombe Road, Beach Road and Reserve Road is a continuing matter of concern and angst.

Williamstown Football Club: achievements

Mr NOONAN (Williamstown) — I rise in response to the member for Albert Park's baseless attack on the Williamstown Football Club. He might be interested to learn that the annual Dog Day Afternoon at Williamstown is held to celebrate the victory of the club's president in avoiding arrest and prosecution at Port Melbourne for the heinous offence of taking his dog to the football, following vigorous attempts by the Port Melbourne hierarchy to have him arrested.

Williamstown prides itself on being the community club of the Victorian Football League. We do not take an exclusionary approach. Families, together with their pets, are all welcome at Williamstown, and we proudly stand by the age-old adage, 'A dog is a man's best friend'. For the member for Albert Park to be waxing lyrical about his club's 133-year history is a bit rich,

when in fact the Williamstown Football Club was one of the first clubs formed in Victoria and has existed since 1864. Williamstown has a rich and proud history, and during the 1950s won six premierships, defeating Port Melbourne on a number of occasions. By comparison the Port Melbourne football club is a mere pup.

Williamstown will not be daunted by the soulless anti-canines who reside under the dark clouds across the bay and who are intent on thwarting full-family participation at traditional Victorian football grounds. The Williamstown Football Club intends to continue with its annual Dog Day and present the Zindzi Cup to the dog most qualified to receive it. Go Towners! A premiership is waiting for us at the end of this season.

Schools: Catholic sector

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — It is extremely disappointing that there is no new education and early childhood funding development funding for Catholic schools in the 2008–09 budget, even though the total new expenditure announced for government schools was \$1.3 billion. I call on the Brumby government to provide full indexation of all state recurrent and targeted grants to the Catholic sector on the basis of the increase in the cost of education in Victoria. Inadequate indexation means that the real value of state grants is continually diminishing. State government funding in Victorian Catholic schools continues to be the worst in Australia. The Brumby government must increase the base Victorian state grant to the Catholic sector to 25 per cent of the cost of educating a student in a government school, in line with the average state/territory contribution across Australia. The Brumby government must provide an additional \$25.5 million per annum to ensure funding equity to the Catholic disadvantaged students and communities. To ensure Catholic students have equal access to technology, funding for internet provision must be increased from \$1.95 million to \$5.9 million per annum to enable needy Catholic schools to have the same bandwidth connection as government schools.

When Mr Brumby became Premier he promised to govern for all Victorians. The current funding inequity between state and Catholic schools is a breach of this promise. It is about time he stopped being divisive and started being fair.

Genetically modified crops: opposition

Ms LOBATO (Gembrook) — Last week in federal Parliament the Liberal member for McMillan in the

House of Representatives, Russell Broadbent, moved a motion in private members business which read:

That the house:

- (1) urges the Australian government to act to restrict any further planting of genetically modified crops in Australia . . . until a full, independent, scientific investigation is carried out to determine:
 - (a) the level of risk to health of foodstuffs containing genetically modified organisms; and
 - (b) the threat of contamination posed by genetically modified crops already planted under relaxed provisions in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria to crops and the food chain as it relates to livestock production in general on neighbouring properties; and
- (2) calls on the Australian government, in considering its course of action, to take into consideration the commitments made by the current Prime Minister on this issue in the lead-up to the 2007 federal election.

The member for McMillan formed his opposition to genetically modified (GM) crops from feedback from his constituents subsequent to conducting extensive research, which included him and his staff speaking to farmers and consumers from one end of McMillan to the other. This motion was seconded by the Liberal member for Latrobe, proving that residents in the outer east and far south-east are opposed to growing and consuming GM foods.

The motion followed on from and referred to the GM-free chefs charter that was recently launched by Greenpeace. Some of Australia's most respected chefs have signed the charter, which opposes the introduction of GM crops and calls for adequate labelling of all foods. Signatories of the charter include Stephanie Alexander and Kylie Kwong, and restaurants on board to capitalise on opposing GM include the South Yarra restaurants France-Soir and the Botanical. The chefs state that, because of the untested long-term risks associated with the growing of GM foods, they are strongly opposed to serving them or ingredients derived from GM products in their restaurants. I congratulate Greenpeace and all chefs taking part and assure them that I and many others will go out of our way to eat at their restaurants.

Westpac Bank: customer service

Mr LIM (Clayton) — A disgruntled Westpac customer has alerted me to an unpleasant experience he has had with that bank. The customer made four small purchases over the internet, which he charged to his MasterCard. He was researching his family history. He made a purchase from the Victorian Registry of Births,

Deaths and Marriages. He then made another purchase from its United Kingdom counterpart, the General Register Office, and another from a similar UK service. This was enough for Westpac to decide someone was fraudulently using the customer's card, which it suspended, without first talking to him.

A simple phone call to the customer would have allowed him to confirm all was okay. Instead the bank sent him an email telling him his card had been suspended. In a show of breathtaking hypocrisy, Westpac said in its email that the customer could not respond by email. When the customer saw the email, some hours later he phoned Westpac. By this time, somewhat incensed, he refused to cooperate with the identification procedure. The bank responded by threatening to cut off his internet banking, even though it was the card and not his internet banking that was in question. It is clear from other cases raised in this house that banks are not perfect in identifying fraud. Instead of being so heavy handed — and the 'B' word comes to mind — they should do more by talking to their customers.

International Men's Health Week

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — Last Friday I had the pleasure of being joined by Daniel Alford, an exercise physiologist, and Hugh Walpole, a social worker, both from Southern Health —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Green) — Order! The member's time has expired, and the time for making members statements has concluded.

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT 2008/2009) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 6 May; motion of Mr BRUMBY (Premier).

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — I rise to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/09) Bill. From the outset I advise that the coalition will not be opposing this bill. However, when the minister sums up the debate we will seek clarification of what appears to be a cut to the budgets of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. I draw the attention of the house to schedule 1 on page 4 of the bill, which is headed 'Parliament department votes — estimates summary'. The schedule states that the Legislative Council had funding of \$2.667 million for the 2007–08 period, and that the estimate for 2008–09 is \$2.637 million. The budget for the Legislative Assembly in 2007–08 was

\$4.111 million, and the estimate for 2008–09 is \$4.076 million. I will come back to that in a moment.

The purpose of the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill is to provide the necessary funds from the Consolidated Fund to operate Parliament for the 2008–09 financial year. It provides budgeted funds totalling \$93.4 million from the Consolidated Fund for the ongoing operations of Parliament for the next financial year, including employee entitlements, building maintenance, asset purchases, parliamentary committees and funding of \$12 million for the Auditor-General's office.

With regard to the operations of Parliament, I first on behalf of the coalition wish to thank the entire parliamentary staff for the excellent service and support they provide to us as members of Parliament and to the Parliament generally. We are very fortunate to have such a dedicated and professional team behind us. I particularly mention the outstanding service provided by the catering team, led by Luke Jordan. Nothing is ever too hard for members of his team, and their special efforts need to be acknowledged.

As deputy chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — the member for Burwood is the chair — I would like to thank not only the committee's staff for their continuing excellent work but all parliamentary committee staff for their efforts to ensure that the Victorian Parliament remains relevant, focused and responsive to community needs and concerns.

The bill also provides for an appropriation totalling \$1.8 million over four years for the provision of live audio and video webcasting of all parliamentary sessions of both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. I know that many people will spend hours watching and listening to that — it will be endless. It will be a big winner out there in Legislative Assembly electorates. This is a welcome initiative which is supported by the coalition and which will hopefully lead to increased openness, transparency and accountability from a Labor government that has had a long history of being totally the opposite — that is, being secretive and continuing to snub the principles of open and transparent government.

I note that other funding is made available to Parliament by way of special appropriations covered by specific legislation. This includes funding for MPs' salaries and allowances, which are governed by the Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation Act. In this regard a special appropriation, which is not part of the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill, has been made for MPs' salaries and allowances and electorate

office funding, which are budgeted to be \$19.2 million in 2008–09. I refer to table 6.4 on page 224 of budget paper 4. The bill also provides for the carrying forward of actual unapplied appropriations from 2007–08, which are estimated to be \$7.6 million, and that information can be found at page 175 of budget paper 4.

The total parliamentary authority for 2008–09, including receipts credited to appropriations of \$15.5 million and total special appropriations of \$20.3 million, is \$137.4 million, an increase of 1 per cent on 2007–08. That can be found at page 175 of budget paper 4. It is worth noting that at page 264 of budget paper 3 the total output summary for Parliament in 2008–09 is \$131.4 million, or 3.5 per cent up on the 2007–08 budget. The total output cost for Parliamentary Services will increase by 8.4 per cent in 2008–09 compared to 2007–08, and this accounts for 68 per cent of the total output cost for Parliament, excluding the allocation for the Auditor-General's office.

Funding of the Auditor-General's office is also by way of a special appropriation governed by the Constitution Act — not part of the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill — and is budgeted to be \$276 000 in 2008–09.

At the beginning of my speech I raised the reduction in expenditure by and the money allocated to the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly. The Legislative Assembly's 2007–08 budget of \$4.111 million has been cut by \$30 000 to \$4.076 million. We need an explanation from the minister as to why that cut has been made. It may be that some of the costs that were the responsibility of the Legislative Assembly have been moved to Parliamentary Services, because the Parliamentary Services budget has increased from \$67.939 million to \$68.449 million. This will need to be explained, because there is no doubt that the Legislative Assembly will have incurred increases in wages and an increase in its running costs. It would also have incurred increases in printing costs. It would have had an increase in the cost of training and in the cost of, for example, general stationery. You would think there would have been increased costs for WorkCover, long service leave, travel costs and in the costs of producing the information sheets the department sends to schoolchildren and members of Parliament. You would have thought the increase in the Legislative Assembly's budget for 2008–09 would have been at least equal to the increase in the consumer price index plus. We need an explanation of why there has been a cut of \$35 000.

There has been a cut of \$30 000 in the Legislative Council's budget, and the same situation applies. You would think the budget for the Council would have increased by at least the CPI, but that is not the case. We will wait to hear an explanation when the minister is summing up of why there has been that reduction. I understand some inquiries have been made in looking for an explanation. The budget was brought down over a month ago, and we need clarification as to why the budgets of the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council have been reduced.

As I have stated in this house before, the Parliament of Victoria is a democratic institution. It enables Victorians, through their elected representatives, to have a direct say in the operation and accountability of the state government and in the making of laws to regulate the behaviour and protect the rights, freedom and liberty of all individuals in our complex and diverse society.

Parliament must be properly resourced and managed to allow democracy to work for all Victorians. However, the continuing lack of resources made available to coalition shadow ministers remains a concern. It is important that we have a strong and effective opposition with access to an appropriate level of resources. That should be an important feature of any democracy.

We in the coalition — the Liberals and The Nationals — are blessed with a strong, talented, hardworking and dedicated team of MPs, and they are backed up very strongly by their staff. As MPs, we have a public duty to ensure that Parliament remains a worthy, effective and respected institution.

However, we should all pause to reflect on why we are here and what is expected of us. The question that needs to be asked is: are Victorians actually receiving the necessary services and essential infrastructure, competent financial management and dynamic leadership from their state Parliament and government? In addition, are Victorians getting genuine value for money from their investment in the institution of Parliament and their elected government? At a time of record state revenues helped by ever-increasing GST receipts from the commonwealth, and expenditure which has doubled since 1999, Victorians should be seeing real, tangible and lasting benefits in terms of service delivery and the provision of infrastructure. Victorians have the right to ask: is the Brumby government demonstrating leadership? Is it indecisive in respect of providing vitally important new infrastructure and services? Is it displaying irresponsible financial management practices which

will see Victoria by 2012 increase its public sector net debt to \$23 billion?

We are not opposing this bill, but I again make the point that we seek clarification as to why there has been a reduction in the budget of the Legislative Assembly.

Ms RICHARDSON (Northcote) — I am very pleased to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. This bill provides funds to the Parliament for its employees and for the conduct of its business here in this building. I also take this opportunity to thank the parliamentary staff — the Hansard staff, library staff, cleaners, gardeners, the dining room staff, the attendants and the presiding officers. The list of workers is quite extensive. They provide invaluable support to us in the house and ensure the smooth running of the place. As a new member to this Parliament, I must say that their professionalism and care made my initiation all the easier, so thank you very much to them.

I welcome the member for Scoresby's comments in respect of electorate office staff and his support of them into the future. We well remember — I was an electorate officer at the time — when the former Kennett government cut electorate office staff by 50 per cent, reducing the number from two electorate office staff members to one. I am pleased that the member for Scoresby is now prepared to acknowledge the important work that electorate officers do, and I look forward to his continuing advocacy of the work they perform.

I would also like to focus particularly on the changes made by the Brumby Labor government in respect of introducing the Parliament to the latest technologies that are available to us. I am specifically talking about the changes that will ensure that the proceedings of the upper house and of this chamber will be broadcast live so that parliamentary debates are available to everyone as if they were listening to a radio broadcast. Measures of this kind that have been introduced in other parliaments have impacted greatly upon the debates conducted there, and I look forward to the way in which the debates in this place will be influenced by the closer scrutiny of the public. This important measure builds on other reforms that have been brought to this place as part of Labor's initiatives to improve democracy in the state of Victoria — measures such as the reforms to the upper house to turn it into a true house of review and house for the people; the provision for a referendum if the constitution is changed; and the taking of this Parliament to regional centres around Victoria. All these measures, along with the introduction of webcasting, are very welcome Labor reforms.

I am also pleased to acknowledge \$360 000 of additional funding to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, which is so ably chaired by the member for Burwood. This commitment builds on Labor's past promise to ensure ongoing funding. We have not only ensured ongoing funding but have increased the support given to the important investigative work that is undertaken by this committee.

The bill also provides funds for the ongoing restoration and improvement of the great building in which we all work. I understand that the building has been inspected and that it can — I am pleased to say — survive another 150 years of debates in this place in support of the work that is undertaken here. Of course, for the building to be here for another 150 years it needs care and it needs work to be conducted upon it. I understand that a restoration plan was initiated by former Speaker Andrianopoulos, and then ably undertaken by former Speaker Maddigan; and the current Speaker is overseeing the restoration works on the building to ensure that it is preserved for future generations. I learnt today that the tiles in the foyer of our great Parliament are of world historic significance; they make up the largest display of encaustic tiles in the world. Encaustic tiles gain their colour not from a glaze that is put on top of them but from the colour of the clay that is used to create them, and ours are of world significance. However, close inspection of the tiles reveals that they are cracked and chipped, and funds from the bill will enable the test restoration of some of the tiles on the second floor to ensure that full restoration can take place so that future generations can enjoy the encaustic tiles in the foyer and in other parts of the building.

Funding from this bill will also support the Parliament's decision to switch to 100 per cent green power to reduce its carbon emissions. We already preserve 80 000 litres of water. It is captured by seven tanks around this Parliament, and members who share the chook house offices with me will be pleased to learn that their toilets are flushed by this recycled water, which is a great initiative by Parliament. In fact the people of Victoria expect that our Parliament and our government should lead the way in these kinds of important environmental initiatives. I am pleased to report that this is precisely what this bill does, and I therefore commend it to the house.

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — I rise to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/09) Bill. As indicated by the member for Scoresby on behalf of the coalition, we will not be opposing the bill. The member for Scoresby has already covered its technical aspects. I would like to discuss briefly some of the functions that this bill enables to be continued in order to service the

people of Victoria. I will quickly speak about three aspects: electorate offices, parliamentary committees, and the functions of the Parliament per se.

With electorate offices, I am certainly very well served in Benalla. Kerrie Facey has been with me since the commencement of my term in the Parliament. Her great skill is to be able to read my mind and therefore not have to read my appalling writing, which sometimes challenges the Clerks. Also in my electorate office is Peta Clarke, who is known as my funding ferret because she has the ability to ferret out funds. She also initiated a much sought-after funding guide for our various community groups. Peta also initiated an arrangement with ADI, now called Thales, for that company to supply computers for us to distribute to community groups throughout the area, and over the five years we have distributed nearly 100 computers.

I should say that both Peta and Kerrie lost their husbands to cancer in the past 18 months, and they are both now single parents with two young children each. During that time they continued to provide outstanding, loyal and dedicated service both to me and to the people of the Benalla electorate. They have been ably supported by Ann Hanrahan, who stepped in during very difficult times and offered a very soothing presence. Also, Felicity Wilkinson has worked with us. I should say that only last Sunday Felicity and her husband, Peter, had a new baby boy, James William. He is a bouncing 9-pound boy, and I think we will encourage him to grow up and vote for The Nationals, or for the coalition.

Also, Shirley Swadesir in my electorate office is paid for a small amount of time there, but does a considerable amount of voluntary work, and I am extremely grateful for that. My wife, Sally, helps out at various times and keeps the show on the road.

As all members of Parliament — I think country members in particular — would appreciate, the role of an electorate officer is very complex and busy, helping constituents access government department services, helping to resolve disputes between constituents and state department services, plus handling a wide range of queries that never cease to amaze. One such query that I put high on the 'Would you believe?' list was from a constituent asking me to contact TRUenergy to ask it to change the spelling of its name from TRUenergy to TRUEenergy, the spelling we were all taught when we went to school and learnt English. I have not taken that one up with TRUenergy yet; I might hand it to the responsible minister to handle that — and I am sure he will enjoy that task!

The other interesting thing is that the constituents who my staff deal with are for a variety of reasons often under severe emotional pressure, particularly in the current times with the extended drought that we have experienced and continue to experience. My staff, and I am sure many electorate staff elsewhere in the state, help their constituents compassionately, competently and constructively.

The other thing that electorate officers have to do is develop effective working relationships with many government departments and statutory authorities. For example, mine work closely with the principals and school councillors of around 40 schools; police officers in about 15 police stations in the electorate; councils and staff of 7 local government areas; the staff and board members of 6 hospitals; and a similar number of aged care facilities. We have a range of journalists working for 15 newspapers, 11 community newsletters and a number of radio and television stations; and, of course, my staff have effective working relationships with the parliamentary staff and ministers' offices.

I turn now to the parliamentary committees. They perform an extremely important function in the Parliament. I think the key features of the parliamentary committees are that they comprise members from the government, other parties and Independents. It is encouraging that the vast majority of recommendations arrived at are unanimously supported by all members of the committee, and generally there is a high level of uptake of the recommendations of those committees by the government of the day.

I have served on a couple of committees. The first was the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee. One of the inquiries it undertook was an inquiry into strategies to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol consumption and a reduction in access to alcohol; linked with that were club and pub lockouts, which is an area that was explored by that committee. I encourage the government to look at the two-volume report that goes to 1200 or 1400 pages, to check that the implementation of the 2.00 a.m. lockouts, which seem to be having some teething problems, is an appropriate strategy if properly managed. I should say that one of the key issues in a strategy such as that is to ensure the availability of public transport for people to disperse from the areas, and I am not sure that that is in place.

The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is the other committee I have served on, and as the member for Scoresby has mentioned, it undertakes some extremely important work in the Parliament. Recent reports include the report on the 2008–09 budget estimates. The part 1 report has been tabled, which was

an amazing effort in a very short space of time after the collection of information, including transcripts from interviews with the Premier, the Treasurer and a number of ministers; I understand that part 2 will be tabled this week. The staff perform extremely well in getting those voluminous reports out.

Another report that has come out from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is on the 2006–07 financial and performance outcomes. It is worth having a look at that report, if people can make the time. That report contains two chapters of particular interest to me. One is on government advertising; it looks at where the money has been spent. For those of us who have some concerns in relation to the government water strategies, to see the massive amount of money being spent on red helicopters, water myths and various other strategies, calls into question the wisdom and appropriateness of the government's financial management.

Similarly in relation to the drought it is interesting that the government claimed it had allocated \$238 million to drought response, but in fact the report identifies that just over half of that — \$140 million — had been spent. If you look at the source of the funding for that \$140 million, \$50 million came from departmental levies which supposedly were to have no impact on service delivery. That raises the question: if you can remove \$50 million from departments collectively and not have any impact on service delivery, why do they have the \$50 million in the first instance?

But if you look more closely at, for example, the budget for the Department of Primary Industries and where it was trimmed, you will see that nearly \$800 000 was removed from strategic and applied scientific research, and another just over \$400 000 from sustainable practice change. I would have thought that when we are combating a drought, that research is absolutely fundamental in both the short and long terms. A cut in funding for that to meet the needs of other drought funding raises questions about the wisdom of the government's financial management capabilities. I encourage members on both sides of the house to read that report, because it is an enlightening coverage of the financial performance of both the government and the department.

Another role of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is to oversee the activities of the Auditor-General's office. I have found the work of the Auditor-General to be extremely enlightening, and I think his office's budget of \$12 million is well spent. A couple of reports that have come out in recent times include *Planning for Water Infrastructure in Victoria*. In its conclusions the report states that while the time

lines for finalising the plan were tight, nevertheless the process underpinning it:

... fell short of the standard the department applied when developing the white paper and the central region strategy. In particular, the plan was finalised with:

minimal stakeholder consultation

inadequate levels of rigour applied to estimate the costs, benefits and risks of some of the key component projects.

The report goes on to state:

It is incumbent on the government to provide full, accurate and timely information on its financial commitments and projects put before the community. The Victorian water plan did not provide this information.

That is rather harsh criticism by the Auditor-General on what is known as the food bowl project and the associated north-south pipeline.

Another more recent report from the Auditor-General, again on water, is called *Piping the System*, and the audit findings include comment on the authority's decision to enter into an alliance agreement with a preferred tenderer who was selected following a traditional, fixed-price tender process as being unwise. In moving to the alliance contract the authority reduced the tenderer's risk and increased its own risk without obtaining a corresponding reduction in the tender price. On page 30 of that report the Auditor-General's office also comments:

Under the alliance contract the contractor's margin was around double the industry average for other large design and construct contracts. Most of the contractor's margin was profit.

The Auditor-General also notes:

The contractor's margin under the alliance was more than twice the profit margin estimated in the business case that envisaged a lump-sum contract.

The Auditor-General has made some very revealing and damning comments on the management by this government of the water infrastructure projects. As members will be interested to read in the report to be published next Thursday, in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee budget estimates hearings just last week the Minister for Water responded to questions and said he was extremely confident that he will deliver the food bowl project on time and on budget. He said he will deliver all of the 520 gigalitres of water savings that have been committed through various projects, even though only 450 gigalitres of water were lost in the irrigation system in the last 12 months.

If you look at the water losses in the irrigation systems over the last 10 years, the figure is still relatively low; in fact if you look in the last six years, there has been substantial improvement — —

Ms Beattie — On the bill.

Dr SYKES — I am talking about the role of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and some of the findings it is coming up with, and therefore justifying why it is important to continue to fund the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. Through you, Acting Speaker, if the member for Yuroke finds that disturbing, then no doubt she will have her chance to reply, but it is somewhat of a challenge to justify the unjustifiable when the government of the day makes promises that it fails to keep or which in fact have misled the public and others.

I challenge the government to live up to some of the claims it is making, including the minister saying that the project would be delivered on time and on budget. I was interested to hear the Minister for Water make a statement like that, yet when he was asked a simple question about how much it will cost to carry one unit of water from the north to the south by the north-south pipeline, he — the man overseeing a \$1 billion infrastructure upgrade and a \$750 million north-south pipeline — could not answer that very simple question. He scrambled around and was offered scraps of paper. A real back-of-the-envelope calculation was being done by his aides, but at the end of the day the minister could not deliver.

I find it an appalling state of affairs when the minister of the day cannot provide the basic information to underpin these major projects. It is why the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is such an important committee — that is, it can identify such shortcomings.

In the final seconds I have left, I would like to commend members of staff in Parliament House, their most outstanding feature being their helpfulness and friendliness. Whether it is in catering, in the Legislative Assembly, the Legislative Council staff, the Hansard people, human resources, the IT people, the maintenance staff, the outdoor staff or the security staff, all of them are helpful and friendly, and it is an absolute pleasure to work with them. Therefore it is important that this bill not be opposed and that funding is made available to support the functions I have spoken about.

Ms BEATTIE (Yuroke) — I rise to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/09) Bill. This makes an appropriation of some \$93.2 million for Parliament

for 2008–09, and as we have heard other speakers say, it provides an appropriation for the Auditor-General.

I would just like to speak about the Auditor-General for a moment. Other members have praised the increase in the size of the appropriation for the Auditor-General, as I too praise that increase, but of course we know how much the appropriation was for the Auditor-General under the Kennett government — it was zero. Why was it zero? Because it scrapped the Office of the Auditor-General. So I think it is somewhat disingenuous for members opposite to stand up and praise the government for increasing the budget of the Auditor-General when, if the other side were back in office, we know it would scrap the Auditor-General's office again. Just as it would bring out the WorkChoices legislation, it would scrap the Auditor-General.

However, this is a good bill, and I will speak on it. I would like to take up a point made by the member for Scoresby when he talked about the extra appropriations. He was also worried about the parliamentary appropriation and the increase in WorkCover premiums. We on this side of the house all know that WorkCover premiums have actually dropped under this government, so I do not think the member for Scoresby should unduly worry about WorkCover premiums.

There are just a couple of other points I would like to raise. We have heard members speak about the allocations for electorate offices. I think every member of this Parliament owes a great debt to their electorate office staff. I pay tribute to my two staff members. Ros Spence came to me from the member for Eltham and had previously worked for a senator in Tasmania. My other staff member is a young man called Josh Bull, who did work experience with me back in 1999, went on to further his education and decided to come back and work for me, which is absolutely terrific.

Another aspect that is covered in the bill is the work of parliamentary committees. No doubt many members were in the chamber when I was appointed to the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee. I am pleased to be a member of the committee. Members will also know that one of the most satisfying aspects of the work of a member of Parliament is as a member of an all-party parliamentary committee. Certainly one of the better experiences of my parliamentary career was co-chairing the Anzac Day subcommittee of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee with Mark Birrell, who was a member of the Legislative Council at the time. Most of that committee's recommendations have been taken up. That work was very satisfying.

Members have also spoken about webcasts. I am sure our ratings are not going to be a threat to Oprah Winfrey or any other television personality, but it will open up the Victorian Parliament to the people. One of the great features of the Labor government since it came to office in 1999 is that it has taken Parliament to the people. We will be going to Gippsland later in the year for regional sittings. I know from my experience of previous regional sittings that people really enjoy having Parliament in their area and being able to see the workings of the Parliament.

I will touch on a couple of other matters. I would also like to praise the staff of the Parliament. To each and every one of them I say thank you. I just want to mention an aspect that is near and dear to my heart — that is, the gardens and the grounds. Paul Gallagher and Brian Bourke and their team have kept the gardens in magnificent condition during my time here. Everybody knows that we are in a 10-year drought, yet under difficult circumstances the gardens continue to thrive.

I also want to comment on the current repairs to the stonework. Having previously been the manager of a heritage-listed building, I know something about repairing stonework. It is a difficult and time-consuming job. It is difficult to analyse the materials needed to ensure that they match the existing stonework. However, we have a responsibility to the people of Victoria in this regard: this building is our workplace, but it belongs to the people of Victoria. With those few words, I think this is a tremendous bill that provides \$93.2 million as the parliamentary appropriation. I commend the bill to the house.

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — As has already been indicated by the member for Scoresby, the opposition does not oppose the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. However, I wish to make a couple of comments in particular in relation to the line item at page 264 of budget paper 3 that relates to Parliamentary Services. I note that Parliamentary Services will receive an 8.4 per cent variation in its allocation in the 2008–09 budget as against the 2007–08 budget. I also note from that that at the time the budget was published, the Parliament believed it would be underspending the budget it was allocated in 2007–08. Given the increases in rentals of recent times alone, I am amazed that there is an underspend.

From budget year to budget year we have an 8.4 per cent increase in the Parliamentary Services budget. The explanation for that increase is at note (b), which states:

The total output cost ... has increased by 8.4 per cent compared with 2007–08. This is due to increased costs from the implementation of the 2006 election changes, completion

of the relocation and refurbishment of electorate offices and increased costs to the Parliament primarily resulting from recent legislative changes.

That note says that the 8.4 per cent increase is attributable to a wide range of circumstances. By way of comparison I refer to the previous year's budget. At page 252 of budget paper 3 of 2007–08, the line item for Parliamentary Services shows a 13.2 per cent increase. Again, if one looks at the explanation of that 13.2 per cent increase, it states:

This is due to increased costs for the relocation and refurbishment of electorate offices, the upgrade to the electorate office wide area network and increased costs of the Parliament.

Previous speakers have spoken at some length about the range of activities under this line item which account for those increases. In very specific terms I believe the government is significantly underfunding this element of Parliamentary Services. I make those comments insofar as rentals have increased massively in recent times, yet the increases provided to Parliamentary Services do not reflect the increases in rental values across Melbourne. At this stage people who have been affected by this are people whose leases have expired or are due to expire; or, as in my case, where the electorate office was auctioned, as is, of course, my landlord's right, and it is also my landlord's right to extract a fair value return for rental.

But what we are seeing — and again I accept the point that rentals in my electorate are high; the member for Malvern and I will probably experience this and I would expect inner city MPs will experience this next — is that the government has failed to fund the Parliament for the massive increases in rentals that have occurred across Victoria but in particular across the Melbourne metropolitan area.

I will give the house an illustration. Again, I completely accept as the member for Brighton that I am in a very, very high rent area. Commercial rentals in Church Street, Brighton, which is the main street of Brighton, will be between \$85 000 and \$95 000 per annum for the sorts of square metreage that members are allowed to have for their electorate offices, and in Bay Street, the secondary street, they will be slightly less. What has happened is that the — and I think Parliament is well aware of the fact — funding for Parliament will not cover the massive rental increases that we have seen in Melbourne and Parliament has now devised a policy. As I said, it is now impacting on me and on other members on my side of politics, but it will eventually impact on every sitting member in this Parliament.

I note that in the *Members Guide* dated November 2006 at page 55 we see a policy on the site location of electorate offices. Under this policy members of Parliament are now to have 'fringe or secondary location only'. That is the result, of course, of the government underfunding the Parliament for rentals for members of Parliament. It is now policy of the Parliament — and I am going out of my way to make the point that it is the Parliament which is being underfunded for rental increases — that members of Parliament will gradually all be requested, according to this policy, to go to fringe or secondary locations only.

I do not think the government can claim that it has not seen this coming. I am happy to refer the government to the *Colliers International Market Indicators Report* of winter 2007 on the Melbourne metropolitan office market, where some forecasts were made. I would not have thought that these are news to anyone. The forecasts were:

Vacancy levels down

Strong tenant demand in all metro markets —

and —

Upward pressure on face rents ...

If the government is not aware of rental movements in the Melbourne property market, I can refer it to an article in *BRW* dated 29 May 2008 headed 'Offices get more expensive'. Every economist who covers the area of retail leasing has made the point over and over again that vacancies in Melbourne are going down and rentals are going up. It is a landlord's market at the moment, and the Parliament does not have the necessary budget to deal with this landlord's market. That report states:

Sutherland expects Melbourne's occupancy costs to surge faster than other Australian cities during the past year, because of increased space absorption due to tightening in other markets.

Given the already slim CBD vacancy rate of about 3 per cent, and the dearth of development on the horizon, it is safe to assume it is only a matter of time before Melbourne joins its Australian counterparts creeping up the list.

I also refer the government to the very significant report by Jones Lang LaSalle in *Advance* headed 'Investment case for Australia'. Again, none of this is new; it has been widely commented on in estate agents' reports and in newspaper and specialist magazine coverage. The report, which was completed this year, has a section on office rentals, which states:

The Australian office market offers attractive prospects for global investors. In the midst of a prolonged cyclical demand upswing, the national vacancy rate had fallen to a 20-year low

and rental growth has been solid in all markets and exceptionally strong in some.

I might add that in the case of my own electorate we have seen exceptionally strong rental growth. The section goes on to say:

Supply is picking up in most markets though vacancy rates are expected to remain below historic averages for the next five years. International financial market gyrations are likely to cause occupier demand to slow, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne, although ongoing positive economic conditions and relatively low vacancy rates are expected to keep rental growth rates at relatively high levels.

I think I have made my point. The fact that rents are going up massively, particularly in Melbourne, is not news; it has been covered by all sorts of reports that are available to the general public. This is not some niche little occupancy of our economic growth or whatever; this is about the rental market, where it has been well known for some time that commercial rentals have been rising and rising. And good luck to those people who own commercial property, particularly in my own electorate or in inner Melbourne; they have made sound investment decisions and they have a right to returns on their investments. But I believe MP accessibility is a very, very important issue, and the fact of the matter is that I am only one of the first cabs off the rank. All members of Parliament, according to this policy — and obviously according to the fact that the budget for the Parliament has been underfunded to cater for these rental increases — will be forced into ‘fringe or secondary locations’. I, for one, think that that is unsatisfactory. Members of Parliament should be in prominent areas in their electorates. I accept that the square metreage designated by the Parliament will mean that we are not in actual prime real estate, and the square metreage of up to 150 000 per MP is a reasonable one. That will ensure — —

Ms Green — One hundred and fifty square metres.

Ms ASHER — I am sorry, 150 square metres. That will ensure that the rentals are reasonable. But, as I said, rentals in the street which I am now in are \$85 000 to \$95 000 per annum. I would argue that that is the cost of maintaining the member for Brighton. Some members of Parliament will be in cheaper rental areas, and others will be in more expensive rental areas.

Mr Langdon — Brighton, for example.

Ms ASHER — Whilst I accept that the member for Ivanhoe might think Brighton rentals are high, this policy will affect all members of Parliament. Clearly members of Parliament have a right to be housed in their own electorates, and some electorates — again,

inner city electorates would be an example — will be more expensive than others.

The budget for the Parliament does not cater for these massive rental increases that we have seen over recent times and, it would appear to me, will not cater in the future for these massive rental increases unless some action is taken by the government to ensure that MPs of all parties are accessible in their electorate offices. I wish to use this opportunity afforded to me by debate on appropriation — —

Mr Ingram — There is plenty of space in Sale.

Ms ASHER — I hear a comment that there is plenty of space in Sale; I think it would be outrageous to tell a member of Parliament representing a city seat to go and locate in Sale, just as I think it would be outrageous for a member in the country to be told, ‘Go and work out of a Melbourne office — for example, Parliament House’. Every member of Parliament should be able to have premises within their own electorates that are reasonably accessible for their constituents. I do not think it is an unreasonable ask at all. No-one is asking for the Taj Mahal. People are just asking for reasonably high-profile locations, with accompanying signage. All members of Parliament from all parties, and indeed possibly even the Independent, would understand that signage is important in terms of member accessibility.

I want to use this opportunity to call on the government to, in the course of next year’s budget deliberations, ensure that the Parliament, and Parliamentary Services in particular, are given adequate budgets to cover the significant rental increases that have occurred across Victoria, and in particular in certain areas of Melbourne in recent times, and to take the opportunity at least to adjust that budget for rental increases for members of Parliament who may have a lease expiring, or indeed, as in my case, may have their property sold at auction. I call on the government to do that as a matter of priority for next year’s parliamentary appropriation.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — It is with great pleasure that I join the debate on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. I am pleased to note that it provides funding for the various departments within the Parliament, both the Assembly and the Council, Parliamentary Services, parliamentary investigatory committees, and also, importantly, the Auditor-General. It should not be forgotten that there was a time in this state when the Auditor-General was not treated with the respect and independence that that position requires in order to preserve accountability and transparency in government funding. It is important that the

appropriation for the Auditor-General is listed in this bill and has shown an increase.

I would like to place on record my thanks to all the staff who help this Parliament tick over, because we could not do it without them — the attendants, who are always looking out for members and ensuring the operation of this place when the Parliament is sitting; the clerks; Hansard; security; the maintenance and gardens people, in particular Brian Bourke and his team for helping me do a bit of a makeover of my parliamentary office this year, which has been most welcome; the dining room staff, led by Luke Jordan, who have been particularly helpful when I have organised various events here; and the committee staff.

I have spoken in this place before, during my previous term when I served on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, about the enormous value I think this Parliament gets out of the hardworking and high-quality committee staff that we have. I am certainly seeing that on the committee that I am serving on now, the Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee, led by executive officer Sean Coley. I particularly want to put on record my congratulations to Dr Geoff Russell for the recent awarding of his doctorate. He is a great example of the talent that is employed in this Parliament. It is really valued, particularly during a time of a booming economy, that we have individuals of the calibre of Dr Russell who choose to serve our community via this Parliament rather than chase the big bucks that someone of his skill and qualifications could chase during a booming economy.

While I am speaking of pay I note that during this financial year the enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) covering our fantastic electorate officers is due to be finalised. I wish them all the very best in their pay negotiations. Of course it would be inappropriate for members to be involved in the negotiations between the Parliament and the Community and Public Sector Union, and that is as it should be. I would encourage the negotiating team, led by our human resources (HR) branch, who I always find very helpful, to have some consultation and discussion with members about the nature of the work that is undertaken in electorate offices, because I do not think there is always that understanding. The HR staff spend a lot of time servicing pay and all those sorts of things and dealing with some policy issues, but I think there needs to be a greater understanding of the nature of the work of electorate officers in the 21st century. I think the HR branch needs to be abreast of the changes in the nature and the volume of the duties undertaken by our hardworking electorate officers, and also needs to

understand fully the changes in the needs and priorities of members, as the managers of electorate staff.

From my perspective, there are some significant issues that should be considered in formulating the Parliament's position in relation to the EBA of current electorate officers. Some of these would include that there is much more work being done by our staff in relation to the media. There has been a huge rollout of print media across metropolitan Melbourne. The Fairfax group has rolled out a completely new set of newspapers, the Star group has expanded, and a number of others. When I was elected I think I had two local newspapers; I now have eight. So the productivity and the creativity of electorate officers has certainly grown and changed in dealing with that, and that needs to be taken into account.

Another issue is websites and internet communication. The demands of the internet have grown exponentially, along with Facebook and MySpace sites, through which community members expect to be able to contact their members of Parliament; constituents rightly expect that this applies to members of Parliament. So we need to be able to support our staff in doing this work and pay them appropriately. Email correspondence has just gone through the roof. One could almost have one dedicated staff member acknowledging and responding to email correspondence. I think it would be pretty easy for both incoming phone calls and the volume of emails to be measured, without compromising the confidentiality of MPs, to appropriately recognise the productivity increases and the workload of electorate officers and the variety of tasks that they are performing.

As to the individual pay scales in the agreement, I strongly reiterate that it has become extremely difficult to recruit and retain skilled staff since the last enterprise bargaining agreement. In particular the pay scale which now precludes recognition of skills beyond grade 3 is a major barrier to recruitment and retention of electorate officers. There are numerous examples of the inequity of this clause; it is quite stark. It is my understanding that there are at least three former members, with four years-plus experience in serving this Parliament, who have worked for other members during the life of this current agreement, and the pay scale means that with a maximum of only three years being able to be recognised, they cannot even have their years of service to this Parliament recognised. I am not aware of any other part of the public sector that does not recognise relevant experience as a matter of course, and it should be that way for our electorate officers (EOs).

Despite the so-called link to the federal electorate officers pay, there now exists a significant gap between what most state EOs are paid compared to their federal counterparts due to the inability of relevant experience to be recognised. I had an example with one of my own staff where there was a delay in recognising the relevant experience, and I think that delay in recognising experience is causing MPs to lose or not retain skilled staff.

I had an electorate officer with more than five years experience and with many years experience as a radio producer. I believe that she should have been employed at the top of the scale, and had she been working for a federal MP she would have been, although she was very unhappy when she took the position that only three years of her considerable experience could be recognised. I was most pleased that she took the job. It was most distressing to me and to her that it took more than 12 weeks for her to be paid, even at level 3, particularly as she was trying to pay child care and petrol bills to get to work. She resigned a fortnight after finally receiving the back pay rightly due to her, and now she again works for a federal MP.

I think these examples of former members, and of the particular staffer of mine, indicate why we need to deal with this problem and deal with it quickly. I also believe this clause discriminates on the grounds of family responsibility. The failure of the current agreement to recognise experience derived more than five years ago has the potential to expose the Parliament to claims of discrimination on the grounds of family responsibility and should definitely be taken out of the agreement when it is finalised.

I reiterate that in the context of the current competition for skilled staff and a booming economy, as I mentioned before, this problem with the current electorate officer EBA is a huge problem for members in recruiting and retaining staff. Fundamentally I believe it needs to be acknowledged within the new agreement that the role of an electorate officer is a multifaceted one which requires a very wide range of skills to adequately serve the needs of an MP in the 21st century. I would be more than happy to elaborate for the negotiating team on the type and range of duties undertaken by my staff in a structured way to assist it in the preparation of its EBA processes, and I am sure that many other members in this place on all sides of the political divide would also be willing to do so.

I would like to put on record my thanks to Department of Parliamentary Services staff for their support during my office relocation. My long-suffering electorate staff and constituents had to put up with a temporary office

in 74 square metres for four and a half years, so I would like to thank all of my staff and my constituents who put up with that for four and a half years. I would like to thank very much the Parliamentary Services staff who helped us relocate to the beautiful central premises that we currently occupy, which is much more accessible for my constituents. I would also like to thank those staff for resolving some recent security matters that have affected my staff, but I would like to draw to their attention some issues with signage which I have experienced with my office.

At the time I moved into my office I expressed concern. It is a heritage building, so signage cannot be put on the building; it can only be put out on the road. I respect the heritage values of the building, but I said to the staff at the time that I was concerned that my constituents may find it difficult to work out how to enter the premises, because it is an unusual site, being the former Berry Street and Sutherland homes site. It is an historic building, and it is a big site with a number of entrances on two very busy roads. The other reason for my concern about the small signage was that in the event of an emergency, emergency vehicles might not be able to locate my office or the entrance to it.

I had a terrible experience, I have to say, in the last week in that a dear friend of mine, a local principal, pulled into the car park at my office whilst suffering a heart attack. I can say to the house — and I am very pleased to say it — that Kerrie is very well now. The ambulance was despatched in very quick time, and also a MICA (mobile intensive care ambulance) unit, but due to the small signage and the lack of lighting — it was late in the afternoon and getting dark — it could have been a very different outcome for the life of someone who is very special to me. It was a very traumatic experience for me and my staff to know that when she staggered into our office, my friend had been in the car park for 14 minutes and people had not been able to find her. I would suggest to the Parliamentary Services staff that members are not being egomaniacs when they say they want decent-sized and well-lit signage. Sometimes it is good to have a battle with the local government concerned if it is overzealous about the size of signage, because there are important reasons for having good signage for emergency service vehicles, and anyone in this house knows that I have a passion about emergency services. Good signage would be of benefit not only to my staff and my constituents who might be visiting my office but also to those in the whole precinct.

Again in closing I thank all of the staff who make our lives as members a lot easier. I commend the

Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill to the house.

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — I rise to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. The purpose of the bill is to make appropriation of certain sums from the Consolidated Fund for Parliament in respect of the financial year 2008–09. I, too, would like to add my support to what the previous members have been saying about the parliamentary staff and those people who support us. In the year or so I have been here, some great kindness and great patience has been shown to me as a new member, and I am happy to record that support.

I am going to focus my response on the second-reading speech particularly on the initiative for live audio and video webcasting of parliamentary sessions. This is an initiative that will help country people, particularly students. Webcasting of sessions will assist country students to better understand the Parliament, because they cannot visit Parliament as often as others can, and they need to better understand how our democracy works. We see students in the galleries regularly. They undertake tours, and many of us, with the assistance of the staff, entertain those students when they are here, but for country students it is not a very common visit, and they cannot follow up a visit to better understand democracy. I have some concerns, though, about how the webcasting is going to be implemented, and there is little detail in the bill and in the second-reading speech. What will be needed are cameras, feeds, an internet link to transfer the data, servers and someone to manage the service. Whoever manages the service must be impartial, and this will be a challenge for whoever takes that position.

I urge Parliament not to set up its own organisation to do this. We need to be as efficient as we can in this, and I think we can take a line from what the ABC or SBS have to offer with these facilities. I also urge that there be not only live feeds but also podcasting of sessions for study purposes. That way students can download the relevant debates in their own time and examine them, should that be necessary. It will make it much more difficult for some students if they can only access the debates live. I would even suggest that there be links from the Parliament website to an ABC or SBS website if they are chosen as the contractors. The ABC and SBS have the right people to manage the complaints and the experience to manage the inevitable impartiality issues that will arise. Let us see our democracy at work at all times by ensuring we have both podcasting and webcasting.

I remind those who have carriage of this project and those who have responsibility for the expenditure, including those of us in this house, not to fall into a myki trap. One of the problems with technology can be that if it is a difficult task, simply adding people and adding time will not necessarily bring you the solution. It is far better to take someone who has a proven track record and who can deliver these services effectively and without all the problems that we inevitably suffer when those of us who do not understand technology well enough end up having difficulties with it. Let us choose someone with a proven track record to do the job properly. The Nationals in coalition are not opposing this bill.

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — I would like to contribute to the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. I am probably one of the longest serving members in the house, and Parliament and electorate offices have changed dramatically since 1996 when I was first elected. At that time I had to purchase a computer out of my own budget. Since then all offices have got computers. We have had several upgrades, for example, of photocopiers. Our photocopier these days does a lot more than the previous ones ever did. Our computers have changed dramatically. We now have laptops and BlackBerrys.

An example of something that has changed since I first got elected is emails. I think all members of this Parliament can relate to the number of emails we are now getting at all hours of the day. That certainly did not occur in 1996. To some degree I wish to go back to those days. Certainly emails and the way the general public can contact you has changed dramatically. I put on record that I still respect those handwritten letters that I receive, basically from the elderly, because I know they have taken an agonising amount of time to write and post. They are becoming rarer, but I certainly respect the sentiment and the effort behind them. Emails can be mass produced and have been mass produced.

Ms Campbell — And are being mass produced!

Mr LANGDON — And are being mass produced, yes. I certainly do not take away people's democratic right to do it, but to some degree it loses something in the equation when they are mass produced.

I know, for example, this budget will see the introduction of new Acer 1000 desktop computers for all electorate officers. Each personal computer will use 50 per cent less energy than a traditional personal computer (PC). Estimates are that we will reduce the power bill across the board by \$15 000 per year with a

fleet of over 400 PCs. Reduction of carbon dioxide gases is estimated to be 165 tonnes per year, which is equated to 1528 cars being taken off our roads. The new PCs are near silent in operation and are designed to be recycled at end of their lives with extremely low impact on the environment and extremely limited landfill waste.

These are the sorts of things the Parliament has been doing over the years. As I said, the equipment in all our parliamentary offices has certainly changed dramatically since I started. This is one of the bigger shake-ups. I look forward to the new technology making life easier for members of Parliament. Certainly some things like emails have made us more accessible. We need to have the resources to respond to those challenges.

I also take this opportunity to briefly thank all the parliamentary staff, including the attendants, librarians, dining room staff and so on. This is their budget and resources as well as ours. I certainly do not take away from all the work they do. The jobs of members of Parliament are hard enough as it is. The member for Yan Yean certainly outlined her support for electorate officers. None of us would be here without efficient staff who are very much a replacement for us when we are not in our offices. Members of our staff make an outstanding effort and really do not get paid as well as they should in return for representing us in our very well-paid positions. I commend the budget to the house. I support calls for a renegotiation of salaries for our electorate officers and certainly compliment the staff of the Parliament.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — I rise on behalf of the Lowan electorate to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. As the shadow Treasurer said, we are not opposing this bill, but I would like to make some comments in relation to it. As we all know, this bill will fund the Parliament for the year 2008–09. The total amount is about \$94 million. On top of that we have another \$12 million for the Auditor-General's office, and I will speak a little about that.

The key thing we see in this budget is the allocation of nearly \$2 million over the next four years for live audio and video webcasting of all parliamentary sessions in both the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council. I am surprised at the amount of money there; I am surprised we can do it for four years at a cost of under \$2 million. We will wait with interest to see that. The member for Mildura spoke about the fact —

Ms Campbell interjected.

Mr DELAHUNTY — Yes, we might have to bring in our own video cameras. We might have them on the top of our heads. The reality is it is a worthwhile and a very good extension of the Parliament, particularly for country people. I know there are many elderly people and students who would like to witness parliamentary proceedings. As the member for Mildura said, a lot of country students get the opportunity to come down here but a lot do not because of cost, and the ever-increasing cost of petrol and transport is making it more and more difficult. We have got to use new and innovative ways to do things. Live audio and video webcasting is welcomed, particularly by country members. It will give those students and elderly people who have the time the opportunity of watching what is going on in the Parliament. It will not only make Parliament more open and transparent but will also make the government more accountable. People now can go on the internet and get information from *Hansard* about what happened in Parliament the day before. My understanding is that in future they will be able to get live audio and video webcasting. It is a very worthwhile extension of the Parliament.

I heard the member for Scoresby speak about some of his concerns regarding the budget. Those are concerns that we all have, particularly the reduction of money to both the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly for the running of the Parliament. Again, I hope the minister in summing up will expand on that and explain the cuts in those areas.

As we know, there have been big cost increases in everything these days. The consumer price index has increased to about 3.9 per cent. I am sure with the price of fuel and everything else we will see a big cost increase and a lot of service delivery problems, whether it be in relation to the printing areas, air conditioning, wages or travel. We need to make sure that the Parliament is properly resourced, not only the Parliament here but also members' electorate offices. I have heard many members speak about their electorate office staff. I want to put on record right up front that I have two electorate office staff who do a fantastic job for me in my office, and I also pay for a part-time officer out of my electorate office budget. I have the biggest electorate in the state. As you know, Acting Speaker, it is 34 500 square kilometres in size. It is about half the size of Ireland.

Mr Ingram — It's a drop in the ocean.

Mr DELAHUNTY — I think the electorate of the member for Gippsland East is the fourth largest in the state — the electorates of Swan Hill and Mildura may have jumped in front in respect of their area. In any

case, they are fairly big electorates. As I said, I have the biggest electorate in the state. In fact I can fit 76 of the other 87 Assembly electorates into the area of my electorate, which has 53 schools, many health services and many police stations, and they all need to be serviced.

I thank my electorate office staff, Joanne Bibby and Dianne McGenniken, who do a fantastic job servicing the electorate. I also have a part-time office at Hamilton from which a phone is connected to my office in Horsham. Electorate office staff do a fantastic job. As other members have said, they are the interface between a member and the community. Not only do they respond to telephone calls but they also attend to mail and email, and members of the public see them when they come into an electorate office. We even get people visiting who live outside the electorate, because back in 2002 there was a redistribution and people who might only be half an hour away still come to my office looking for information about Parliament, about government and particularly about available services.

I would also like to mention the many services we are provided with as parliamentarians. They are services we need. I also want to mention building maintenance. I compliment Brian Bourke and his team, who do a great job of looking after this heritage-listed building, which is over 150 years old. In the nine years I have been in this place I have had the opportunity to visit the New Zealand Parliament, which is also a big building. I noted that shock absorbers had been installed under the building because it is in an earthquake-prone zone.

The Queensland Parliament in Brisbane was closed down for a couple of years when it had to be covered by a tent and fumigated to get rid of all the borers in the wood and to then refurbish the building. As we have seen in New South Wales and other states, parliamentary buildings are the people's buildings. I believe that not enough members of the community come into these buildings. I welcome visits from people from my electorate if they want to come and have a look at the building. If I have the time, I take the opportunity to show them around and have a cup of coffee.

As I said earlier, at the end of the day Brian Bourke and his team do a great job of looking after a very old building. It is a shame that the building was not completed, and I do not believe a dome needs to be put on top of the building. When you think that some 20 or 30 members of Parliament are housed outside the building in portable classrooms, I think the standing of Parliament has been degraded. It is a pity Parliament

House was not finished in accordance with the original plans; it probably will never happen.

In catering Luke Jordan and his team do a great job. I am a board member of VicHealth, and we have held various functions here. I have even seen the Parliament's catering staff organise and cater for a wedding here. They do a great job in looking after the catering in Parliament.

Parliamentary committees are funded through this appropriation, and they do a lot of great work. Sandy Cook is the executive officer of the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee, and I thank her and her staff for the work they do.

I thank the clerks who sit in here — Ray Purdey, Liz Choat and Bridget Noonan — and provide us with support and answer the many queries we have. They do a great job. In particular I compliment Bridget Noonan, a country girl who has come down to Melbourne from Noradjuha in my electorate. A lot of people would not know where it is, but her presence here highlights the fact that young people from the country can do a lot of good things if they get the right training and the right opportunities. Bridget is doing a great job here supporting Ray and Liz.

I also mention Hansard. There are many people in Hansard, and they do a great job of making our speeches readable. More importantly, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate and publicly thank John Hickey, the editor of the Legislative Assembly *Hansard*, who has taken long service leave prior to retiring. He did a great job. I noticed him here just the other day. He must have got lost and had to come back to Parliament House to find his way home. Well done, John Hickey, for your great work.

The parliamentary attendants, in particular Warren Smith and his team, have all been issued with new uniforms this year, and they look the part. Victoria Spicer and all the people in the parliamentary library do a fantastic job of supporting members. I know that my staff appreciate the work done by the library. Members of Parliament need to be properly resourced, and all these people do a lot of work in relation to that.

This bill also provides funding of \$12 million for the Victorian Auditor-General's Office (VAGO). In the early days I did not feel that we were getting a lot out of the Auditor-General's office, but in the last few years I have come to support the work the office does. The amount of funding for VAGO is nearly one-tenth the funding for the whole Parliament — a big expenditure for the Parliament — but I again compliment VAGO

for the good work it has done, and particularly for its reports on water infrastructure and patient safety in public hospitals.

In my previous role I was The Nationals spokesperson on health, and the report on patient safety in public hospitals leapt out at me. As is said on page 1 of the executive summary of the Auditor-General's report on patient safety in public hospitals, numerous clinical incidents occur in health settings. Sometimes they result in harm to patients, but a lot of the times they do not. The precise number of clinical incidents that occur in Victorian hospitals is difficult to estimate.

It is also interesting to note that page 2 of the report states that Victoria is the only state which has no incident monitoring system that collates patient safety data across the state. This report has highlighted what I think needs to be addressed by the Parliament and by this government but it also notes that these clinical incidents are estimated to cost Victoria around \$511 million annually. If we do not get it right, obviously it impacts heavily on the patients, but it also costs the patient, their insurer and this government to address those clinical incidents.

In my final few minutes I want to talk about this great Parliament House building, which is not used and visited enough. The Parliament's excellent staff — the attendants and the PSOs (protective service officers) — do a great deal of work around the building, and the maintenance of the gardens is done very well, even though we are in drought conditions, but I still feel that the building is not welcoming enough for people to visit. I speak regularly at forums across my electorate. Often I ask people how many of them have been into the state Parliament. I believe that less than 5 per cent of the people of Victoria have had the opportunity to come here. In China every citizen has to climb the Great Wall of China, and every person in England visits Buckingham Palace and the houses of Parliament, but I do not think enough people in Victoria get or take the opportunity to have a look inside this great, heritage-listed and historic building. Not only should they see how the Parliament operates but they should also be able to look through the building. I think we could do more in that regard.

I also want to talk about the employment of staff and other people in this building. We need to make sure that they are appropriately skilled and resourced. I compliment the work of the IT strategy group, not only in relation to email services but also the new technology that the group has introduced. I will never forget that when I first became a member of Parliament

I got an enormous electricity bill. Those bills are now covered by the budget in this allocation.

Again I return to the point that not only do we need to make sure that the Parliament and the Auditor-General are well resourced but also we need to make sure members of Parliament are well resourced; we need good staff and the latest technology, such as BlackBerrys and internet technology. It is great that across most of my electorate I can get mobile telephone service, and I congratulate the federal member for Mallee in the House of Representatives for the work he has done on mobile phone services.

Like other members, I will not be opposing the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. I ask that the issues addressed by the member for Scoresby about the reduction in funding for the running of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council be explained by the minister in his summing up. With those few words, I will not be opposing this bill.

Mr BROOKS (Bundoora) — It is a pleasure to be able to make a contribution to debate on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. At the outset I want to make a comment about contributions by some other members. There has been some discussion about the need for further expenditure to meet other needs. A member on the other side spoke about the need for further funding to meet the increasing costs of rents so that members are able to retain prime real estate positions.

It is important that this Parliament subjects itself to a certain degree of restraint when it sets its own budgets, and I think the community would rightly expect that if the government was careful about its spending on a whole range of service areas, it would also be careful about its own spending. Simply because members of Parliament deem it necessary to have offices in prime real estate locations, I do not think it is necessarily the case that that should be funded by the taxpayer. Having said that, I think it is an important issue that possibly needs further discussion in the appropriate forum.

On the issue of the total budget I note that in schedule 1 on page 4 of the bill the estimated amount for 2008–09 is \$93.402 million, which is an approximately 1.35 per cent increase on the budget figure for the previous year. That is a relatively modest increase, and I hope in line with community expectations as to the amount the Parliament expends.

This is a very important bill in that it allocates the resources for members of this place so that they are able to help constituents who require assistance. One of the

very important roles that members of Parliament play — and I have heard previous members speak on this matter — is in helping a constituent or constituents who seek assistance with an important matter. We all know that from time to time some constituents find themselves in really dire circumstances, and it is important that members of Parliament have an accessible office and an accessible means of communication so that they are able to help them. They need the resources and the staff to ensure that the time and energy necessary is spent in helping out people who might have a problem with the government or a service provider or what have you. Members need to be able to communicate and listen to constituents, and it is important that the resources are provided by Parliament to do that at an appropriate level. I again suggest that the bill before us does that.

I note that the budget includes an amount for audio broadcasting of Parliament on the internet. This is a very welcome initiative that has been announced by the Premier and implemented by the Parliament so that Victorians will have access to audio broadcasting and, I believe, videocasting further down the track.

It is also important that members have the resources to properly research and consider a range of policy areas and bills. The parliamentary committees play a very important role in that, and it is very important that they are properly resourced. There are excellent facilities and staff involved in assisting members on parliamentary committees.

In closing, I also want to mention the important work that is done by the whole range of parliamentary staff, but in particular the people who look after the Parliament buildings and grounds, as well as the attendants. A large number of schoolchildren and other visitors from the electorates come through the Parliament, and as the centrepiece of democracy in Victoria it is important that this building, its grounds and its staff contribute to carrying on the great tradition of the Victorian Parliament. It is a great experience for many of the schoolchildren from my electorate who visit this place, and it is important to continue providing the resources for that to continue. This bill certainly does that, and I commend it to the house.

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I rise to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. Every year we debate the allocations in the budget for Parliament, and it is clearly an important part of our democratic process that the parliamentary appropriation is scrutinised every year. The staff and operations of the Parliament are incredibly important to the job we do

and the ability we have to deliver services and have contact with constituents in our electorates.

There are a couple of issues I want to raise in relation to this bill, particularly the apparent reduction in funding for the Legislative Assembly and the small reduction in funding for the Legislative Council. This decrease is a bit of a concern, because we need to ensure that the staff of the Legislative Assembly have the capacity to deliver the services necessary for its operation. It is particularly important in view of the regional sitting of the Legislative Assembly at the Gippsland campus of Monash University this year as funding for that forms part of the allocations listed in this bill. There needs to be clarification on the potential impact of the reduction in funding and whether there are programs that are not going to be continued. If funding is normally provided, this reduction needs to be explained, because it is otherwise not clear.

There has been an increase in funding for the parliamentary investigatory joint committees. That is important because with the way the new upper house is functioning, there is increased activity within the parliamentary committee system. As members would know, the committee system is an important part of the democratic process of scrutinising government, and the increase in funding clearly outlines that that need is there. I serve on the Environment and Natural Resources Committee (ENRC), and the budget for the committee in the last year has been reasonably tight. It is important that the committee system functions properly and that its members can go about their activities such as making sure that committee reports are of a high quality and setting the agenda for some of the legislative reform that the state undertakes.

As has already been indicated, there has been a small increase in the funding for the Department of Parliamentary Services. Overall the only real issue that comes out of the budget is the decrease in the Assembly and Council allocations.

Over the years that I have been here there have been significant improvements in the operation of IT services through our electorate offices, their functions and the services provided to them, and that must be commended. When I was first elected in 1999 the notebook computers provided were fairly basic tools; the office computers were very substandard. Electorate offices were still on ADSL — asymmetric digital subscriber line — and basic dial-up services until only a very short time ago. The rollout of high-speed broadband — my electorate office is in the main business district of Bairnsdale — has been a great improvement. Before that if someone in the office

system started downloading a PDF — portable document format — or large document, the other systems would crash. It is unbelievable that an important office that deals with electronic communications all the time — like the electorate offices of members of Parliament — did not have access to high-speed communication when we were rolling out such much-needed technology to schools, preschools and other services. Many of the business people in my electorate found this quite amazing. It has improved greatly; the new computers, printers and copiers are much better than the old equipment we had. They allow us to deliver good services to our constituents, which is very important in the day-to-day work of members in their electorate offices because that is how they communicate with their constituents.

Previous speakers in this debate, particularly the members for Lara and Mildura, made a number of comments about audio and video streaming. I think Parliament has been backward in not embracing this technology up to this time. I have a bit of an interest in access to technology, and I have raised it previously with Speakers and other people. As a member of Parliament who has cross-border issues with New South Wales — issues relating to the Snowy debate both at a federal level and in New South Wales — I could sit in my electorate office or in my office here and watch the debates about the Snowy privatisation in the New South Wales or commonwealth parliaments, as they are web streamed. Our Parliament has not provided that access. In the future our constituents will be able to listen to parliamentary debate live online if they so choose — and I would not encourage too many people to tune in — —

Mrs Fyffe interjected.

Mr INGRAM — Sometimes the level of debate is such that it is not quite as riveting as listening to some of the other forms of entertainment one has access to nowadays.

A large number of the debates that we have in this place are critical to the lives of our constituents. Access to the democratic process is almost unattainable for a lot of people. When legislation is being debated that will impact on their lives, they have to physically attend the Parliament. At the start of the parliamentary sitting week we often do not know what day or time of day a piece of legislation will be coming on, so someone in far East Gippsland who will be impacted upon by legislation has to make the big trip down to Melbourne and stay around all week waiting for the debate to come on. Now with improvements in IT web streaming or video streaming, they will have that access within their

electorates. You will get more people who are interested in particular debates listening in to those debates. It might improve the democratic process, and it will also probably improve the debates that go on here.

The New South Wales Parliament, like the Victorian Parliament, is housed in a heritage-listed building — it is a very important and historic building — and it had an issue with the placement of video cameras. I disagree with the comments made by other members about how difficult this process is; it is a very simple process. The cameras are fixed on pivots and are managed in a very simple process to direct the cameras at the person who is on their feet. The problem in New South Wales is that the video cameras were placed at the back of the chamber. At question time, and during other intense debates, the Speaker has almost no control, because the member who is holding the floor directs their attention to the cameras and does not look at the Speaker. That is politics sometimes. It is important that we get this right. They are fairly basic systems, but they improve accessibility.

Nowadays at the start of the sitting week we have a reasonable idea what legislation will be brought on. For the improvement of access, it is important for the parliamentary website to list the legislation that will be debated so that people actually have some idea when it will come on. I know some of this will take work, but with a bit of agreement between the parties and an understanding that the timing is flexible, it could be arranged. It is important that at the start of the sitting week we give an indication so that those people who are not in the precinct know what is coming up.

Hansard always makes the best of our presentations in this place, but historically the way it has been done is that our ahs and ums and other fillers, if you like, have been taken out so that it becomes a very fluent and embellished presentation. You might look back at some of my speeches and say, 'That looks a lot better than it was'. One of the challenges of live webstreaming is the issue about how we match those two up, because there will be a permanent public record of the exact presentation that was made to the chamber. It will be important to make sure we record the real comments that were made. Some members may think it is okay to slightly edit our greens when we get them. That is one of the challenges going forwards. I know there has been some discussion with Hansard as to how that will occur.

With those words, I support the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. I know it is very important that we pass this legislation to ensure the staff of this place can continue to do their work not only by

servicing our needs but also the needs of the people of Victoria. They do a spectacular job. As other members have mentioned, all of the staff of the Parliament, whether they be leading group tours, the library providing excellent research papers, or the grounds people and other staff who maintain the buildings and the facilities, provide services to the members and to other visitors to this place. I would like to thank them for their work over the last year, but also say that we are now providing the resources for another 12 months of excellent service to the Victorian people.

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this important legislation on parliamentary appropriations. Along with so many other people in this house, I know that being a member of Parliament is an immense privilege. On the day you stand in this house for your inaugural speech you wonder how it is possible that a person finds their way into this house and has the title ‘MP’ after their name. In preparing for this legislation I reflected on this and thought of a couple of very recent examples in my own electorate office where a member of Parliament’s office is able to achieve something while so many people spend months and indeed years trying to navigate through the bureaucratic process. At the outset I want to say that MPs — and I compliment others who have already said it — cannot do their job without good electorate staff. I record my thanks to Kerrie, Mary, Bonnie, Therese, Chris and Kathleen, and to Jenny, who has moved to other work since I last spoke on a parliamentary appropriations bill.

Going back to some of the very complicated examples which have come up recently in my own electorate office where we have been able to achieve positive results for constituents, I had a worker who had been trying to navigate through and get justice from the WorkCover system. After eight years we were able to achieve a just resolution for that man. Last week I could have cried when I was presented with another case, which was a mental health issue. This man had gone to a legal firm and had paid \$3000 up-front for work that we could have done to assist him to navigate through the mental health system. In education, local school communities, be they the non-government sector or the state school system, use MPs’ offices to advocate strongly for infrastructure. I note that the Minister for Education is at the table. Pascoe Vale Girls Secondary College was one that she recently visited, and she heard its important requests. As a result of our advocacy Pascoe Vale North Primary School was very pleased to have \$3.1 million awarded to it in the last state budget. The non-government sector has been approaching us. They know that even though some individuals in our

electorates cannot speak to members there is strong representation for them.

Often people say, ‘Thank you for looking after me’, ‘Thank you for doing this’ and ‘Thank you for doing that’. You have to keep reminding them that it is simply their taxes at work. We are not doing anything gratuitously; we are being paid to look after them, and we are very pleased to be able to do so. A recent highlight of advocacy for me and for my electorate office was a young man who had been sentenced to prison in Western Australia. He had a young child, and as a result of great parents and great family support he was able to be transferred back here to Victoria, and he is very soon to be released.

Members would be able to give umpteen examples of people coming into their electorate offices and of the honour we have in serving them. I think part of the reason why people come to us with more complex issues now is our communications budget. The parliamentary appropriation bill makes sure that our electorate offices are adequately financed in order to send out reports. I always find that after we put out a report many more people ring the office as a result of being reminded that they often do not need to pay high legal fees and they do not need to spend an inordinate amount of time on hold waiting for government departments to respond to their requests; they can do it through their electorate office.

One of the points I want to raise in this debate is the value of having feedback from MPs. I think our survey forms are very useful, but I do think they have to be confidential. When I failed to fill in my survey form I was reminded by the survey company that I should respond. I thought, ‘If we are supposed to be doing confidential surveys, I do not feel really comfortable about being prompted’. I was reassured that whatever survey comments I made would remain confidential — —

Mr Ingram interjected.

Ms CAMPBELL — I will respond to the interjection, ‘Perhaps nobody responded and everybody was phoned’. I think it is important that we respond. It is important that we have a feedback loop, and I trust our comments are taken on board.

One of the comments I am going to make in this debate is about the importance of wireless connection for our computers. I notice people nodding on the opposition benches. Lest I be accused of supporting the opposition I am very conscious of my opposition days; they are indelibly implanted in my memory, never ever to be erased. You are on the road, you do everything yourself

and wireless connection is really important. Other members have commented on being deluged with emails. Quite frankly if you are in a car and perhaps travelling on a social occasion — and obviously not driving — having an opportunity to delete one heck of a lot of emails from your BlackBerry is terrific. But if you are away you need internet access, and wireless is really important. I have offered to be the guinea pig for any wireless connection that comes on board.

I want to record my appreciation of the parliamentary staff. I am sure many times this place is like a school staff room where teachers say, 'Gee, the place would run one heck of a lot better if we did not have students'. I am sure the parliamentary staff reflect that this place would run much more smoothly without MPs, but the fact is that we all live and work together, and we have to make sure we support each other. I want to record my thanks particularly to the catering staff. Shirley and the team on level 1 and the team on level 2 are absolutely terrific. Jacqui does a great job, and no matter what our moods they always have a smile and make each one of us feel really special. The chefs are fantastic, and I thank them. There is nothing like fixing blood sugar levels to put us all in a better mood, and I compliment them. With those few words I want to conclude my contribution by reinforcing yet again the importance of having wireless connection as soon as possible.

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I am pleased to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. A democratic institution such as this Parliament must be properly resourced to ensure fair and responsible government that is subjected to the scrutiny of the opposition. Also the opposition should be fairly funded so that it can perform the role that it is elected here to do.

One point that has been raised by previous speakers is the cut to the Legislative Assembly budget, from \$4.11 million down to \$4.076 million, which needs some explanation. I note there is an increase in the Department of Parliamentary Services budget, so perhaps it is just a transferring of services from one area across to another.

The member for Yan Yean made great mention of members' electorate officers. All members of Parliament, from both sides, can attest that we have extremely hardworking staff. One of the reasons our trusted staff work as hard as they do is because no matter what side of the political spectrum they are from, they share a common passion to create a better society for all Victorians. The demands on our electorate officers are many and varied. They provide a

combination of administrative support, counselling to distressed constituents and information to people who do not know where else to turn; and they undertake research so that MPs can reflect a balance of opinion, values and technical knowledge. Their workload is ever increasing.

In the last couple of weeks we will have all noted that our volume of emails has rapidly increased, and the management of them is not something an MP can do on their own — emails have to be attended to at least twice a day as they are relegated to whether they need a full answer, need to be printed off and responded to formally, or whether they require a quick response — and those activities add to the workload.

We also have a difference in the workload from people arriving at the door of the office — and I compare it to when I was in office from 1999 to 2002 — who have some complex needs and problems. We are all aware that at certain times in the monthly cycle people who take up a lot of time and whose behavioural difficulties can cause concern come to our electorate offices. Our electorate officers are the ones on the front line who deal with these situations. I urge all those who are involved in the negotiations with the salaries for the electorate officers to realise the importance of their salaries being commensurate with and representative of comparable professions with similar duties and responsibilities.

I would also like to commend the staff in Parliament, who also work extremely hard for all of us. The grounds staff make the gardens look so beautiful that they always give me a few minutes of pleasure when I arrive here or when I need to get a breath of fresh air and walk around. The security staff ably check and meet all the people at the front but do it in a friendly manner as they guide them through. The catering staff cater for all our fancies and whims; I in particular have been a little bit more demanding with dietary needs, but the staff are absolutely wonderful.

How much I admire the library staff! The number of times after my electorate office has closed I have gone into the library and wanted something from NewsCentre the staff have patiently, once again, found it for me. I can never remember my password or exactly how to do it, and time and again they have done it for me. The library is exceptional in searching for specific books or documents that you might need to refer to. As many members on the government side will remember, in opposition you are left to your own resources a lot, and you need those extra research hands.

I also commend Bill Schober on his parking duties; he is always friendly, courteous and looks after us and our guests. Hansard reports our speeches. Often after having spoken here I think, 'How on earth is that going to read?', but Hansard has made it fairly reasonable and readable. The staff who support us here in the house look after us during the day and make sure we have the things we need.

The Parliamentary Services staff handle the relocations and refurbishments of our offices. During this last year I moved from an office that had been the office for the member for Evelyn from 1978 until last year. It was quite an old office — a converted factory — and I was moved into a smaller but better-equipped office. I thank the staff who handled that, because we all want everything, and I wanted to pick the best of everything and have colour schemes which did not fit into the budget. The things that go wrong when a place is being fitted out and the attention needed over the following months when things do not work as well as they should are handled efficiently by the Parliamentary Services staff. The other day we had a problem with the handle on one of the toilet doors, and within 24 hours a repair man was out there and repaired the handle. The staff are always very courteous, no matter what it is they are doing.

Returning to the work in our electorate offices, one of the things that needs to be noted with the increase in our communications allowances and other allowances is that most members are going to be doing more mail-outs. I think I can speak on behalf of all electorate officers no matter who they work for when I say it would be terrific if they had a good mail-folding machine, equivalent to those found in federal MPs' offices. The folding of papers and the stuffing of envelopes can take up inordinate amounts of time as we try to increase communication with our constituents.

The wireless connection that was mentioned by the previous speaker is something that we all need. I often take my laptop home. At home I am on dial-up, and it would be just so much easier if we had a wireless connection.

I am proud to be a member of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, which recently undertook valuable work with the inquiry into the bushfires. It is a reference that was originally endorsed by The Nationals and supported by the Liberal Party. The committee is working extremely well under the chairmanship of the member for Dandenong. We are writing our report on that inquiry now, but as with all inquiries, we rely on the public and experts to provide us with the information on which we assess the merit of

any proposal, and if we did not have sufficient funding to advertise for submissions to be made as part of an inquiry or money to fund in-depth research, the quality and results of the committee findings would be compromised. Since they are used to inform government on policy, inadequate funding can lead the government to make bad decisions. Every government has to be conscious that funding is sufficient to support the committees.

The other thing I would like to speak about briefly is the electronic democracy that will soon be with us — that is, webcasting. It will be interesting to see it being rolled out and seeing how it will work. It would be good if there were just voice recordings rather than a camera, but we will go with whatever the government decides. It will give a lot of people the opportunity to see firsthand how their MP is performing: whether they are accurately reflecting the values and attitudes of their constituency, whether they are fully informed of the issues that have arisen in their electorate and whether they are energetic and enthusiastic about getting results for their residents. In short, it will give the public a greater opportunity to scrutinise the functioning of both the state government and the opposition.

As has been mentioned by my colleagues from The Nationals, the convenience of electronic access to state Parliament will prove to be especially valuable for people in remote areas. Geographic isolation and inadequate transport services in rural communities will no longer constrain the ability of political citizens to scrutinise the actions or inaction of the government. The only thing I would say is that four years seems a long time for that to be implemented, and it would be good if it were implemented sooner. I commend the bill to the house. I look forward to the increase in services that we as members will have, and I hope the wages negotiations of the electorate officers go well.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Dandenong) — It is a pleasure to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2008/2009) Bill. Whilst this is a bill about the resources available to members of Parliament and parliamentary officers to do their jobs, what it is really about is the way we practise parliamentary democracy in Victoria. The reality is that many Victorians and Australians take our parliamentary democracy for granted. Recently I did some work with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association executive council as one of the regional representatives from Australia. I now get to see in more detail the amount of work that is done around promoting parliamentary democracy globally and what a great and fantastic model we have in Victoria. One of the great unsung achievements of this Parliament is the amount of international work it does through the

association. Only a few weeks ago the entire membership of the Rivers State House of Assembly of the oil-rich state of Nigeria was here visiting us, the New South Wales Parliament and the federal Parliament, along with a number of parliamentary officers who were looking at the sorts of things they could learn from us. We assist many other commonwealth countries, mainly in the Pacific region, where the Victorian Parliament is twinned with some sister Parliaments in Tuvalu, Nauru and Fiji, whenever Fiji comes back into the commonwealth fold.

But not only are there great things we as parliamentarians can do among our own constituents in the promotion of issues around parliamentary democracy so that people do not take it for granted, there is also the work that we are doing and can do even more in helping other commonwealth countries and other regions. We are in a number of parliamentary friendship groups with different regions of the world, and parliamentary democracy is a valuable part not only of sharing experiences of the way we do things here but also of learning from other jurisdictions about the way they practise their democracy. We can all complain about the adequacy of resources we have as members or staff of the Parliament, and there is a continuous balancing act that governments have to perform about what is an appropriate level of resources, but it is good to see that there is about \$1.27 million of extra resources in the parliamentary departments and that we are seeing some new initiatives.

I think all of us will welcome the webcasting of the Parliament of Victoria. It is long overdue. I agree with the member for Gippsland East that it is another great vehicle for us to lift the quality of debate and the way we perform in Parliament, not only because we would potentially be seen by our constituents in the broader world, but also because it is another way to get out to members of the broader public in a way they readily understand. While we are putting in resources for webcasting, with cameras et cetera, at the national level there is a need to look at parliamentary channels that exist in other jurisdictions. For example, nowadays in India both the lower house, the Lok Sabha, and the upper house of Parliament are televised. Given the new digital TV licences that will be available in the future, it would be appropriate to have a digital TV channel provided free of charge by the commonwealth to be shared by the parliaments around Australia.

Recently I was in the UK and on the TV in the hotel room watched the Welsh assembly, including its committee meetings, being televised. Whilst we move forward on webcasting, as parliamentarians we need to be cognisant of the fact that although we are not world

leaders in these developments, we should be. Once we have the infrastructure in place it will not be too expensive to make the service much more widely accessible. I agree with the member for Gippsland East that one of the limitations is constituents not knowing what debates are going to be on. As webcasting is a new area that this Parliament is going into, perhaps over time it will be possible to have discussions and debates about how accessible we are.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association annual conference, which is to be held in August in Malaysia, has as one of the themes on its agenda: how we can be much more connected with our constituents and the global community. We have many debates on similar issues. Those of us in the Victorian Parliament who see even a little bit of federal Parliament or read about what happens in other parliaments realise how relevant debates in other jurisdictions are to our own. Webcasting would mean that we could be seen by the world, but I think this is unfinished business for us.

As chair of the parliamentary Environment and Natural Resources Committee I am very pleased that additional resources will be provided for parliamentary committees. Our committee has deliberately decided to make itself very widely accessible. On our bushfire inquiry, on which we will report to the house by the end of the month, we deliberately went into all the areas that people wanted us to go to, talked to them and held hearings. We believe that is a very important role for us. But the flip side of that is that it is a costly exercise. It involves organising regional trips, advertising them, hiring halls and incurring other costs. Often we have had to pay for transcripts when Hansard has not been available because it has been servicing other parliamentary committees. There has been a big expansion in parliamentary committees — certainly upper house committees — and that has placed considerable budgetary pressures on all committees. The committee has been in the very difficult position, as have I as chair, of having to say no to a number of things which I would have thought were normal day-to-day things the committee should have been involved in because they would have had some expenditure attached to them. As we have had to say no, part of our committee work has been curtailed. I am pleased that more resources will be available to help parliamentary committees do their future work.

In closing I would like to quickly cover one other area of important work that we do in this place — that is, being an accessible place for the people of Victoria. We can be even more accessible in the way this chamber is used, in the way that tours of the Parliament are conducted and in the way school tours are conducted.

Having previously worn a hat as Minister for Tourism I know that the Parliament of Victoria is in the cultural tourism guide of Victoria. Parliament House is one of the most popular and visited tourist destinations — certainly of the free tourist destinations — in Victoria. As members we get to see that in the number of people coming through the front doors, those taking photographs on the front steps and the number of tour buses that stop in front of the building. I often wonder whether the people taking photographs know what goes on in this building. Another question that we as members should ask is how we can make this space even more accessible to more people so they will understand the work we do.

I commend the bill to the house. It is great that we will have extra resources. I also want to commend the staff of the Parliament as well as all our electorate office staff, who do great work in assisting each and every one of us as an MP.

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I wish briefly to make a couple of comments. I am the chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. The Presiding Officers appeared before the committee, which has been reported on in the most recent report on the budget estimates tabled into Parliament last week. I want to thank the staff of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee for the extraordinary work they do. They are a marvellous group of people, and they work well and truly beyond what is normally demanded of staff.

I note in this budget the ongoing extra commitment to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee of \$360 000 per year. That was provided to the committee last year by the then Premier; it is continuing for this year and for future years.

I also note that the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is responsible under section 7D (2) of the Audit Act 1994 for discussing the budget of the Auditor-General with the Auditor-General. That did occur this year. I also note that the Auditor-General will actually expect an unprecedented funding deficit in 2007–08 of \$2.9 million — \$1 million over and above its target. We have written to the Treasurer pointing out various aspects of the funding of the Auditor-General. It is fine for the coming year, but there will need to be discussions on the funding of the Auditor-General and his office in the years further out, and that will need to be considered in the next budget. With those brief comments, I commend the bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

APPROPRIATION (2008/2009) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 29 May, on motion of Mr BRUMBY (Premier).

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — It is a pleasure to rise to contribute to debate on the Appropriation (2008/09) Bill. This year's budget has raised some quite interesting issues in Gippsland East. I will go to those a bit down the track. I think the coverage and the response to the budget has been relatively positive. In particular one issue that I think has been important is the further reduction in rates of business, land and payroll tax and stamp duty. I think this has been good news for businesses and has been reasonably well received. There has been a fair amount of debate, within the chamber, about whether these are actually real reductions, but I think anything that government can do to keep these costs on business down should be encouraged.

One of the issues of concern to have come out of the budget is the increased level of debt in the budget, which is increasing over the projected outlook. This is a concern, and while the level of debt should be manageable, it does concern taxpayers and all Victorians that the state debt is potentially increasing. Government should be prepared to borrow, in my view, just as householders are prepared to borrow, particularly for essential pieces of infrastructure and other assets that the community needs, but we have to make sure that that borrowing is manageable and does not place long-term interest costs on the budget and the community.

I am not going to go down the path of other speakers who are basically wanting everything out of the budget. I know there is a very difficult balance in the state budget. As most members of our community will probably know, with the increase in costs and the changed economic times over recent periods, just maintaining the household budget is very difficult. Increased interest rates and increased living expenses are having an impact on the household budget, and that is the issue that is probably the biggest-biting one within our communities at the moment. So I think it is

important that we get the balance right. Mainly, though, in my budget address I will speak on issues within my electorate.

As the Minister for Education is at the table, I open the discussion on funding for the Maffra Secondary College. I do not think we need to go back over this issue, because there has been plenty of debate within this place and within the wider community about it. I would like to congratulate the Minister for Education and the Premier for coming down last Friday to visit the Maffra Secondary College. The Premier also visited the primary school. We have now allowed the Maffra community to fully celebrate the upgrades of both the secondary school and the primary school in that town. It was a very positive day. The community really expressed the warmth of gratitude that has come from the provision of that funding. There was a mistake; but we will leave that there.

I had a range of meetings with the minister's office, the minister and also the Premier's office and the Treasurer's office, with Andrew McIntosh, who is the school principal, with Ginni Ross, the school council president, and with Jenny Harris, the parents club president, and I think we put a pretty strong argument as to why that funding should be granted. I am just glad that that has been listened to. The Maffra community is grateful to the government for its commitment, and I know that when those facilities are provided to the school we will be providing much better educational opportunities within that community. The Maffra Secondary College has a very high standing within the community for the education it provides.

I would also like to acknowledge the funding in the budget for Eagle Point Primary School. I think it is recognised that that is a small school but is one that provides great educational opportunities.

I would like to raise the issue of independent schools funding. I have had representations from particularly the Catholic school sector and other independent schools in my electorate. Because of the wage increase, there will be flow-on effects to the budgets of the independent school sector. This will cause some real problems to those schools. I think it is essential that they have the ability to pass on the wage increases. I think everyone acknowledges that providing a wage increase to our teachers, who do a wonderful job within not only the government school sector but also the independent school sector, is very important.

Many of our Catholic schools and other independent schools in regional areas do not necessarily provide a service for wealthy parents and students. The Catholic

education system provides a good-quality education service to all students. This wage increase, because it was probably done at a time when the schools could not get further funding from the commonwealth to cover the shortfall, will mean that this year's budget will be difficult for those schools. They need to know with some certainty about where that funding increase is going to come from in the future. Unlike some other private schools, it is difficult for them to pass on the cost increases to their students. Basically their fees are set for this year, and the wage increase will mean that they may have to cut some of the optional extras to their students, which will impact on the education they provide.

There are a number of issues that have come out of the budget in relation to health. Future budgets will need to consider aged and health services delivered in Maffra by Central Gippsland Health Service. It plans to consolidate on the one site both aged and other health services, and it is important that the government plans for that eventuality. I know that the health service is providing that planning at the moment.

We still have issues in Bairnsdale with ambulance transfer costs. That is something I have taken up a number of times with the previous health minister and also the current health minister, and that is something we are going to need to address. There are also some challenges at Bairnsdale Regional Health Service due to the change in its services. Basically it has gone out and increased the public patient throughput, but that has impacted on its budget.

I have a number of issues I would like to raise, including the issue that has been raised with my office of the investigation of establishing a base price for transport cartage. The increase in fuel prices has had a detrimental impact on the transport industry, and the industry has been undercut by some of its players, basically because they are cutting the margins very tight and the cut in the margins has increased the cowboy element within the transport industry.

One of my constituents indicated that what they really need to have is some type of regulation about setting a base price which people cannot undercut so that we know exactly what the minimum price for transport cartage is going to be. The industry is aware that VicRoads would like to increase the scrutiny of GPS (global positioning system) trackers and the like and the management of logbooks in the industry to change the behaviour of transport drivers. Everyone knows that there are some elements within the transport industry that from time to time resort to long hours of operation, drug use and logbook manipulation.

These are very concerning issues because they decrease the safety on highways. What the industry would like to do is weed out those rogue elements, and basically one way of doing that is by setting up GPS trackers. But to do that you would need to give a benefit to the industry, and one way of doing that would be to have some light regulation of the industry to set a minimum rate which cannot be undercut.

One of the other issues that has come up in some public discussion recently has been the proposal to introduce two new AFL (Australian Football League) clubs into the Gold Coast and Sydney, and there has also been a push to move some of our state-based clubs interstate. I would like to raise the issue of country football. Country football is very important in regional communities, and to establish two new clubs would actually reduce the number of good young players who remain in country areas. I think we need to be very protective of our country football to make sure that we do not bleed it dry simply so we can establish new football clubs interstate. Also, the sustainability of the Melbourne-based clubs is very important.

I would like to raise the issue of public transport. The return of the Bairnsdale passenger train service has been very successful. Everyone who has been down there on the train recently would acknowledge that it is a very good service. Decreasing the cost of fares has had a very successful outcome: it has increased the patronage to the extent that future budgets will need to look at replacement of the existing fleet. I think there has been acknowledgement of that, and I think that is something we are going to have to look at in the future. There are still some issues about the timetables and getting into Melbourne with luggage, but overall the service is good. It could be improved, but a good service is being provided.

One of the other issues in the budget that has been raised recently relates to stamp duty. I have had correspondence and discussions with the Civil Contractors Federation of Australia about the fact that Victoria is one of the few states that still has stamp duty on earthmoving equipment, and this has had an impact on the industry. In Victoria the stamp duty on earthmoving equipment — excavators, graders, dozers, rollers and other road-making equipment — is between \$5000 and \$8000. In other states either there is no stamp duty or you can apply for a concession to have it exempted. This impacts on the ability of those industries in Victoria to compete with other states, and I know they have raised this with the government. I think the government needs to give serious consideration to removing the stamp duty on earthmoving equipment and making it consistent across the commonwealth.

The other issue I would like to discuss is in relation to the Snowy River environmental flows. I listened with interest to The Nationals deputy leader, the member for Swan Hill, and I have to say that his comments demonstrate the greatest hypocrisy. He also put those comments in my local paper, and I would just like to put on the record that this is in direct conflict with some of his previous comments. I do not think the community actually believes his current show of concern in my local paper about environmental flows. For the record, this is what the member for Swan Hill stands for. In 1999, as the then VFF (Victorian Farmers Federation) president, he said:

We're concerned that political opportunism may override good policy decision —

in relation to environmental flows.

The current member for Shepparton has stated:

... people in the north-east were angered by seeing the Premier of Victoria and the former Premier of New South Wales standing in the Snowy River and watching water being flushed down the river ...

The member for Murray Valley recently said in Parliament:

As for putting more water down the Snowy River, that is an absolute disgrace to me.

These comments are quite consistent, and for the member for Swan Hill to stand in this place and pretend that he is the saviour of environmental flows is absolute rubbish, when everything that The Nationals has done speaks to the opposite.

The other issue that is very important to my electorate is the Mitchell River, and I would like to point out to this place that it will not be dammed while I am there, because the fight will be incredibly severe.

Sitting suspended 6.32 p.m. until 8.02 p.m.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — It gives me great pleasure to speak on the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill 2008. We have seen a lot of changes over the year since the last budget. The former Premier has gone, the former Treasurer has become the Premier and we have a new Treasurer. We thought we might have seen some changes, some new ideas and some innovation. Instead what we see from this government is the same old recipe. It is the same old recipe of lots of tax revenue and skyrocketing debt — up to \$22.9 billion by 2012. We have seen the same old recipe of ill-managed government services — people who cannot get access and people who cannot get the sort of support they should be getting from this

government. What we have seen from this Treasurer is more of the same, but the quantities have significantly increased.

What is the reality we see out there? We see overcrowding on trains, trams and buses. This is particularly the case out in Doncaster where we do not have the rail options, but we see overcrowded buses and people left at bus stops all the time. What else do we see? We see lists to get onto a waiting list in a hospital. People are waiting months and up to years to access hospital services. We see school maintenance at a disgraceful level. Hundreds of schools cannot get the maintenance they need. In my own electorate we see asbestos that cannot be replaced in schools and children having to learn in inappropriate facilities. We see a failure in people's ability to access services. They cannot get access to the support they need, and I will talk through some of that particularly in relation to my portfolio.

I would like to quote from comments made by the Victorian Council of Social Service in relation to the budget overall:

It was just disappointing that at a time when the financial position of the state is so strong and the pressure on many families so great, that more could not have been delivered to ease their present burden and invest further to develop a stronger and more just state.

I would like to go through a few different areas. Firstly, I refer to disability services. The government unfortunately has been playing politics with the commonwealth state/territory disability agreement for many months. Back in May 2007 the former federal government offered a fifty-fifty funding deal. This government rejected that offer. Subsequently the present government offered a similar fifty-fifty deal. The Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, said that it would be a priority to get that funding in place. That funding is not going to be delivered until 1 January 2009. That is nearly \$45 million worth of federal government money which could have delivered services to people with a disability in this state this year which is not being delivered. People have to wait to access a service that has been delayed through this process.

The political game playing of this government is inappropriate and has resulted in people with disabilities not being able to access the services they need. This is particularly the case in supported accommodation. There has been some increased money for the refurbishment of existing facilities, which we know, from community visitor reports, are very poor. Overall there has been a real fall of 3.5 per cent in terms of supported accommodation. There are 1370 people on

the waiting list. The Auditor-General says that by 2016 there will be 2500 people waiting to access supported accommodation. We know there has been no new beds for years — the Auditor-General also reported that.

Recently the federal government has given 70 more beds. That is a good thing, but there is a long way to go. All of these beds have been federally funded. When you look at the Victorian government budget papers, you see that not one extra place in supported accommodation has been provided for by this government. This year 4880 people will get supported accommodation, and next year it will be exactly the same number.

The government keeps saying it is offering different types of services, but the reality is that this is accommodation for people with severe and profound disabilities. They do not want individual packages in their home. They do not want individual packages so that services can be delivered to them in independent living. They need shared supported accommodation, and this government is just not delivering it.

On 22 May at a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing the Minister for Mental Health said:

We are now moving to a system which is about individualised funding and support packages to people with a disability to assist them to make the right choice.

But what we see is this government telling individuals what the right choice is, and the right choice is not shared supported accommodation, because this government is not investing in services so that more people can access them.

I am incredibly pleased that the Family and Community Development Committee is conducting a review, which was initiated by the opposition, to make sure that we can have new ideas for shared supported accommodation, so that we can take action in this area. Action is what is needed. In terms of services for people with disabilities, I would also like to mention door-to-door transport. The multipurpose taxi program is the main mechanism the government delivers, but what we see is greater demand for the service but less access to it. The program is underspent, but the reality is that it is currently capped and restricted, and is very complex to access. Many of us will have seen individuals who have come to us to try and get that sort of support.

In terms of mental health, the government says there is a need for a stronger focus on services for young people and also to improve access, but what is the reality in the budget? There has been a reduction in the estimated

number of community clients, and no change in the estimated proportion of people with a mental illness accessing community care, either before or after they enter hospital. There is exactly the same number of community contact hours, and the same number of clients being serviced by non-government organisations. The government is very happy to use the rhetoric and language of 'more services' and 'early intervention', but the reality is that it is spin over substance. There are exactly the same targets in terms of the services that are delivered and no real change in the outcomes for people with a mental illness.

Specifically in terms of not delivering on promises, 73 beds at Dandenong Hospital for acute mental illness were promised in the election, but they are yet to be delivered. The people of Dandenong and that area need those beds, and the government needs to get on and deliver on the commitment it made.

I would like to talk briefly about drugs and alcohol services. Just before the budget the Victoria's alcohol action plan was announced by the Premier and the Minister for Mental Health. At the time, the minister said at a Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing:

We, of course, need to be constantly vigilant and able to respond to ongoing and emerging problems.

Let me tell you what 'constantly vigilant' translates to in reality. Firstly there was an announcement of a \$17.6 million liquor licensing compliance directorate. In response to a question the minister said there would be no new licensing inspectors and no new compliance activities in the next year, so I do not see how this constant vigilance and response to emerging issues translates to action in the budget when no change is actually delivered.

The Victorian alcohol action plan was a grab bag of ideas from this government. It did not put back one of the 66 beds that the government removed from the treatment service system, and eight more are about to go from Warrnambool. The plan did not put in place any long-term treatment services, but consistently we hear that there is up to a four-year wait for people to access the treatment services they need. There was nothing in the Victorian alcohol action plan for country Victoria.

The Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee report into the consumption of alcohol said that tailored solutions were needed for country Victoria, because it is different from metropolitan Melbourne, but this city-centric government has done more of the same. There is not a

single initiative for country Victoria in the Victorian alcohol action plan.

Parents have an important role to play in issues surrounding young people and drinking. When the Victorian alcohol action plan was first promised in 2002 — six years before it was delivered — the then minister said that strategies to suggest what parents need to know about alcohol would be included in this process. Once again, there is absolutely nothing.

In the time I have left I will touch on a few other areas. In terms of our ageing community, I welcome the funding for Trentham Residential Aged Care, the Stella Anderson Nursing Home and the second stage of the Kingston Centre redevelopment, but they have been a long time coming. These services have needed upgrades for a long time. This contrasts with the 2001 fabric survey, in which 33 facilities were identified as dilapidated and as having unsuitable layouts and occupational health and safety risks. At the present time 17 facilities, which is more than half the facilities identified seven years ago, have had nothing done to them; in fact, planning for seven of them has not even started. This government is not delivering on facilities for people who are ageing.

In terms of concessions, there was a promise of an increase in water and sewerage concessions — up to \$23.50, which is about a 14.8 per cent increase, but the average bill is going up by \$100. Pensioners need to find an additional \$76 to be able to pay their bills. The Premier promised that proportionality would be maintained, but in Gippsland the charges are going to go up more than 14.8 per cent, and the government will not maintain the proportionality of the concession. This promise is not going to be delivered, and it hits country Victorians much harder. The concessions need to allow older people, who are under so much pressure from price increases, to be able to pay their water and sewerage bills and be able to access funding for other things they need.

In terms of the women's affairs portfolio, I welcome the \$24.7 million initiative against intimate partner violence, because partner violence is a leading contributor to death, disability and illness among women between 15 and 44 years of age. But funding in and of itself is not enough; it also needs a solid legislative framework and sound evaluation. In 2005 the Victorian Law Reform Commission recommended what we have been waiting to see — that is, the family violence bill. The Attorney-General promised in 2007 that it would be delivered last year, and we are still waiting for the family violence bill to be introduced to the Parliament.

We are pleased that the evaluation of the women's safety strategy has happened, but its outcome is not being made public, consistent with this government's secrecy and lack of transparency on important issues that need to be addressed.

I would like to spend the last few minutes of my speech dealing with issues in my electorate of Doncaster. Finally there is funding in the budget for a few extra buses on the Eastern Freeway, but the funding provided is a fraction of the commitment of this government under Meeting Our Transport Challenges, and it goes nowhere near the \$300 million that the Eddington report said was required to ensure that Doncaster has a state-of-the-art public transport service to the centre of Melbourne that is as fast, as comfortable and as reliable as a fixed rail service.

In contrast to the opposition, this government consistently fails to invest in rail services to Doncaster. Bus services need to be frequent and reliable over an extended period so that people trust the service. We need more investment in public transport services in Doncaster so that people have the confidence to use the system. At the same time that this underinvestment is happening, the government is going to be taking a bonanza in speed camera revenue from the residents of Donvale, Doncaster and their surrounds.

On the one hand, I am very pleased that there is funding for a master plan for Doncaster Secondary College. I commend the college's principal, staff and families who have spent many years advocating for the upgrade of facilities so that the students and teachers can have the positive learning environment they deserve.

On the other hand, the failure to fund the Box Hill Hospital redevelopment is an absolute disaster. Some \$8.5 million for infrastructure funding will only repair air conditioners and make sure that things are turning over, but what is needed is \$850 million to completely redevelop the hospital. The planning has been done for years and has had the support and encouragement of the government. The member for Burwood even chaired the hospital's redevelopment committee, but absolutely nothing has happened. People in the eastern region need a hospital service that is high quality and can deliver the care and services that they need.

In conclusion, what do we see in the budget from this government? We see increased revenue, ever-increasing debt and continually failing services, when we needed new ideas and a new approach. The people of Doncaster — indeed, of Victoria — deserve significantly better than what this tired and arrogant government has provided.

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — It is with great pleasure that I join the debate on the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill. I have always taken a great deal of pleasure in speaking on each of the appropriations bills since I was elected in 2002 because each budget, whether under the Bracks Labor government or now under the Brumby Labor government, has delivered significant benefits to my electorate. This budget has been described as a baby boom budget, and in an electorate like mine that has a large number of families and a large number of babies being born, it is absolutely the right sort of budget that we need to support the families.

Whilst we are talking about the babies being born in my electorate, I am pleased to see that we are up to the fourth upgrade now at the Northern Hospital since we have come to government. The upgrade this year focuses on \$2.5 million in funding for increased maternity services that will provide for an additional 500 births to take place at that fantastic hospital. My electorate and the northern suburbs generally are very fortunate in the quality of health services that we have, being served by three out of the four newest hospitals in Victoria based in the northern suburbs: the Northern Hospital, the Austin Hospital and the Mercy Hospital for Women. The Austin Hospital has also had some significant funding allocated in this budget, including \$25 million to fast-track cancer treatment at the Austin Hospital's appropriately named Olivia Newton-John Cancer Centre. Also the Repatriation campus of the Austin Hospital is going to have some additional investment in mental health services for our veterans, which is another fantastic health service in the northern suburbs.

There has been additional funding for families, with an early childhood package of \$179.2 million for mothers, babies and children in the early years. In my electorate we have already seen a children's centre in South Morang, one of the first children's centres built by this government — they are now advocated by the Rudd Labor government in Canberra — and we are going to have one built shortly at Doreen. It is important to have these early childhood services co-located with where our kids are being educated.

I am really pleased to see that in the education component of this fantastic Brumby Labor government budget we are funding another new school in the Yan Yean electorate; the Mernda central primary school will be built to service the new communities in Mernda. Additionally, only in the last fortnight I had great pleasure in hosting the Minister for Education at the sod turning for the new Doreen North primary school at Laurimar. That follows on from the opening of the Epping Views Primary School earlier this year and the

Mill Park Lakes P-9 school. The first campus opened last year, and in term 3 the dedicated P-4 and special development school campus is due to open.

An honourable member interjected.

Ms GREEN — It is all happening in schools in the Yan Yean electorate. We are also seeing at the edge of my electorate the upgrade to the Upper Plenty Primary School. Not only are we making a commitment to the large new schools that need to be built in the new suburbs in my electorate, but I also have the privilege of representing a lot of small rural communities, and they have also benefited from our investments in education with this rebuild at Upper Plenty. We also have the Kinglake West school upgrade, which is almost complete.

I have talked about the early years and the primary schools, but our secondary schools have also had good news in this budget in that each of the fantastic secondary schools in my electorate is receiving a significant boost in technical equipment. Whittlesea Secondary College, a renowned leader in vocational education and training, is receiving new equipment. The Mill Park Secondary College, where I was privileged to be at the senior campus last week with the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs to announce additional funding for some new drought proofing of the multipurpose sporting facility, is also getting some new equipment at the senior campus. The Diamond Valley Secondary College is getting some additional equipment. St Helena Secondary College, which is on the edge of my electorate and which I share with the member for Eltham, is also getting additional equipment. Eltham High School, where many of my constituents' children go to school, as does my own son, is getting additional equipment. Warrandyte High School, where many of my constituents from North Warrandyte attend, is also getting additional technical equipment so that we can deliver the full range of subjects in all the fantastic government schools in my electorate.

Following on from secondary schools, we also have a fantastic trades investment at the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT) campus at Epping. This is the second major upgrade to that campus since I entered this place in 2002. The first investment was a \$10 million investment in the agricultural and primary industry trades, because NMIT actually delivers the largest number of agricultural and horticultural training courses of any institution in Victoria. This year there is going to be another \$10.5 million for the development of another facility at this great institution that will cater for the growing demand for training and provide a

specialist painting and plastering training centre, a new library and a student services building. For the electorate that I represent, with two magnificent growth corridors in Epping North and South Morang through to Doreen and Mernda where there are many new houses built, this sort of investment in local training to provide the skilled workers to continue building those homes is very welcome. While I am talking about those new homes and the need to support families in buying their homes, I was particularly pleased to see the \$1.43 million of support for first home buyers as well.

I have talked about education, early childhood services and health benefits going to my electorate in this budget, but in the health arena there has also been some additional expenditure set aside for ambulance services, including an additional peak period unit at South Morang, which services my electorate and also that of Greensborough. This is in addition to the many upgrades to ambulance services that have occurred in my electorate. I forgot to say — although it is just outside my electorate it will also benefit the community — that the Kilmore ambulance unit has been upgraded to a 24-hour service. My community has been particularly pleased with and has welcomed the announcement pre-budget, although it is part of the budget, of the amalgamation of the two ambulance services in this state into one new entity that will deliver even better ambulance services and get rid of some of those little things such as dispatch issues that occurred on the boundaries of the areas covered by the Rural Ambulance Victoria (RAV) and the Metropolitan Ambulance Services (MAS), particularly around Kinglake. The amalgamation of those two services will bring a lot of benefits.

I look forward shortly to the conclusion of the construction of the first ambulance station in Whittlesea township in addition to the ambulances this government has placed at Diamond Creek, Craigieburn, Bundoora, Broadmeadows and Coolaroo. This just shows that this government has been very committed to providing and improving ambulance services in the north, something that was sorely neglected by the Kennett government of the 1990s.

In the public transport arena I was very pleased to see John Brumby on the day he became Premier of this state less than 12 months ago nail his colours to the mast and say that he would be a Premier who would govern for the outer suburbs. This budget has definitely shown his commitment to doing that. Whether it was in his role as Treasurer or as Minister for State and Regional Development, he has always said that he would govern for the whole state. He has done many things across regional Victoria, but I am pleased that he

has also placed a focus on the outer suburbs where the main pressures of Victoria's booming economy are being felt.

I also welcome the expenditure that is being made and the support that is being provided for first home owners constructing a home in regional Victoria. I support the development and building of homes in regional and country Victoria because that support for those home buyers takes pressure off the growth corridors that I represent. I am really pleased that the Premier, representing the northern suburbs, has shown his commitment to the northern suburbs by bringing forward the timetable for the extension of the train line to South Morang. This budget allocates \$10.4 million for the detailed planning and engineering works that are necessary to appropriately cost this enormous project.

Those on the other side have tried to make out that this is a very cheap project to undertake, and it certainly is not. They have made ridiculous and underfunded promises and played politics with this issue, but the reality is that the system we inherited when we came to government in 1999 was one that they had let down. They had not invested in it at all. In fact they had privatised it and left an enormous mess. You only have to look at the failed contracting to see that. It cost the government \$600 million to bail out that failed experiment.

We also found that there were very significant pinch points in the system, and I was pleased that in previous budgets we had started the staging of the extension of the train line to South Morang because you cannot just extend it. Unlike members of the opposition who might say, 'Just put the second storey on the house; who cares if it has dud foundations', we have been very committed to fixing the foundations of that system to prepare it for the extra demand. I am pleased to see the work that is occurring in duplicating the track between Clifton Hill and Westgarth and building a new bridge because it means that unlike the 13 trains per hour that can currently travel through the junction of the Epping and Hurstbridge lines we will be able to have 20 trains per hour travelling through it so that when the line is extended to South Morang it will offer a regular service.

I was pleased over the last financial year to see the bus reviews that have been instigated and funded by the Minister for Public Transport. I am certain that some of those resources will be spent soon in my electorate once the Whittlesea and Banyule/Nillumbik reviews come out shortly. In the transport area I was also pleased to see \$9 million was allocated for the Yarra Glen bypass. Many of my constituents on the eastern side of the

electorate shop, work and go to schools in Yarra Glen so they are very pleased to see that occurring.

On community safety, we have done a significant amount in upgrading and building new police stations in my electorate. I am pleased to see that the Greensborough police station will be getting an upgrade this time, which will improve safety and also the experience of those attending the police station. It will improve the reception area and the holding cells there. This is in addition to the new police stations that have been opened only in the last 12 months at Warrandyte and Hurstbridge. In previous years we have had a new station for the first time at Kinglake and a new police station at Eltham.

In conclusion, this is an extremely good budget that continues to nail the Brumby Labor government's sail to the mast and to ensure that Victoria is and remains as the best place to live, work and raise a family. Certainly in my electorate of Yan Yean we have seen the benefits of the Brumby Labor government. We also look forward to continued partnerships with and overtures from the federal Rudd Labor government, and I am sure that working together we can continue this good work to deliver for the working families in our area.

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill, and I wish to draw on a series of quotes that have been made in response to the budget. I start with a quote from the shadow Treasurer and the headline of his media release on 6 May, which says 'State debt to sky rocket: Victoria's interest bill to hit \$1.8 billion a year. Debt jumps to \$23 billion'. It is not a good start. We then go to Peter Ryan, Leader of The Nationals, whose media release on the same day states 'Some budget wins for country Victoria, but many more losses'. It goes on to say:

And whilst claiming to give back to the community in the form of tax cuts, the reality is Labor is planning to increase its tax take from payroll tax, stamp duty and land tax by a staggering \$1.5 billion this coming financial year.

The Leader of the Liberal Party's media release of 6 May is headlined 'Labor's taxes soar as services slide: payroll tax revenue up by \$360 million; land tax revenue up by almost \$300 million; stamp duty revenue up by almost \$900 million'.

We then go to the local media and community comment. In the *Mansfield Courier* we see the headline by journalists Steve Kelly and Rhyll Moore, after talking with the shire, the school and the hospital, 'Hunt for funding: no major windfalls for shire, hospital or college in budget, but some hope to access more cash'.

We then go to the Labor Party's own state members for Northern Victoria Region in the other place, Kaye Darveniza and Candy Broad, whose press release says 'The Brumby Labor government is taking action for our region' and all they can identify is the first homeowner's bonus and something on the future farming strategy. When you come specifically to northern Victoria — that is, all of northern Victoria — there is a reference to a logistics centre at Wodonga, rural dental chairs at Mildura and Wodonga which are welcome, Goulburn Ovens TAFE at Wangaratta and some funding for schools at Wangaratta and Wodonga. That is the sum total; about \$30 million is the sum total of the budget contribution to northern Victoria.

If we then go on to education, we see the responses from the community on education. In the *Mansfield Courier* we have the headline on the front page, prior to the budget, which says 'Waiting game: college hopes for rebuild, as termites and age eat away at facilities'. The article says:

The college has been playing the patch-up game for years, pouring money in to a structure they hope will soon be rebuilt to accommodate ... the needs of its 470 students.

The only problem is the government says it is not a growing area, it is not a big school and it is low on the priority list.

We then have the situation with the federal government about to withdraw the incentive payments to public sector employers for the employment of students under the Australian School-based Apprenticeships scheme. Mansfield Secondary College is a leader in the scheme; it has 130 students per year undertaking the scheme and employs up to 7 of those students in the school each year. Let us have an example of cooperative federalism; let us have our Labor colleagues at the state level negotiate with Mr Rudd and Ms Gillard to bring back that benefit so that Mansfield Secondary College and other colleges in country Victoria can give our country kids a chance of achieving.

Let us move on to Catholic schools. The headline on the front page of the *Wangaratta Chronicle*, Friday, 16 May reads, 'What about our schools?', and the subheading reads, 'Catholic, independents fear higher fees, as state refuses funding plea'. We then have a letter from Denis Higgins, who is the director of Catholic education for the Sandhurst diocese. The letter identifies a number of issues that are hurting Catholic schools. It asks the government to commit to full indexation of all state recurrent and targeted grants to the Catholic sector on the basis of the increased cost of education in Victoria. It asks for the base Victorian state grant to be increased to 25 per cent of the cost of

educating a student in a government school, in line with the average state or territory contribution across Australia. Currently Victorian Catholic schools only receive 15.8 per cent of that amount — shame on the Labor government! Catholic schools receive only \$5000 per student with a disability; a government school with the same student would receive \$15 000.

The suggestion to Catholic and independent schools is that they increase fees, but there is a little problem: parents cannot afford to pay increased fees. If we look at socioeconomic status levels — that is, the indicator of poverty in the communities that schools service — 100 is an average level, whereas St Joseph's School in Benalla has the level of 93, down from 94; FCJ College in Benalla is 92, down from 94; St John's School at Euroa is 90; St Mary's School at Mansfield is 93; St Mary's School at Myrtleford is 89 and St Joseph's School at Nagambie is 88. The schools cannot afford to put up their fees because the people cannot afford to pay them.

Mr Nardella — It is their decision.

Dr SYKES — The member for Melton says, 'It is their decision'. Thanks very much to the caring member for Melton; the local people will be much impressed by the caring Labor Party!

Let us move on to kindergartens. The headline of the *Mansfield Courier* of 3 June reads, 'Kinder dilemma as state cuts funding', and the subheading reads, 'Higher fees, big classes, waiting lists pondered'. The article refers to:

an \$18 000 cutback in state government funding for the Mansfield kindergarten ...

It says:

Currently running three classes of 20 per week, the kindergarten may be forced to drop to two classes of ... 30 —

students —

per week.

Thanks very much — the Labor Party cares about country kids, doesn't it?

Let us move on to tertiary education. I quote from a media release by Peter Hall, a Nationals member, headed 'Tertiary education, skills, miss out in budget':

Mr Hall said the government had reduced budgeted funding for its skills and workforce output by 3.7 per cent —

thanks very much to the caring Labor government!

The government proposes to change the TAFE system in ways that may result in the introduction of higher education contribution scheme-style fees, increasing the cost of education for country kids, who are already struggling to achieve their tertiary education, because if you are a country kid your tertiary education costs twice as much as it would if you were a city kid — thanks very much to the caring Labor government!

Let us move to local government, which is outraged. I again go to the *Mansfield Courier*. I quote from an article of 12 May under the headline ‘Weed fight funds not enough’:

northern Victoria councils say they don't have —

enough —

money to deal with the responsibility of tackling roadside weeds in their municipalities.

...

Mansfield Shire Council chief executive officer David Roff said his council only had the resources to deal with minimal roadside weed control and the funding provided in the Future Farming package needed to be reviewed.

We have the Wangaratta Rural City Council being quoted in an article that appeared in the *Wangaratta Chronicle* of Friday, 9 May, under the heading ‘Roadside weeds cost ratepayers’ and the subheading ‘State dumps responsibility: council forced to fork out around \$195 000’.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Dr SYKES — City chief executive officer, Doug Sharp, confirms that the annual bill will be around \$195 000. The move was a clear case of — the member for Melton should listen! — government cost shifting.

Let us just stick with weeds for a moment. We have the government making a great contribution to the management of our state! About 7 million hectares of the country is now under the so-called ‘management’ of the state. Parks Victoria wrote a letter to the local people in the Goomalibee area. They said in relation to weed control:

Parks Victoria has limited resources for the control of weeds in the many parks and reserves we manage, resources are allocated against a range of competing priorities.

The government has not got enough money! It keeps taking control of more land, and it will not provide funds for the land it already has the responsibility to manage.

Let us move on to health, and a plea to the member for Melton, through the Chair of course. Regarding Alpine Health services, the *Alpine Observer* of Wednesday, 4 June, has the heading ‘Health service misses funding’ and the subheading ‘Alpine Health left out in cold after federal government rethink’. The federal government has pulled the pin on \$780 000 of regional partnership money to upgrade the health services in Myrtleford, Mount Beauty and Bright. Thanks very much to a caring Labor government! What about you blokes over there putting your so-called cooperative federalism into practice and talking to your mates up there to get that money so that the country elderly and country sick people can have some help.

We move on, and there is another little problem called energy costs. Electricity is set to go up by about 17 per cent in 2008 and gas prices are going to rise by more than 7 per cent, but there have been no increases to the energy concessions or hardship payment, according to the Leader of the Liberal Party. That is the — —

Mr Nardella — That’s a reliable source.

Dr SYKES — At least we do not tell lies like that fellow across on the other side who has been naming the Plug the Pipe people. His day of reckoning will come. If we look at electricity prices, we see in the *Shepparton News* — the paper operated by the McPherson family, who are strong advocates of piping water from north to south — of Wednesday, 4 June, the headline ‘Electricity price surge’ and the subheading ‘New contract, but council’s still forking out 30 per cent more for power’, it is making it a little bit hard for country people, is it not?

Let us look at the *Weekly Times* of 28 May and the article by Lyndal Reading under the headline ‘Shock for rural business’. It states:

Country businesses pay up to 40 per cent more for electricity than their metropolitan counterparts.

A study by the City of Greater Bendigo and the Better Bendigo Manufacturing Group found that Victorian country network prices are 19 to 30 per cent higher than Melbourne.

But that is all right — we govern for all Victorians, don’t we! That side of the house says, ‘We govern for all Victorians’, but it is not governing very evenly. The government supposedly looks after the interests of the people in Bendigo!

Let us move on to deal with the drought.

Mr Nardella — What drought?

Dr SYKES — What drought? That is right, because the budget says that we are assuming the drought is over. I have got news for the government: it is not over — and the people out there are hurting. What I will tell the government is that now our community leaders are starting to hurt. They are coming to me and saying, ‘Bill, it is getting too tough. Those people we thought were resilient financially and emotionally are rolling over, they are going over’. It is starting to knock around our community leaders who have been holding them together.

Our community outreach worker, Ivan Lister, whom I have mentioned in this Parliament before in relation to this issue, is funded for five days a week until 30 June. After 30 June his funding cuts back to cover only three days a week. I have made pleas to the Minister for Mental Health, and I have made pleas to the secretary to the Department of Human Services, and they tell me they are still considering it. They have not worked out whether in less than three weeks time there will be funding for a community outreach worker who is out there connecting people to their lifeline. Thanks very much for a caring Labor government! We love them! Just in case members have not read the local papers up our way, the drought is continuing, and the Murray River is a series of waterholes. There is a bit of a drought up there!

The government of the day wishes to take water — steal water — from the dry north and pipe it south when there is not enough water up there.

If we then look at another sleight of hand, we have the Country Fire Authority volunteer welfare fund, which is a good idea; a generous idea of \$2 million. But according to Mr Alex Hooper, a CFA volunteer — are members listening? — \$1.5 million of that \$2 million is going to come from the fire services levy. Do members know who pays that? It is those of us who insure our properties. Do members know what the rate of the fire services levy is now in Victoria? In rural Victoria the fire services levy is now 58 per cent or 59 per cent, which is way above any other fire services levy in states which have those levies. The Labor government is a non-caring government.

Finally, let us look at what could have been delivered. For example, the Alpine shire has issued a booklet on its economic development issues, and has come up with a number of suggestions which would kick along the shire, including clarification of water rights; security of water supply, which includes the upgrading and expansion of Lake Buffalo into Big Buffalo; and a secure water supply for Bright and Myrtleford. Bright has 30 000 people and still does not have anything

more than direct access to the river. For \$10 million the shire could put in place infrastructure to put power and water up to Mount Buffalo Chalet so we would have something for people to come and visit. But this Labor government does not care.

I have not even touched on the food bowl and that fiasco other than to say that last week we saw what country people were thinking. Today we heard on ABC radio what their view is. Just in case the government has not got the message, the headline on the front page of Wednesday’s *Alexandra Standard* says:

Brumby calls PTP — —

Plug the Pipe — —

liars.

That is not a good call.

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this fantastic budget; the first budget delivered by our new Treasurer, and the first Brumby government budget. It was welcomed with open arms in the Pascoe Vale electorate, particularly by Pascoe Vale North Primary School, which had \$3.1 million worth of reasons to smile. Education is a top priority in my electorate, for my electorate office and the work we do, and for the local community, and this budget delivers a fantastic result.

I want to highlight the great work that enabled the state budget to deliver for Pascoe Vale North Primary School’s stage 2 modernisation project. I had been advocating on behalf of the school to have this much-needed capital works program finalised. After the completion of the \$1.37 million stage 1 upgrade in 2006 the school was given the go-ahead for the stage 2 plan. We have a fantastic principal in Peter Adams, and a school council led by Sonia Josipovic. They have worked tirelessly to get funding to rebuild the school.

When the stage 2 modernisation is complete the new students at the school will be able to enjoy state-of-the-art facilities which are matched only by the fantastic teaching, the curriculum and the dedicated volunteer and staff team there. Stage 2 of the project includes the replacement of light timber construction buildings, a new library, a new art room, and refurbished administration and toilet blocks.

Other budget initiatives in education that were welcomed in my electorate were \$100 000 for Pascoe Vale Girls College and \$20 000 for Coburg Senior High School. Those grants will build on funding that is required to provide state-of-the-art technical and

vocational education and training. It includes items such as computer-aided drafting and manufacturing equipment and software, machinery equipment, digital lathes and automotive and engineering equipment.

Students doing the vocational education and training (VET) program and similar programs will have state-of-the-art technical and vocational education equipment to accompany the great training provided by the schools. Lest people say that the work is complete, I highlight now that in the next budget I will make school infrastructure funding a top priority for the Pascoe Vale Girls College, which deserves the next phase of its modernisation.

Turning now to transport, the budget provided funding for the implementation of the new clearways policy. I am pleased the Minister for Roads and Ports is in the house this evening because I have had the opportunity to speak with him about the importance of consultation on clearways, and it is fantastic that he will be meeting with interested parties in another week or so on clearways. The Moreland Integrated Transport strategy, accompanied by the minister's new announcement on clearways, can give a greater transport provision to the Sydney Road corridor. At certain times of the day Sydney Road has clearways on both sides of the road. The new clearways policy will enable us to work with VicRoads, Moreland council and the Coburg traders to have, for example, three forms of transport along Sydney Road: the tram line, a road for cars and a dedicated bike lane. The establishment of the new clearways and the implementation of these three forms of transport will ensure the government strategy for more non-vehicular transport will occur.

What I love about Sydney Road, and I need to declare my interest in cycling at this point, is that it is a nice, clear, flat road that goes straight into the city. For those who are not interested in the great big bike rides and mountain bike riding, Sydney Road provides clear, efficient transport straight into the city without any hills. This will be a great outcome, and funding is provided in the budget for the new clearways.

I now refer to public transport. This budget continues to improve on the many initiatives that have been undertaken by the Labor government in public transport. It was a great day when the new Gowanbrae on-demand bus service was announced by the Minister for Public Transport. It will be running when the third school term commences. This new service provides public transport to a part of Moreland that previously had no public transport whatsoever.

The transport initiatives from the Hume-Moreland Bus Service Review have enabled extra bus services on the Gowrie to Northland route. We have also been able to implement route 530, which travels between Campbellfield and North Coburg and which will extend the existing route to Gowrie railway station and central Coburg. Route 534, Glenroy to Merlynston, will have an extension of the existing route to central Coburg and an extension of operating hours to 9.00 p.m. seven days a week. The operating hours of route 540, Upfield to Broadmeadows, will be extended to 9.00 p.m. seven days a week. That is part of this government's commitment under the \$10.5 million Meeting Our Transport Challenges action plan, which includes a 10-year strategy to improve our transport system.

In concluding on transport, I congratulate the Department of Sustainability and Environment for taking action to ensure the completion of the principal bike network. There have been some hold-ups with municipal councils, and small objections are being made. Previously they have been heard on a one-by-one basis. The Department of Sustainability and Environment has taken the decision to complete as many of these pathways as possible. This will be a great improvement. It will be good for cycling, will lead to improved health benefits and of course will be good for the environment.

The third area that I would like to mention resulting from the budget is health. One of the best speeches I heard from the member for Ivanhoe was the one he gave the other week in relation to mental health services, particularly in the northern suburbs. As he is lucky enough to have the great public Austin Hospital in his electorate, he knows the facilities there and the great work of its staff, particularly in mental health. This budget provides for the northern suburbs even further improvements in mental health, with \$15.5 million for works at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, including the centre for trauma-related mental health services. The centre is to be a redevelopment of the veterans psychiatric unit and will provide a new 20-bed unit for inpatients and outpatients, treating veterans and non-veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders and major mood disorders.

Pascoe Vale and surrounds, particularly Pascoe Vale, were established after the Second World War by soldier settlers, who hold the repatriation hospital very dear. Many of them at our local RSL were probably the most outspoken critics of our involvement in the Iraq war. I quite frankly thought that many of them would support it, but after the trauma they had experienced they said that no young person should be sent to war in Iraq. Not

one person at the Pascoe Vale RSL supported our involvement in that war. The fact is, though, that we sent people to Iraq, and we will require more inpatient and outpatient services for veterans as a result. The wonderful Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital will be able to provide just that.

Also on health, we will have improvements in ambulances. Twenty-four new paramedic teams are being established, and Coburg is lucky enough to also have improved ambulance services as a result of this budget.

The Northern Hospital has been allocated \$2.5 million for the expansion of its maternity services. The member for Yan Yean mentioned that in her contribution, so I will not go into it in detail because I am running out of time.

The other item I wish to cover in the 3 minutes remaining is the fact that money has been allocated to the Department of Human Services in the Office of Women's Policy. I welcome that, particularly in relation to the recent reports of the Victorian Law Reform Commission. Good policy requires thorough investigation by our departmental policy personnel. I trust they will take time to read and incorporate 80 per cent of the submissions made to the VLRC's recent inquiry into abortion.

In my submission to that inquiry I recommended an increased emphasis on informed consent. I recommended an adverse events register, because it is good public policy and it is done in the public hospitals, but it is not done in private facilities; with increased information in relation to post-abortion trauma it is really important that we have that information on an adverse events register. The third component that I emphasised in my submission to that inquiry was adequate time for pregnancy counselling, reflection and decision making. If we are to have good public policy on reproductive technology, reproductive health and abortion, we must have in all cases informed consent. We need to know the effects of certain procedures, and adverse events registers are therefore very important. Of course you cannot have informed consent without adequate time for pregnancy counselling, reflection and decision making.

With those comments, I wish to congratulate the budget expenditure review committee that put together this budget. I want to congratulate the Treasurer and the Premier on what is for one his first budget as Treasurer, and for the other his first budget as Premier. The results of this budget will be profound, and they will continue

to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — This government has blown probably the greatest political opportunity in Victorian history. It has blown it in the good years — and what a disappointment it is! Government members have had the time, they have had the money, they have had the power and they have had nearly nine years to do anything they wanted as a government, but they have done so little.

What do Victorians have to show for this government's tenure? We have slipped in most of the indexes, we have slipped in livability in Melbourne and we have slipped in the interstate comparisons. This budget simply adds to what is a very ordinary record of a government that inherited surpluses, inherited opportunity and inherited a chance to really make a difference. This budget lacks vision. It simply taxes to the maximum and provides minimum services. Debt is soaring yet again.

It is extraordinary that at the very time the federal government is preaching restraint, this budget expands the basis both of revenue and of expenses by around 10 per cent in 12 months. Total revenues this year will be close to \$38 billion, a 10 per cent increase from last year — a \$3.5 billion revenues increase from last year at a time like this! Total expenses are some \$37 billion — an over 9 per cent increase of \$3.1 billion in that period. This is at the very time, as I said, that the federal government is preaching restraint. Again as I said, there are maximum taxes, minimum services, rising debt and a lack of vision.

The budget was self-proclaimed by the Treasurer and promoted in the budget lock-up as a baby budget — perhaps it is not a baby boomer's budget but a booming baby budget! — and to an extent he was correct. Our babies will be paying for years to come for the failings of this government. They will be paying long into the future. What an irony that is, when this government has had so much by way of surplus, when it has had so much by way of opportunity and when it has itself closed so many obstetrics wards around the state. The reality of this budget is that trains will still run late, local school roofs will still leak and Victorians will still be stuck on waiting lists for vital health care.

An interesting thing has been happening in Victoria and with this government over the last few months. The Premier has been in the job for nearly 12 months, but he is making a concerted effort to wash his hands of his predecessor's years. The rhetoric associated with almost every announcement of this government — and

we heard it again in question time today — runs to this issue: ‘We have suddenly got some unexpected growth in Victoria; therefore all bets are off. We might not have got it right in the past, so we can wash our hands of the Bracks years and draw a new line in the sand’. It is nonsense, Acting Speaker, and Victorians ought to be on guard for this sort of rhetoric.

To see this we only have to go back to 2002 and the 12 or 18 months beforehand, when the Deputy Premier was the planning minister and was preparing what was described then as the metropolitan strategy, which has since become known as Melbourne 2030. That strategy initially was going to be a 2020 strategy. It was to map out growth in metropolitan Melbourne and Victoria to the year 2020. The population figures were obviously prepared for that. Along with that strategy went a transport strategy, which was titled early on and retained its title, 20-20-20 — 20 per cent of trips by the year 2020 was the aim, coming off a base of about 8 per cent of trips. The whole strategy was designed for 2020. The population figures and the growth estimates were there and the estimates were such that all that has happened in Victoria could have been anticipated. But what happened? Very late in the process, when the former Deputy Premier was under pressure on the metropolitan strategy, it switched from a 2020 strategy to a 2030 one, because the numbers were a bit scary.

The anticipated growth at the time was a bit scary, and it shifted to a 2030 strategy. And former Deputy Premier John Thwaites stepped aside and we had another minister, we have had another since, and we have had another since then. All along the anticipated growth was there. This washing of hands of the past has been a complete nonsense.

In 2004 I had the privilege of attending a conference when there was a heady debate about population figures in this state. Some very well-credentialed individuals got up and indicated that the government was not being truthful with its growth figures.

Dr Napthine — They weren’t liars, were they?

Mr BAILLIEU — The member for South-West Coast asked whether the government were liars. I would not say that; they were simply falsely asserting the growth figures. Very curiously at that conference one of the principal public servants in charge of these figures had the rug pulled on his contribution, because the government did not want to expose what were the real figures.

The good years have been blown and, as I said, this budget simply has not delivered. It is not the first, but it is interesting to reflect — —

Mr Nardella — It won’t be the last.

Mr BAILLIEU — You have got two more to go, Johnny, and I suspect they will not deliver either! It is interesting to reflect on some of the commentary on the budget. The Ballarat *Courier* of 7 May says ‘Tax funds surplus while debt rises’ and:

Victorians will pay more ... than ever as the state government looks to increase the size of its surpluses and go deeper into debt to fund infrastructure.

I refer to newspaper headlines. The Warrnambool *Standard* said ‘High on taxes, low on glamour’; the *Border Mail* said ‘Record tax take to fund spree’; and the AMA (Australian Medical Association) described this budget in at least the Ballarat *Courier*, if not in other places, as a ‘golden opportunity missed’. The *Australian Financial Review* noted the ‘problems ahead’ for this government, and the *Australian* noted, again on 7 May, ‘Brumby borrows to spend up big’. The *Age* said it neatly in its editorial of 7 May:

... a state budget of missed opportunities —

and indeed it is. If we look at what the situation is in regard to other states, how does Victoria measure up these days? How do we measure up in terms of police, education, health and public transport? You do not have to be a genius to know. In policing, per capita police numbers are amongst the lowest of Australian states. No new police are announced in this budget, and indeed since the budget the Police Association has estimated the force is some 3000 officers short.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr BAILLIEU — The member for Melton wants to make another contribution, which causes me to note that in Melton and indeed in Brimbank the estimate is that they are 120 police officers short, but I am sure the member for Melton does not care about that even though Melton has the fourth highest incidence of most-violent assaults.

On per capita education, Victoria has the lowest level of Catholic and independent funding per student of any state and the lowest levels of literacy and numeracy of any mainland state. What a wonderful trip we had in terms of the enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) on teachers, when the government was dragged kicking and screaming to pay teachers at the highest level in Australia, only for us to discover later that that was not the case.

On health, we still have the lowest level of per capita funding for public hospitals and the fewest beds per capita. It is an extraordinary record. In public transport, there is still no relief: it is overcrowded and unreliable, with no new trains, trams or tracks. The list goes on.

What have we had in tax, compared with other states? Victorians will still be paying the most stamp duty of any state on a median-priced home, land tax has gone up, gaming taxes are up, stamp duty is up, congestion levies have been retained when they have proved to be a farce, motor cycle levies have been retained and fines are up. Indeed, taxation is up all round. If you look at the basic taxation message, when the government released this budget it pushed out this message that somehow or other it is making some tax cuts. The budget had \$1.5 billion in extra taxes and \$300 million was given back. That was the simple message.

I want to comment also about an issue which is increasingly engaging not only Victorians but all Australians, and that is fuel prices. It is interesting that the take per litre to Victoria is of significance. I think members would know that the GST on fuel in Victoria comes back to Victoria by way of that GST. Interestingly, over the last 12 months fuel prices have obviously increased. Associated with that increase, the Victorian government is collecting additional money. For every 5 cent addition to the fuel price, there is an extra \$30 million take by the Victorian government.

If you go back to 12 months ago, the price of fuel was about \$1.30 per litre, although obviously it varied at different pumps. It is now heading north, and we are told that it will soon be \$2 a litre. We need to take into account the fact that the Victorian government is taking a fair slab of additional money as a consequence. In addition to the issues of this industry and the economy in Victoria, it is interesting to look at the latest Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry survey of business trends and the June quarter 2008 outlook. It notes that trading conditions weakened during the March quarter and that the business sentiment index is down. Indeed, the document shows that few are expecting stronger conditions over the next 12 months and others are gloomier.

We have had a positive announcement today about Toyota in terms of a new model vehicle to be built in Victoria over the next few years. That came at the same time as Holden pulled 500 jobs out of its engine manufacturing plant. Expectations are not high at the moment in terms of business confidence, and we need to recognise that. Indeed the Australian Industry Group said as much in April this year. It noted that the construction industry is continuing to decline and that

the service sector is being hit hard by rising interest rates.

A series of concerns have been expressed by other members in terms of what this government has and has not done. Obviously there have been significant blow-outs, whether it is the Monash-West Gate project, which is \$360 million over budget already, as we have heard in the last few weeks, the channel deepening project or the extraordinary myki project. We have noted that debt is projected to balloon out to some \$23 billion by 2012. If you go back to last year's budget and look at the commentary about debt last year, it is extraordinary to think it has blown out even further.

If we look at some of the things that are missing in this budget, we see that they are quite extraordinary. There is no reference of any significance to the Tattersall's and Tabcorp payout provisions, channel deepening support is not what was sought and there is no reference to funding any projects of the Eddington report or of recycled water options. Where is that pipeline to Sebastian near Bendigo, which I am sure you would be aware of, Acting Speaker? Where is the funding for an independent, broad-based anticorruption commission? Where is the funding for the Seymour Technical High College or for Catholic teachers or TAFE teachers?

Where is the funding in Kororoit for upgrades to the strategy for Main Road, St Albans? Where is the funding for Caroline Springs? Just in terms of my own electorate, I mention again the community hub and Manresa Kindergarten — where is the funding to support that? I hope that that announcement comes soon. Where is the funding to support those initiatives to reduce crime and violence in my electorate? What we have seen instead is this government stripping local communities of power and planning power, and we have seen yet again a visionless budget of maximum taxes and minimum services.

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park) — I am very pleased to rise in support of yet another terrific budget presented by the new Treasurer, the Honourable John Lenders from the other place. It is also the first budget of the new Premier and builds on major investment of money in a variety of key areas over the last few years. I am very pleased to say that yet again the people of my electorate will share in the benefits arising from this budget. The budget is squarely a budget that targets young families, families in general, young people and the outer suburbs, and it resonates, again, with the commitment of the government to the key areas of health, education, transport and, of course, water infrastructure. I am very pleased that the budget presents a very good report on where we have come

and where we are heading into the future. We have a government that has built up major credit over a number of years for its record investments into these key areas, but we have not lost sight of the fact that there is more that needs to be done, and we are on the way and in the business of doing more and delivering. This budget is certainly one that will put fruit on the trees.

As I said, there has been a major boost to Victoria's population, and that is basically because there has been a major vote of confidence in the management of the economy here in Victoria, which has seen record jobs growth and a very low unemployment level compared to the rest of the country. For a state that has much less in the way of natural resources to dig out of the ground and export, we are doing phenomenally well. That is because we are able to inject faith and strength and hope into the business community in manufacturing, and are able to grow the state so that the shares are there for everyone to benefit from and enjoy — from the producers, whether of food products or manufacturing and other types of businesses, right down to people who are employed in those very industries. There have been big ticks over the years of this government for our investment and our faith in industry and growing the economy, and again, this budget shares out the benefits derived from that hard work and investment and trust in our economy and our people. Our people are our greatest strength.

I would like to talk about some of this government's key areas of interest. Education, of course, remains our no. 1 priority, and that is why we set about making a commitment before the last state election to rebuild or renovate every government school right across the state. This budget provides further dollars to effect that commitment. The budget provides \$592 million to build, replace and renovate 128 schools in communities right across the state, and I am very pleased to state that schools in my electorate have been beneficiaries of this commitment in previous budgets in this term, and certainly we are well on the way to fulfilling our commitment in terms of rebuilding, renovating or replacing every one of our government schools right across the state. There have also been major investments for teachers to work in schools where they are needed most, and funding for maintenance programs in TAFE's, to give young Victorians the best possible learning and training facilities.

I certainly commend and point to the latest government education blueprint, which comes to terms with very challenging issues to ensure that we have well-trained teachers and principals in the schools where it is hardest to teach. One of the key hallmarks of this government,

of which I am very proud, is that it is prepared to address issues of equity and better outcomes for all children.

Regardless of whether it be in primary or secondary schools in the Mill Park electorate or in the eastern suburbs, this government is prepared to lift standards right across our communities, including in the western suburbs and the northern suburbs, where my electorate is and where there are challenges before us. There are terrific principals and teachers in a lot of the schools in my electorate, and I am very pleased that this government is intent on delivering dollars and programs to assist them in getting the best outcomes that we possibly can from students and families. Expectations are very important when it comes to learning outcomes, and I know that a lot of families and children in areas such as mine will benefit from this government's efforts and specialised concentration on lifting standards in schools and growing the potential of young people in our communities. They deserve it, this government knows they deserve it, and it will help to ensure that people are given the break they need.

I am also very pleased that there is a new emphasis on cancer. The new cancer action plan aims to increase cancer survival rates. We have a government that is not simply about investing money in infrastructure and people resources to deal with problems that currently exist; it is about prevention too. Whether it is about obesity, whether it is about healthier eating or whether it is about generally broader health benefits, the key is also to address the preventive elements that will filter through our population in areas such as health, and cancer is a critical area.

The Premier is very passionate about innovation. He has led the charge in innovation and supporting innovative programs here in Victoria across a wide range of industries, and health is no different. I am very pleased that we are a leading state in the area of programmatic funding to increase the cancer survival rates of Victorians. The target is to increase those rates by a further 10 per cent. If you look at it in terms of numbers, we aim to save 2000 lives by 2015. This \$150 million plan will step up our efforts to tackle the causes of cancer. Of course smoking is an important element, but it is not the only one. I am very pleased that many people who would otherwise be at risk of dying from cancer in the future will benefit from this terrific leading-edge initiative.

Transport is another key feature of this budget. We have rolled out a number of initiatives over the life of this government to rebuild what was an early 20th-century transportation system, one that was

neglected for decades and decades — and let us be clear about this — by every colour of government. It took this government to shoulder the heavy burden of bringing our public transport system to the point it is at now, and the plan is to bring it to a level that our communities deserve, especially in the outer suburbs where there is a large population growth. As part of this budget the government is investing another \$769 million for outer metropolitan arterial road improvements and for additional road maintenance funding, and I am fairly confident that the area that I service in my electorate will see some of those benefits reach its boundaries. Since 1999 the government has funded 1500 road safety projects and over 1130 accident black spots, but of course it does not stop there.

For an example of the benefits of this budget to my electorate specifically, we only have to look at the growth and expansion of the Northern Hospital, which has the pride of place in our community. It has the busiest emergency department of metropolitan Melbourne at least, if not all of Victoria, and this government squarely recognises the importance of delivering extra funds to that hospital.

I note in passing that the Minister for Health has been working very closely in collaboration with the federal government — with the avid support, of course, and involvement of the Premier — to deliver record growth funds to tackle elective surgery waiting lists, and I know that the Northern Hospital will benefit from that. I was very pleased that the budget is delivering \$2.5 million to the Northern Hospital to expand the existing maternity services there. The add-on to the maternity unit will ensure that it is able to cope with an extra 500 births each year. I was very pleased that the Minister for Health was able to visit the Northern Hospital last week and have a chat with nurses, doctors and other medical staff, together with the member for Thomastown and me, to discuss the benefits of that expansion to maternity services, and the news was very well received.

We are also looking at improving training opportunities for young people in my electorate. The Epping campus of the Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE has been allocated \$10.5 million for expansion of its existing services. That TAFE college in Epping has gone from strength to strength since the advent of this government, with the sheer confidence by weight of investment that this government has given to training and growing the training opportunities for young people, especially in the outer suburbs. I am very pleased to see this additional expenditure for the suburbs of Mill Park and surrounds.

We have also had a very significant boost to local ambulance services. There will now be money for a 12-hour peak period ambulance unit located in my electorate to help service the growing area of South Morang. I also note that there is additional funding to ensure that there are over 19 000 extra free ambulance transport services for pensioners and health care card holders.

Of course our commitment is clear on the extension of the Epping train line. We have reaffirmed our commitment as a government to seeing the extension of that rail line, and I am very pleased that this comes on the heels of the \$52 million that has already been committed to and is currently being spent on the duplication of the rail bridge over the Merri Creek at Clifton Hill to grow the capacity of the two rail lines there — Hurstbridge and Epping. This will allow additional morning peak-hour services to run. I am very pleased that the Premier's commitment upon his elevation to the premiership was to bring forward some key transport initiatives; this is one of them. I am very pleased that there is clear planning money for detailed plans for the duplication of the Epping line between Keon Park and Epping and for the extension to South Morang. I will certainly be following this development very keenly, and I look forward with some hope that in next year's budget there may be some more news on the bringing forward of this critical infrastructure project for the people of my electorate. I would like to pay particular tribute to the Minister for Public Transport and the Premier, no less, for their commitment to this very important initiative for my electorate.

This budget builds on a terrific or wonderful record that has brought the outer suburbs into the heart of government. The electorate of Mill Park is one such electorate that has been brought into the heart of government in the way that government operates and the services that it delivers. I am very pleased to know that if it were not for the government we have today, we would certainly be miles behind in terms of the services that are the very key to the people of my electorate. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — It is a pleasure to rise to speak in this debate on the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill. It is certainly one of the more important bills that we deal with in a year, and it is probably one of the relatively few opportunities that Parliament gets to run the ruler over the government's performance — only in the broadest sense of course because there is not really too much in the way of hard data or meaningful information. There is lots of paper in the budget but there is not too much hard data. I

guess you do not really want facts and stuff that you can actually get your teeth into to get in the way of what the government thinks is a good story. I thought the best summary of the budget came from *The Australian* in its quite simple headline 'Straight-faced grab for revenue'. I thought it summed up the budget reasonably well.

The reality is that not much changes from year to year. Each year the standard of services declines further, the waiting lists at our hospitals get longer, the trains, the trams and the buses become more crowded, and the gridlock on the roads tightens even further. Worst of all though is the increase in unmet demand across many human services areas. I find that term 'unmet demand' to be one of the more offensive expressions in bureaucratese. It would be almost quaint if it did not mask so effectively the enormous difficulties that so many in our community face. Our state debt continues to grow, and I guess that is entirely predictable. It is, after all, a typical Labor budget.

One of the things that concerns me about the way we are heading is that the hard-fought gains of the 1990s are in serious risk of being squandered. The economy and the budget Labor inherited in 1999 were in excellent shape, and it was all the more remarkable that they were in excellent shape given the rust bucket, virtually bankrupt state in which this place was left in 1992. The turnaround that was achieved was the result of an extraordinary amount of hard work, not only by the government of the day but from right across the Victorian community. There were hardships spread all around, and it had to be that way if we were going to break out of the direction in which we had been cast. The community bit the bullet, it put in the time and the effort, and the result was absolutely amazing. We are at very real risk of losing those gains and falling back to where we were.

The figures in this budget and indeed the figures in the March national accounts figures which were recently published have now confirmed that Victoria is a second-tier state. The figures also indicate how exposed this economy and the state budget has become to the effect of rising interest rates and how exposed we are to the blow-out in world oil prices. Of course both those things have started to bite in the last three months, and I suspect they will be issues in budgets for a number of years to come. Under this government the state growth rate has been below the national growth rate for seven of the last eight years.

Far from capitalising on the opportunities created by the Howard government, growth in this state has plateaued and then collapsed. It is down from 1.8 per cent in the

December quarter to 0.6 per cent in March. We are even being outstripped by New South Wales, and that is saying something. We have only marginally more than one-third the growth of states like South Australia and Western Australia, despite the oft-repeated statements in this place from both government members and ministers and the mantra of, 'We are spending record amounts on ...' — and here we can insert whatever the subject is.

When it comes to infrastructure, the national accounts reveal the truth. Public sector capital investment grew by less than 1 per cent in this state in the 12 months to March compared with 20 per cent nationally. That means we are not investing in our schools, we are not investing in our hospitals and we are not investing in our public transport or our roads at a pace that goes anywhere near keeping up with current demand, let alone building the sort of infrastructure that we need to ensure future prosperity. Violence on the streets continues to rise because we are not investing in public safety. Our quality of life in this state continues to drop. Melbourne's much-vaunted livability status is now, sadly, a distant memory.

With every budget that passes the opportunity to reverse the decline is diminished. You might well ask why, because this government has not exactly been short of cash or of opportunity. It has had the growth revenue stream of the GST, which thanks to the foresight and courage of the Howard government has delivered a bonus to the state that 20th century treasurers could only dream about. It has gone from a base in 2000–01 of \$5.1 billion to \$10.3 billion in the coming financial year, an increase of 102 per cent. In contrast the all-groups consumer price index (CPI) for Melbourne in December 1999 stood at 123.5; by March 2008 it had risen to 160.6, a rise of slightly over 30 per cent. Inflation is up by less than a third and the GST income has doubled. Payroll tax, which is essentially a tax on employment and is a reason not to employ another person as far as employers are concerned, has risen by 70 per cent since 1999 — more than double the rate of increase of the CPI.

Property taxes now make up a huge proportion of budget income, so we are now dangerously exposed when the inevitable asset price correction comes. Whether it is a big correction or a small correction, it will come and it will cause damage to the budget. Land tax has climbed from \$378 million in 1999 to over \$1 billion in this budget year, five times the increase in the CPI. Stamp duty, which in anyone's language is a key driver of housing affordability — and how much do we hear about the need to develop more affordable housing in this place? — has more than tripled since

Labor came to power. It has gone from \$1 billion in 1999 to \$3.73 billion next financial year, an increase eight times the rise in the CPI.

Our insurance taxes have doubled and our police fines have quadrupled. Tax sourced from gaming machines — really it is tax sourced from gamblers, and largely from problem gamblers at that, so it is probably the most regressive form of taxation ever devised when you consider who actually gets hurt by this increase — has gone up by 1200 per cent, 39 times the inflation rate.

As I said earlier, in question time and on other occasions what often passes for a response is the government saying it is spending 'record amounts'. Frankly, given the unbelievable growth in revenue the state has had, it would be pretty difficult not to be spending more. It would show an even greater level of incompetence if that could not be achieved.

I want to talk briefly about local government and its exposure to the budget sector, and the impact of the budget on it. One of the recurring themes of the Bracks and now Brumby government has been relentless cost shifting to local government. The most recent manifestation of this is the decision to strip councils of their statutory planning powers and to divert those decisions to development panels. The announcement makes no mention of funding. There is no discussion about how the banks and banks of statutory planners, who provide the necessary backstop to this process, will be remunerated. No doubt ratepayers will be left to pick up the tab and fund the government's failed Melbourne 2030 policy. Once again we will then have a situation of taxation without representation, but I digress.

Local councils are being asked to do more and more, not only by residents, their ratepayers and their communities but particularly by government. I am not talking only about the time-honoured practice perfected by the Cain government of providing money to get programs established and then winding back the contribution, and in effect, because councils are reluctant to accept community pressure, having them funded from ratepayers money. It was not only the Cain government that did that; governments of all colours have done that. I am not just referring to that. I am referring to the whole range of demands, particularly administrative demands, that are placed on councils. Some people might call it red tape, but these are costs councils cannot afford. I am not arguing the merits of whether these things are good or bad; either way they cost money. They cost money that would otherwise be available to do the basic works that local government is

supposed to undertake, including investing in infrastructure.

Recently I was speaking to a chief executive officer from a metropolitan fringe council. It was nowhere near the Mornington Peninsula, in case anyone draws any conclusions. He told me that although he was happy with the Victoria Grants Commission formula — and one has to acknowledge that there are winners and losers under that formula, but he was happy with the proportion of funds his council was getting through the VGC; essentially he is one of the winners — the council simply does not have the funds or the resources to provide the necessary infrastructure to keep up with the current demands. He went a little bit further and said that in his view local government has a long-term problem with the way it is funded. He then went on to ponder that perhaps it may be necessary for local government to surrender some of its responsibilities and some of its functional areas to state instrumentalities. That was coming from someone who has spent his career in local government and understands it very well.

We are seeing this problem reflected in council budgets as they come through. Last week the *Herald Sun* was talking about 42 Victorian councils having revealed their 2008–09 draft budgets and that rates have been put up by 5.5 per cent. The Municipal Association of Victoria is saying councils are being forced to increase rates by more than the inflation rate to cover the increased cost of current services. You do not have to look too far to see the culprit. When you look at page 465 of budget paper 3 you see that government funding for local government — table D.1 — will decline by \$25.342 million this financial year. If you look at the growth in state revenue, which is about 3.9 per cent, and you think local government should share in that, then it is being dudded to the tune of over \$50 million. You do not need to look too far to see who the culprit is.

It is traditional for members to speak about the impact of the budget on their own electorates. I do not have long, and it will not take long, because a search of all the budget papers reveals not one mention of Mornington, Mount Martha, Mount Eliza or Moorooduc. Just in case I was not searching assiduously enough, there is no mention in the *Leader* newspaper summary either. A few bits and pieces have dribbled out since the budget was presented, the most impressive of which seems to be a large amount of \$40 000 allocated for improved security at Mornington police station. I do not begrudge the station that improved security, but I think we would have preferred extra police to provide security for everyone, rather than simply extra security for the police station itself.

I will give three headlines to finish: from the *Frankston Standard*, 'Frankston ignored in budget'; from the *Mornington Mail*, 'Fight for rights', which refers to the ongoing fight for improved police numbers in the area; and from the *Mornington Peninsula Leader*, 'Give us a fair crack — Peninsula demands better public transport'. To summarise: thanks for nothing, Mr Treasurer.

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — Today I support a true Labor budget that, once it is analysed, goes through the philosophy of the Australian Labor Party. What is Labor? It is a very broad church made up of members of the party who, day in and day out, do the hard slog. They are out there at the polling booths in marginal seats, safe seats and non-held seats, out there doing the fundraising and the work to promote the Australian Labor Party and the trade union movement. The trade union movement is a critical part of the Australian Labor Party. I do not walk away from that. The party is made up of Fabians, of the people in the Socialist Left and people within Labor Unity — people from a wide spectrum of views and philosophies. One of the great things about the Australian Labor Party is that the people who make up the party are critical to the success of the party, and everyone is welcome within it.

Philosophy is of a very critical nature within the Australian Labor Party. The views of the party can be encompassed in the word 'fairness'. The philosophy of the Australian Labor Party is also about aspirations. It is aspirational and about looking after the less advantaged within our society. The party is about looking after young people and students and their needs, and about looking after seniors. The party is about lifelong learning and educating people throughout their lives. It is about jobs, employment and providing opportunity, regardless of where you live, your gender and your abilities. It is about making sure that you are able to participate within our society.

The philosophy extends to quality services and making sure that people are provided with quality services and are looked after by a government when they need those services. The party is also about having debate and not being afraid to debate and talk about the issues that matter to people and their communities. It is about listening to people, to organisations and stakeholders, and then acting after listening to those people and organisations. Labor is about looking after everybody within the state, not any particular section or any particular group, but looking after all the groups and communities within our society.

One of the major tenets of our philosophy is caring. We are about caring for people, caring for communities and

building up people and communities throughout the state and throughout Australia. Labor is also about catching people before they fall, and making sure that the services that they need and the things they require as individuals or as families are provided by the Australian Labor Party. Our philosophy is one of partnerships and making sure that there is collective action. It is about looking after your mate, which is really important.

We have done that time and time again in difficult situations throughout the wars. It is also about looking after your mate when they need a hand up from our community. It is about comradeship, which is extremely important to the philosophy of the Australian Labor Party. You can see this every day; party members help other party members in times of adversity. That philosophy transcends party members and reaches members of Parliament, organisational wings and those individuals who help others all the time.

The government helps people in those adverse times. We see that every day we are in this place, when we are in our electorates and when we are talking to others in our community. Whether those adverse times are about the drought, victims of crime or involve people who are down on their luck, the Australian Labor Party's philosophy is to assist and help people during those times.

Our philosophy is also about compassion. One of the most critical aspects of this part of our philosophy is to know and understand issues and to say sorry when required. It was fantastic when our Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, said sorry in federal Parliament. It was one of the most defining moments in Australian history and will be remembered forever. The philosophy of compassion is about doing the right thing. The philosophy is also about being visionary and aiming for the light on the hill, as Chifley, a former Australian Prime Minister, expressed it.

The philosophy also involves taking the reins when the chips are down. During the Depression or the Second World War, when the conservatives vacated the field and could not hack the hard work, the Australian Labor Party and then Prime Minister Curtin and his team took over the reins. The reins were taken over also in 1982 when the state was a basket case; the conservatives could not even get Alcoa off and running.

In 1983, after the disaster of the Fraser years, Hawke — and Keating, who became the Treasurer — took over the federal reins. In 2007 — Kevin 07! — Kevin Rudd and his government are facing the economic reality of

the new century left to us by the disaster of the former Howard government.

The basis of the Australian Labor Party when in government is economic responsibility. It is about learning the lessons of history; it is about not repeating mistakes and about taking measures to guarantee growth and economic responsibility. It is about being conservative; this is a defining feature of the Australian Labor Party, including this government and its caucus. We are economically conservative because we want to make sure that we are on this side of the house for a long time and, more importantly, that we can, in actual fact, do the things we need to do for the people we need to do it for — these people are the disadvantaged and those in society who are less well off.

But we go further than that: we help people through putting in place important policies like A Fairer Victoria, which is a key to our philosophy. The A Fairer Victoria policy is about looking after the disadvantaged. We started with the social justice policy strategy of the 1980s and the 1990s. Now that is a critical part of fairness within society and of this government; it is a part that will be imitated by the federal Labor government. It is one of the keystones of this philosophy that makes the Australian Labor Party the greatest party in the world.

The Australian Labor Party members know this philosophy. It is part of their being. It is part of their lives. It is the reason why they remain an integral part of the labour movement. The labour movement is also the reason for the Australian Labor Party being established, but it is an integral part of the Australian Labor Party.

Over a hundred years ago, the labour movement, the trade unions within this state, established the Australian Labor Party. Victoria was the leading state, after Queensland, under the Tree of Knowledge, where the trade unions established the Australian Labor Party to be the political arm of the trade union movement. Australian Labor Party members and trade unionists have this running through their veins: this philosophy of looking after each other, of collective action and of looking after the disadvantaged.

The Australian Labor Party and the trade union movement have stood, shoulder to shoulder, during the hard times: during the McMahon years, the Fraser years, the Howard years, and under the Bolte years, the Hamer years, the Thompson years, and then the Kennett years — the seven long, dark years this state had to endure under Premier Jeff Kennett. The Australian Labor Party has stood shoulder to shoulder

with the trade union movement here in Victoria and throughout Australia, including in the MUA (Maritime Union of Australia) dispute — MUA here to stay! — and I was very proud when I was invited to the MUA's 10th anniversary celebration of its fantastic win. There we were, shoulder to shoulder, out there on the Patrick site, fighting Patrick, fighting Peter Reith and fighting John Howard. We were fighting for trade union rights and fighting to make sure people were looked after and were not thrown to the wolves by the conservatives within this state and country. We were there, shoulder to shoulder with the trade union movement, because that is part of the blood running through our veins; and it is part of our philosophy. It is about *Tampa*. It is about WorkChoices. It is about looking after asylum seekers. The list goes on of examples of the Australian Labor Party being there with the trade union movement.

The trade union movement is also critical, with the Australian Labor Party, when you are talking about human rights, when you are talking globally about the atrocities that are occurring in the world, within other countries and within this country — within communities in Australia. We have within our veins a deep philosophy of looking after human beings — of looking after people — of righting the wrongs that people endure in their lives and of making sure that we listen to those people and have them as our guiding light within the Australian Labor Party and the trade union movement. That defines us as different from the people opposite — the people in the opposition — who stand for nothing, who are leaderless and rudderless, who have no heart and who do not care about people that they affect during their day-to-day operations within government.

When they are in government, they do not care about the ordinary, small person, about the families and individuals within our society; they are there to look after their vested interests. The people they represent are the corporations, the organisations like the Victoria Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry and others within society that are advantaged; they do not speak for those who cannot speak for themselves and who do not have the ability to stand up for themselves. That is when those people come to us. That is when they turn to the Australian Labor Party. The philosophy and the critical aspects of the Australian Labor Party mean that they have to turn to us. That is because they always get let down by the conservatives. They always get let down by the people who are there to squash them. They always get let down by the people who do not believe in families, who do not believe in individuals, and who do not believe in the communities

that build this society. That is why I support this budget before the house.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING SPEAKER (Dr Sykes) — Order!
The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Drought: government assistance

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health. The action I seek is the reinstatement of drought support funding.

The Department of Human Services funds regional drought response coordinators, and in particular a coordinator in the Loddon Mallee region. This coordinator networks with the drought coordinators and local government drought workers who are appointed by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI). Because of the cross-portfolio nature of the drought response, there is a requirement for coordination to ensure effective and efficient use of the resources.

I understand that the DPI is scaling back its drought coordinators through reassignment or attrition. As we end the financial year we are lacking a commitment going forward. The tasks these workers are doing involve working with the community, mental health officers, philanthropic trusts, other organisations and anyone else who has been supportive of rural communities during this terrible drought.

The drought is not over, yet the response and the commitment from the government appears to be. Even if the government recommits to these programs, it has already caused a break in the coordination and an inevitable change in personnel. I understand that this stop-start approach has been happening since 2003, but the effects of the current drought are widespread and serious, and this valuable work in Victorian communities needs continuity for the job to be done properly. Even if the drought is over, because of its severity there will be a very long recovery period.

People administering the programs have been distributing health dollars and convening meetings with local coordinators and local government as well as other government departments to coordinate the drought responses and develop the networks that will now be lost and cost valuable time and money to reactivate.

I call on the minister to take immediate action to reinstate funding and to assure those involved that the programs will continue and thus be effective in delivering services to those who need them. As an indication that the drought is not over, rainfall figures for the Loddon Mallee region, which has one of the coordinators being retired due to coming to the end of the financial year and the lack of commitment, indicate that in the last three months, rainfall in the Mildura region is 50 per cent below average, rainfall in the Bendigo region is about 50 per cent below average, and rainfall in the Echuca region is 65 per cent below average.

These figures are causing enormous concern, therefore the minister needs to act now to reinstate the funding for these positions going forward so that this valuable work can continue uninterrupted as we wait for this terrible drought to finally end.

Lysterfield–Wellington roads, Lysterfield: traffic lights

Ms LOBATO (Gembrook) — I raise an issue for the Minister for Roads and Ports. The action I seek is for funding to be provided for the installation of traffic lights at the intersection of Lysterfield Road and Wellington Road, Lysterfield. I raise this matter on behalf of constituents in both the Gembrook and Monbulk electorates. The member for Monbulk has been a strong advocate for the installation of lights at this site and has worked tirelessly with me and with the previous roads minister to achieve a commitment prior to the 2006 election.

The intersection of Lysterfield and Wellington roads is a very dangerous one. It is located at the top of a hill, and so allows almost no visibility when cars are trying to turn into Wellington Road from Lysterfield Road or from Wellington Road into Lysterfield Road. Traffic travels at up to 80 kilometres per hour along Wellington Road and motorists frequently have to brake suddenly due to cars entering Wellington Road. Sometimes, unfortunately, there is no time to brake. This intersection has been the location of many ugly incidents over a long time, and I have feared it for many years, especially when I first got my licence.

Since coming to office, the state Labor government has funded 51 outer metropolitan road projects totalling \$1.5 billion. The very successful Arrive Alive program aims to reduce the road toll by 30 per cent by 2017, and \$650 million has been allocated over 10 years for investment in road safety infrastructure to help realise this aim. The 51 projects also include a notoriously dangerous intersection at the southern end of my

electorate, the intersection of Enterprise Avenue and Clyde Road. Traffic lights were recently installed at that intersection and they will help to make that intersection safe once the problems related to coordination with the rail service are resolved. I hope the lights will be in operation shortly. Over the year much funding has been provided to improve the safety of Wellington Road. It is a very dark, winding road with speed limits that range from 80 to 100 kilometres per hour. The lights at the Lysterfield Road intersection will add to the safety improvements throughout the area to assist in protecting motorists.

Therefore on behalf of both the member for Monbulk and myself I request that the minister ensure that funding be allocated for the installation of the traffic lights so that our constituents and our visitors arrive alive.

Tertiary education and training: skills training

Mrs VICTORIA (Bayswater) — I rise to ask the Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation to extend the deadline for submissions responding to the *Securing Our Future Economic Prosperity* discussion paper until all the information is in the public arena. This recently released discussion paper suggests reforming skills training in Victoria by increasing the numbers of those who take up training for the first time. It also claims that this state will face a shortfall of 123 000 diploma and advanced diploma graduates by 2016.

It is supposed to be encouraging public discussion and debate, but the figures thrown up by the government can be classed as misleading at best, as these shortfalls are not expected at all levels. The projected shortfall of 123 000 diploma and advanced diploma graduates in fact becomes a surplus of 5400 when coupled with graduates of certificates I to IV courses. A look at the figures in the 2006 report of the Monash Australian Council for Educational Research Centre for the Economics of Education and Training, which the government uses for its own data, shows that there is a large discrepancy between the total hours of training undertaken and the total hours of training required for these same graduates over a given period. Once the data is included with certificates I to IV, it can be seen that overall — and not just in selected numbers — the annual increase in training is only 13 per cent.

According to the Victorian TAFE Association and those who spoke with me last week at a Box Hill Institute of TAFE awards night, Victoria has one of the lowest student contact hour funding rates in Australia, which is shamefully 13.7 per cent below the national

average. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to work out that the projected shortfall in annual training hours could be overcome by simply funding Victorian TAFE providers at the Australian average level. The government is overstating the numbers, but to what benefit? The use of the gross figure and therefore exaggerating the problem — a problem which actually appears to be a surplus of VET (vocational education and training) qualified people — raises the question of why the Brumby government is doing this. Is this just the sneaky beginning of major change, such as privatising TAFEs?

If there really are intentions to open this issue for public debate, I ask the minister to release all the data to the public, including interested parties, and not merely open the debate based on a narrow set of figures. This is an issue that cannot be allowed to be swept under the carpet. Reforms cannot go ahead without the proper public debate. I am aware that people in positions that will be affected by these reforms are being kept in the dark. This shows the typical lack of consultation this Labor government is becoming so well known for. Once again I ask the minister to extend the deadline for submissions and to ensure that all necessary information is in the public forum, not merely the data that suits the government and its intentions.

Kilbreda College: positive body image small grants program

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — The action I seek this evening is from the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs, and I ask him to make available grant funding of \$5000 for Kilbreda College for a positive body image program.

Recently I wrote to all the local schools in my electorate and encouraged them to apply for funding of up to \$5000 under the positive body image small grants program. Now it has come to my attention that Kilbreda College has applied for this grant because it wishes to put in place an innovative and potentially useful program for its year 9 and year 7 students. This funding would facilitate Kilbreda putting this program in place. Kilbreda is a Catholic girls secondary school that is attended by many young women from my electorate. It is a caring and supportive school that endeavours to provide its students with an excellent, all-round education to prepare them for full and productive lives.

The proposed program aims to educate the year 9 students about media manipulation and its effects. Over 350 girls will potentially benefit from the program, which is a bargain really at \$5000, with a target of over 100 year 9 girls aged between 14 and 15. The girls who

directly participate in the program will workshop with around 170 year 7 girls in the program. The student team from year 9 will work with core staff to plan the program days, which will include whole-day presentations focusing on media manipulation and how students see themselves, which will also be covered in personal development classes. It is anticipated that a web page will be designed as part of the IT curriculum and included on the school intranet so that it can be accessed by the entire student population of 1050 students, all of whom are young women. As Kilbreda College says:

... if we can arm our students with a real sense of their bodies and allow them to understand that the images in the media are unrealistic, this in turn could have a positive effect on their self-image.

I have visited Kilbreda College on a number of occasions, and I can attest to the care and attention that the school gives to its students — —

Ms Thomson interjected.

Ms MUNT — That's right; I have visited with the member for Footscray. I have been very impressed by a number of programs that are run for the school's young women, ranging from the performing arts to social interaction projects and even programs participated in by students to aid other students in East Timor. I believe this proposed program would be very beneficial to these young women. Body image and eating disorders are a tragedy to those affected and can cause dreadful harm. I commend Kilbreda College for tackling this head on — and I urge the minister to fund this program.

Mental health: services

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health. The action I seek is for her to do the policy work to deliver integrated mental health services rather than the current Brumby government's inaccessible and fragmented mental health system. Last week the coalition announced some early commitments in its mental health policy for the next election. Our focus is on reigniting the reform process and building a mental health system that will detect and intervene early, is fully integrated and will ensure that people living with a mental illness can access the care and services they need.

In the 1990s, under the Kennett government, Victoria led the nation in terms of both mental health reform and investment in mental health. However, under Labor reform has atrophied, investment has dwindled and we

have now fallen from being the no. 1 funder of mental health care in the nation to being no. 3. The result is a system that is characterised by inaccessibility and complexity. The statistics are very concerning: 34 per cent of patients wait over 8 hours in emergency departments before finally getting access to a bed, 45 per cent of patients get no care in the community in the month before going into hospital, 31 per cent of patients receive no care in the month after leaving hospital and 14 per cent of patients are subject to unplanned readmission within a month — and those are the lucky ones who actually get access to services. We also know that 56 per cent of Victorians with a mental illness gain no access to services in any one year. In a report the government commissioned, the Boston Consulting Group said that Labor's mental health care and support system is so fragmented and complex that even a knowledgeable, healthy consumer would find it difficult to navigate.

In response to this and to the government's ongoing rhetoric but failure to act, the coalition has announced the start of its mental health reform agenda. A future coalition government will set up a mental illness research fund with an initial investment of \$10 million to improve the evidence-based treatment of mental illness in Victoria. We will also set up a system of central coordination of inpatient mental health beds so that people can get a bed when they need one. Finally, we will establish pathways to participation. This will be an education and employment program with the ambitious goal of raising the rate of employment for Victorians with a mental illness from the 29 per cent now to 50 per cent by 2020. More will be added to the coalition's vision of an integrated mental health system in the lead-up to the next election, but these announcements are an important down payment and stand in clear and stark contrast to what we see from the government.

The minister should ensure there is bipartisan support for these important measures so that Victorians living with a mental illness can get the integrated care and support they need early in their illness and support and services as they live with mental illness in the future.

Maribyrnong: positive body image program

Ms THOMSON (Footscray) — I raise an adjournment matter with the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs. The action I seek from the minister is his support for a positive body image grant to the Maribyrnong City Council for a photographic exhibition that will be undertaken through Footscray City College. Members have heard me talk in this house before about the disadvantaged people in my

electorate. While the project is to be undertaken at one school with 20 students, both girls and boys, in year 9, through the exhibit it will affect the students around Braybrook, Footscray West, Kingsville, Yarraville, Maribyrnong, Tottenham, Seddon and Footscray itself.

A number of phases are being proposed for this project. There will be six 90-minute sessions. Phase 1 participants will be taken through two workshops that will look at positive self-esteem and body image. These workshops will give the participants the background to work in phases 2, 3 and 4 and will be driven by questions that the participants will have identified as requiring answers. Phase 2 will include work with young people around how photographic images are being used in the media, how young people are represented and whether those body images are realistic and achievable. It will provide an opportunity for them to have a discussion about that. They will then work at developing their own photographic images of what are normal body images, which is really important. Then they will have the exhibit to demonstrate what young people really look like.

The project will give them new skills. It is a great opportunity to make a big difference to the way the people of Footscray see themselves. It will do so in a way that crosses the boundaries and divides of ethnicity and language, which is vitally important in my community as it has a high refugee base. It will probably help cement those communities of young people by drawing them together in discussion. It will also be documented and have an ongoing life. It will be the basis for new projects that will extend to other classes and other schools.

I ask that the minister look favourably upon this application because people in electorates such as mine get the least attention in relation to those sorts of body images. They are the very people whose problems are kept internal and never really expressed. This is an opportunity for them to come to terms with these issues and bring them out into the open.

Public transport: Box Hill electorate

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I raise with the Minister for Public Transport the issue of public transport services in and around Box Hill, in particular the Box Hill transport interchange and the public transport servicing it. I ask the minister to take action to improve those services.

As the minister will be aware, Box Hill was declared a transit city in 2001. This was supposed to mean that Box Hill would receive improved public transport

services in exchange for higher density development. While other transit cities have received funding for improvements, Box Hill has been almost completely neglected.

The government has tried to fob off the community with streetscape upgrades instead of undertaking the necessary upgrades to either the interchange itself or the services operating out of it. For years the government tried to avoid its responsibilities by putting the community and the Whitehorse council through hoops by requiring planning study after planning study. We had a Connecting Transport Services study in 2001, an urban design framework study and a Box Hill transport interchange concept design in 2002 and an issues and opportunities study in 2005. Eventually last year the council adopted the *Box Hill Transit City Activity Centre Structure Plan*, which is supposed to be inserted as a reference document into the Whitehorse planning scheme. However, the government has still not provided the public transport improvements that are needed.

The bus terminus at the Box Hill interchange is one of the busiest in Melbourne, but it is cold, windswept and hard to reach. The Whitehorse council has drawn up detailed proposals that would vastly improve the terminus and bus access with a Bondi Junction-style enclosed central waiting area, better entry and exit points for buses and direct pedestrian access by escalator from the Box Hill mall.

The bus services to and from the interchange also need improving. Recently I presented in this house a petition taken up by the Public Transport Users Association (PTUA) seeking an upgrade of route 765 to a SmartBus route running along Canterbury Road. The recently announced changes to route 765 fall far short of this, with services still finishing at 9.00 p.m. and with low frequency and a slow and circuitous route. The PTUA argues that high-frequency, direct bus routes along major roads backed by good local bus services where needed will provide a service that is far better, quicker and easier to understand. The PTUA also points out in its submission to the Manningham, Whitehorse and Monash bus review that there are many low-cost improvements that could be made to local bus services. These include clear and consistent naming of bus stops, making up-to-date journey planner information readily accessible for commuters from mobile phone screens, BlackBerrys and other PDAs (personal digital assistants) and route and timetable improvements.

There are many ways in which public transport services in and around Box Hill can and should be improved, and I ask the minister to take action to do so.

Yan Yean Road: upgrade

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports. I ask him to accelerate the process for the upgrade of Yan Yean Road particularly in the most southern section of that road between Kurrak Road, Yarrambat through Plenty and down to Diamond Creek Road and Diamond Creek. My community welcomed the work that was supported by the minister previously, including the recently completed safety works and additional turning lane at Diamond Creek Road, which was funded in last year's budget as part of the anti-congestion measures. This new lane is working well and providing additional safety and improved traffic flow.

The minister also previously approved funding of \$25 000 for an alignment study for this section of Yan Yean Road, and this study has been completed now. It was a country road with many bends in it which was not designed particularly to take the loads of suburban traffic that it is now taking. Previous ministers had also provided Arrive Alive funding of around \$1 million to improve the surface of the road as well as the shoulders, which work has not long been completed and which much improved safety.

However, Yan Yean Road, which is the spine of my electorate and which I have spoken about many times in this place, is carrying more and more traffic every day. It has two local bus routes including one that runs between Yan Yean and Greensborough, servicing the new communities in Doreen. I am hopeful that the bus review, which has been almost completed by the Minister for Public Transport, will provide some increased services for that route. There is also another successful route operating between South Morang and Greensborough.

In coming years not one but two orbital SmartBus routes are planned for this section of Yan Yean Road. I seek the upgrading of this road, and not just for the car users because 88 per cent of public transport trips across Melbourne are undertaken on roads. With the increase in petrol prices, climate change, and the need to service our growing communities, Yan Yean Road needs this upgrade in order to ensure that these orbital SmartBus routes will be a success. It is also required for safety reasons and to really give those growing communities a choice, whether it is to attend work or to connect with the excellent train services that operate from Greensborough station or to access TAFE or secondary schools. I urge the minister to act to upgrade this important road.

Sewerage: Mount Eliza

Mr MORRIS (Mornington) — The matter I raise this evening is for the Minister for Environment and Climate Change in the other place, and the action I seek is that the minister obtain from his department and make public an urgent assessment of outfall drainage points and sewerage pumping stations along the Mount Eliza coastline together with a timetable for the refurbishment of these assets.

The Mount Eliza foreshore stretches some 4.2 kilometres along the coast from Kackeraboite Creek in the north to Manmangur Creek in the south. It is a particularly sensitive stretch of coastline. It contains three bays and three substantial beaches. Five creeks feed into the bay along its length, and there are sites of Aboriginal and geological significance. There is also remnant coastal and dune features; probably more remnant than we would like them to be. Unusually there is also a small section of the coast where the tide extends to the high-water mark.

The Mount Eliza Association for Environmental Care and Mount Eliza Coast Care are two groups that have worked very hard along this stretch of coast. They have undertaken revegetation works and erosion management activities on the foreshore, and they have put in a considerable amount of time.

The Mount Eliza to Point Nepean Coastal Action Plan in its current iteration identifies stormwater outfalls as eroding the coastline and polluting water and foreshores and being a significant problem in the area. Both foreshore and drainage management in this area have passed through a number of hands since the early 1990s, including the former City of Frankston and the Dandenong Valley Authority. Most recently Melbourne Water took on responsibility for waterways and creeks in the area and the authorities have undertaken some works, particularly on the pumping stations.

The issue is complicated. A memorandum of understanding transferred responsibility for management from the Department of Sustainability and Environment to Mornington Peninsula shire as far as the high-water mark, but outfalls extend into the bay. There are seven stormwater outfalls along this relatively short stretch of coast. Some have had minimal work done on them and some are so clogged below the waterline as to be useless. Most are simply not up to the task — for example, at Canadian Bay Beach run-off forms an offensive, smelly and potentially hazardous pool on the beach. That is just one example of the seven stormwater outfalls. The problem is immediate and requires a solution. It is not a

political issue, but is simply an infrastructure issue that needs addressing, and I request the minister's assistance.

Geelong ring-road: progress

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — Tonight I raise an issue for action also for the Minister for Roads and Ports. The issue I raise for action relates to the completion dates of stages 1 and 2 of the Geelong ring-road. For the information of the house the Geelong ring-road is the most important road project seen in the history of Geelong. It has taken the Bracks and Brumby governments to bring this project into fruition, after more than 40 years of procrastination and pork barrelling from various Liberal governments.

The action I seek is for the minister to work with VicRoads to ensure that stages 1 and 2 of this important project are completed and thus open for traffic as scheduled by VicRoads for late 2008. On completion of the ring-road in 2010, the road will eliminate the need for south-west motorists to traverse approximately 29 sets of traffic lights through Geelong and save, I estimate, around 20 to 30 minutes travel time. In turn, the ring-road project will also eliminate much of the traffic for people who live in Geelong, especially along the routes, as you know, Acting Speaker, of Latrobe Terrace, Shannon Avenue and east and west along Malop Street and down to the Bellarine Peninsula.

As this house is well aware, the Geelong ring-road is a \$380 million project which is jointly funded by the federal government and the Brumby government, with this state contributing \$194 million. Section 1 of the road is a 10.5 kilometre stretch from the Princes Freeway at Corio just outside Geelong across to the Midland Highway, which leads on to Ballarat, Bannockburn and areas to the north-west of Geelong. Section 2 travels from the Midland Highway to the Hamilton Highway, which includes the impressive 200 metre bridge spanning the Moorabool River. Section 3 stretches from the Hamilton Highway to the Princes Highway at Waurn Ponds, while section 4 completes the road on to Anglesea and back to the highway.

As I said, this is the most important road project in Geelong's history and builds on this government's previous work of upgrading the Geelong-Melbourne Road in 2002. It will also complement our commitment to duplicating the Princess Highway west from Waurn Ponds to Winchelsea, once again in partnership with the Rudd federal government. This is an important project. I am well aware that the minister appreciates how

important the project is, and therefore I look forward to his action.

Responses

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — The members for Mordialloc and Footscray raised matters concerning applications from Kilbreda College and the Maribyrnong City Council to the Brumby government's Positive Body Image Grants. The grants are one component of the broader \$2.1 million Go for your Life positive body image strategy. The grants were successfully launched last year and are aimed at funding community-based activities that promote positive body image messages, healthy lifestyle choices and building self-esteem in young people. Projects already undertaken have given young people a greater understanding of the issues surrounding body image, including encouraging healthy life choices and increasing self-esteem and confidence in young people.

Young people were integral in the development, delivery and evaluation of the projects, ensuring that activities met both their needs and their interests. Last year over 3850 young people participated in projects conducted through the grants program, and I look forward to even greater numbers taking part this year. As I mentioned, it is just one part of the overall positive body image strategy.

The Victorian Labor government, importantly, is the first and only government to conduct both a parliamentary inquiry into the complex issues surrounding negative body image on young people and to respond comprehensively. From the inquiry the Brumby government developed Australia's first voluntary media code of conduct on body image, which encourages the media to use images responsibly and reduce the impact of negative body image on young Victorians.

The code contains four clauses that the media, fashion and advertising industries are being urged to adopt. The clauses cover the use and disclosure of altered and enhanced images, which both the member for Mordialloc and the member for Footscray talked about in terms of local projects; representation of a diversity of body shapes; fair placement of diet, exercise and cosmetic surgery advertising, and avoiding the glamorisation of severely underweight models or celebrities. Already the code has had an impressive list of supporters, including the *Age*, *Girlfriend* magazine, Sportsgirl, Dove group, Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, Australian Association of National

Advertisers, Mushroom Marketing and L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival.

The code, in particular, and the positive body image strategy as a whole, which incorporates the grants that have been talked about this evening, are a significant step in changing the way images are portrayed and improving body image in young people. I would like to quote Professor Susan Paxton of La Trobe University School of Psychological Science. She said:

The Victorian government leads the world in the development of this important code. This initiative will drive changes in the presentation of dangerous media images and raise awareness of their negative impact.

Through the Brumby government's positive body image strategy the government remains committed to supporting young people to be positive and confident. I can assure the member for Mordialloc and the member for Footscray that I will take into consideration their strong support for the applications from Kilbreda College and from Maribyrnong City Council, and I look forward to making announcements shortly.

The member for Mildura raised a matter for the Minister for Health; the member for Bayswater raised a matter for the Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation; the member for Doncaster raised a matter for the Minister for Mental Health; the member for Box Hill raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport; the member for Mornington raised a matter for the Minister for Environment and Climate Change in the other place; the members for Gembrook, Yan Yean and Geelong raised matters for the Minister for Roads and Ports.

The member for Gembrook raised a matter both on behalf of her constituents but also on behalf of mine, and I thank her for that. It is in relation to traffic lights at the intersection of Lysterfield and Wellington roads. I would like to take this opportunity to thank local resident Gary Williams for raising this important matter with me. I can assure him that both the member for Gembrook and I will raise again with the Minister for Roads and Ports the need for urgent funding for this important intersection.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) —
Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 10.34 p.m.

