

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 28 May 2008

(Extract from book 7)

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

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

Professor DAVID de KRETZER, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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| Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Senior Victorians | The Hon. L. M. Neville, MP |
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Standing Orders Committee — The Speaker, Ms Barker, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Langdon, Mr McIntosh, Mr Nardella and Mrs Powell.

Joint committees

Dispute Resolution Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Batchelor, Mr Cameron, Mr Clark, Mr Holding, Mr McIntosh, Mr Robinson and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mr P. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Jennings, Mr Lenders and Ms Pennicuik.

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Delahunty, Mr Haermeyer, Mr McIntosh, Mrs Maddigan and Mr Morris. (*Council*): Mr Leane and Ms Mikakos.

Economic Development and Infrastructure Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr Crisp and Ms Thomson. (*Council*): Mr Atkinson, Mr D. Davis, Mr Tee and Mr Thornley.

Education and Training Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Dixon, Dr Harkness, Mr Herbert, Mr Howard and Mr Kotsiras. (*Council*): Mr Elasmarr and Mr Hall.

Electoral Matters Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr O'Brien, Mr Scott and Mr Thompson. (*Council*): Ms Broad, Mr Hall and Mr Somyurek.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Duncan, Mrs Fyffe, Mr Ingram, Ms Lobato, Mr Pandazopoulos and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mrs Petrovich and Mr Viney.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Noonan, Mr Perera, Mrs Powell and Ms Wooldridge. (*Council*): Mr Finn, Mr Scheffer and Mr Somyurek.

House Committee — (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Ms Beattie, Mr Delahunty, Mr Howard, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Scott and Mr K. Smith. (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), Mr Atkinson, Ms Darveniza, Mr Drum, Mr Eideh and Ms Hartland.

Law Reform Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Clark, Mr Donnellan and Mr Foley. (*Council*): Mrs Kronberg, Mr O'Donohue and Mr Scheffer.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Green, Mr Hodgett, Mr Nardella, Mr Seitz and Mr K. Smith. (*Council*): Mr Elasmarr, Mr Guy and Ms Hartland.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Graley, Ms Munt, Mr Scott, Mr Stensholt, Dr Sykes and Mr Wells. (*Council*): Mr Barber, Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr Pakula and Mr Rich-Phillips.

Road Safety Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Eren, Mr Langdon, Mr Mulder, Mr Trezise and Mr Weller. (*Council*): Mr Koch and Mr Leane.

Rural and Regional Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Marshall and Mr Northe. (*Council*): Ms Darveniza, Mr Drum, Ms Lovell, Ms Tierney and Mr Vogels.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Carli, Mr Jasper, Mr Languiller and Mr R. Smith. (*Council*): Mr Eideh, Mr O'Donohue, Mrs Peulich and Ms Pulford.

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Dr S. O'Kane

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

Speaker: The Hon. JENNY LINDELL

Deputy Speaker: Ms A. P. BARKER

Acting Speakers: Ms Beattie, Ms Campbell, Mr Eren, Mrs Fyffe, Ms Green, Dr Harkness, Mr Howard, Mr Ingram, Mr Jasper, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Languiller, Mr Lupton, Ms Marshall, Ms Munt, Mr Nardella, Mrs Powell, Mr Seitz, Mr K. Smith, Mr Stensholt and Mr Thompson

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The Hon. J. M. BRUMBY (from 30 July 2007)

The Hon. S. P. BRACKS (to 30 July 2007)

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

The Hon. R. J. HULLS (from 30 July 2007)

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition:

Mr E. N. BAILLIEU

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition:

The Hon. LOUISE ASHER

Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. J. RYAN

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr P. L. WALSH

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| Campbell, Ms Christine Mary | Pascoe Vale | ALP | Neville, Ms Lisa Mary | Bellarine | ALP |
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| Harkness, Dr Alistair Ross | Frankston | ALP | Smith, Mr Ryan | Warrandyte | LP |
| Helper, Mr Jochen | Ripon | ALP | Stensholt, Mr Robert Einar | Burwood | ALP |
| Herbert, Mr Steven Ralph | Eltham | ALP | Sykes, Dr William Everett | Benalla | Nats |
| Hodgett, Mr David John | Kilsyth | LP | Thompson, Mr Murray Hamilton Ross | Sandringham | LP |
| Holding, Mr Timothy James | Lyndhurst | ALP | Thomson, Ms Marsha Rose | Footscray | ALP |
| Howard, Mr Geoffrey Kemp | Ballarat East | ALP | Thwaites, Mr Johnstone William ³ | Albert Park | ALP |
| Hudson, Mr Robert John | Bentleigh | ALP | Tilley, Mr William John | Benambra | LP |
| Hulls, Mr Rob Justin | Niddrie | ALP | Trezeise, Mr Ian Douglas | Geelong | ALP |
| Ingram, Mr Craig | Gippsland East | Ind | Victoria, Mrs Heidi | Bayswater | LP |
| Jasper, Mr Kenneth Stephen | Murray Valley | Nats | Wakeling, Mr Nicholas | Ferntree Gully | LP |
| Kosky, Ms Lynne Janice | Altona | ALP | Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay | Swan Hill | Nats |
| Kotsiras, Mr Nicholas | Bulleen | LP | Weller, Mr Paul | Rodney | Nats |
| Langdon, Mr Craig Anthony Cuffe | Ivanhoe | ALP | Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur | Scoresby | LP |
| Languiller, Mr Telmo Ramon | Derrimut | ALP | Woodridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling | Doncaster | LP |
| Lim, Mr Muy Hong | Clayton | ALP | Wynne, Mr Richard William | Richmond | ALP |

¹ Resigned 6 August 2007

² Elected 15 September 2007

³ Resigned 6 August 2007

⁴ Elected 15 September 2007

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Wednesday, 28 May 2008

The SPEAKER (Hon. Jenny Lindell) took the chair at 9.33 a.m. and read the prayer.

**MELBOURNE CRICKET GROUND
AMENDMENT BILL**

Introduction and first reading

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Melbourne Cricket Ground Act 1933 to provide for the reservation of a stratum of land at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and for other purposes.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lewan) — Could the minister give us a brief explanation of the bill?

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — This bill facilitates the expansion of the concourse over Brunton Avenue to deal with some pinch points at the MCG.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

**WILDLIFE AMENDMENT (MARINE
MAMMALS) 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 amend the Wildlife Act 1975 to further provide for marine mammals and other matters, to amend the Crimes (Controlled Operations) Act 2004 and for other purposes.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — Could the minister offer a brief explanation as to the basis of the bill?

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — This is a bill that will be of the utmost interest to The Nationals because it is to improve the arrangements for the protection of whales in emergency situations and to increase the protection of seals.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

**CRIMES (CONTROLLED OPERATIONS)
AMENDMENT BILL**

Introduction and first reading

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to amend the Crimes (Controlled Operations) Act 2004 to repeal provisions relating to the Australian Crime Commission and to make consequential amendments to the Major Crime Legislation (Office of Police Integrity) Act 2004 and for other purposes.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I ask the Attorney-General for a brief explanation of the bill.

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — As the honourable member would know, in 2004 we introduced into this place the Crimes (Controlled Operations) Act 2004. It has not commenced operation because there was a constitutional impediment in relation to — —

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr HULLS — No, quite the opposite. There was a constitutional impediment in relation to federal government amendments. The former federal government was going to move amendments to its legislation, but it lost office! This amendment will reduce further delay in the implementation of the controlled operations regime in Victoria.

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 36 to 38 and 162 to 170 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.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

The SPEAKER — Order! I welcome to the gallery this morning the Consul-General of the People's Republic of China in Melbourne, Mr Liang Shugen.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Kiewa Valley Highway, Kergunyah: speed limits

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

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of Victoria notes that due to changes in local demography (the number of new residents) and subsequent rise in traffic density, the speed limit on the Kiewa Valley Highway at Kergunyah is inappropriate. We observe daily near misses and often witness accidents, as local traffic enters the highway from Kergunyah Road and Simpsons Lane, to be confronted by numerous cars, log trucks, B-double milk tankers, fuel tankers, large delivery trucks and school buses, all travelling at up to the limit of 100 kilometres an hour. As well, several pick-ups and set-downs by school buses are made daily at these two locations during the school year.

Petitioners therefore pray that the Victorian government notes the issue and recommends to VicRoads that an 80 kilometre per hour zone be established near the Indigo shire town signage for the town of Kergunyah on the Kiewa Valley Highway.

By Mr TILLEY (Benambra) (244 signatures)

Public transport: outer east

To the members of the Legislative Assembly assembled in Parliament:

The humble petition of the undersigned citizens of Victoria respectfully requests that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

1. Recognise the need for improved public transport services in the outer east.
2. Recognise that Canterbury Road is an integral part of the principal public transport network.
3. Recognise as a whole Canterbury Road is poorly serviced by public transport, despite the fact that Canterbury Road is a major arterial road with a high volume of car traffic and a number of significant destinations and trip attractors.
4. Recognise that despite these destinations there are no direct east-west bus routes servicing this area between Box Hill and Ringwood. Many existing services are infrequent and divert a great distance away from Canterbury Road (e.g. route 765), thus limiting the patronage and usefulness of these services.
5. Call for the provision of SmartBus services that would provide the following:

A premium level of service consistent with SmartBus standards (including 10 to 15-minute service frequencies from 6.00 a.m. to midnight seven days a week).

Recognise the strategic importance of completing the principal public transport network in Whitehorse and Maroondah.

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

By Mr CLARK (Box Hill) (381 signatures)

Dinwoodie Drive, Newborough: safety

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the undersigned residents and road users of Dinwoodie Drive and its connected roads, Newborough, Victoria, draws to the attention of the honourable house the great inconvenience and danger suffered by residents and road users of Dinwoodie Drive and its connected roads, Newborough, by the lack of action in constructing a safe outlet to Narracan Drive; in particular, the lack of roundabout at the junction of Dinwoodie Drive and Narracan Drive, which has made it extremely dangerous for turning traffic at the said road junction during the hours of 7.00 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. and 2.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. due to the large traffic travelling along Narracan Drive.

We point out that there is only one traffic outlet for the entire Dinwoodie Drive area which not only contains 335 dwellings but Narracan Gardens Aged Care Facility, Orana Elderly Citizens Club and facilities, and the Moe Salvation Army Church.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria direct the government to take immediate action to install a roundabout at the said road or construct a second road exit.

By Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) (2024 signatures)

Port Phillip Bay: channel deepening

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the citizens of Victoria points out to the house that:

We oppose the proposed dumping of over 2 million cubic metres of dredged toxic waste from Port Melbourne channel, Yarra River and Williamstown channels into the proposed toxic dump site in the bay. The toxic dump proposal in our bay by the authorities is very foolhardy and certainly not hole-proof to toxic leakage in our waters. Such a proposal is unacceptable.

There is no EPA approval for the Port Phillip dump site. The Port of Melbourne Authority has no authority to dump hazardous waste in Port Phillip Bay, and has no approval to acquire the land for the site.

The petitioners request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria oppose the proposed dump site project in our bay.

By Mr DIXON (Nepean) (625 signatures)

Health Professions Registration Act

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of Hugh Doherty, resident of the Oakleigh electorate in Victoria draws to the attention of the house:

The gross injustice of the Health Professions Registration Act 2005 Act No. 97/2005. (Assented to 7 December 2005) which came into force on 1 July 2007.

Under section 120, this act legislates as follows:

120. Membership of a responsible board

- (1) A responsible board consists of at least 9 and not more than 12 members nominated by the Minister and appointed by the Governor in Council.
- (2) Of the persons appointed to a responsible board —
 - (a) at least half the members must be registered health practitioners in the health profession regulated by the board; and
 - (b) one must be a lawyer; and
 - (c) 3 must be persons who are not health practitioners in the health profession regulated by the board.

This means that the government by way of the minister and the Governor in Council stack the board with medical practitioners giving them controlling power. Also under the amended division 3 of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 section 181 as follows:

181. Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998

In schedule 1 to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998, after Part 5 insert —

“PART 5A — HEALTH PROFESSIONS REGISTRATION ACT 2005

11A Constitution of Tribunal for hearings

The Tribunal is to be constituted for the purposes of making a final determination under Part 4 of the Health Professions Registration Act 2005 by at least 3 members, of whom at least 2 must be health practitioners with professional qualifications in the health profession regulated by the board that is a party to the proceedings.”

This three member tribunal, where two members must be health practitioners, removes the independence and control of the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal.

This legislation is the worst form of perverting the course of natural justice perpetrated on the general public who make complaints about medical practitioners.

I therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria take immediate action to put a stop to this most unjust practice by:

1. Repealing or amending the Health Professions Registration Act 2005.

2. Establishing independent bodies to investigate and hear complaints against medical practitioners.
3. Reinstating the independent VCAT appeals process that does not include medical practitioners on the tribunal.

By Ms BARKER (Oakleigh) (1 signature)

Tabled.

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

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

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Auditor-General:

Patient Safety in Public Hospitals — Ordered to be printed

Piping the System: Incorporating the Wimmera–Mallee Pipeline and the Goldfields Super-pipe — Ordered to be printed

Project Rosetta (Streams 1 and 2) — Ordered to be printed

Results of Audits for Entities with other than 30 June 2007 Balance Dates — Ordered to be printed

Review of South East Water’s Works Alliance Agreement — Ordered to be printed

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Minister’s exemption certificate in relation to Statutory Rule 37

Victorian Law Reform Commission — Civil Justice Review — Ordered to be printed.

CONDOLENCES

China earthquake

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) (By leave) — Two weeks ago, on 12 May, a massive earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale struck in Wenchuan County in south-west China’s Sichuan Province. Cities and towns across the region were flattened in a matter of minutes. The intensity of the earthquake was so great that workers in Beijing — some 1500 kilometres away — were forced to flee their office blocks and workplaces.

The scale of the disaster was truly catastrophic. The official death toll, which is provided by China's State Council Information Office, presently stands at over 65 000 people, and this figure is expected to rise as the recovery efforts continue. Around 360 000 people have been injured, and 23 150 people are still missing. Close to 14.8 million people have been relocated from the quake-affected areas. I understand that up to 5 million people remain homeless.

Earlier this morning I met with the Consul-General of China in Melbourne, Consul-General Liang Shugen, who advised me that much of the area which has been affected is very mountainous and is very difficult to get to. Many of the roads have been closed, and members of the People's Liberation Army are being parachuted in, often from very low levels below the clouds, and spend 29 hours walking into the area. Such is the difficulty of the terrain and the dimension of the devastation.

The death toll, tragically, includes thousands of children. It is fair to say that the sheer magnitude of this disaster is hard to fathom and the danger is far from over. The Consul-General reminded me this morning that there have been 180 further significant aftershocks following the main quake in Sichuan Province. Twenty-eight of those aftershocks have been measured above magnitude 5, and five of them have been above magnitude 6. The most recent strong aftershock, measuring 6.4, struck on just Sunday afternoon in Qingchuan County in north Sichuan. Sadly, eight people were killed and more than 900 were injured.

The rapid response of the Chinese government and the people of China to this major disaster has been, in every sense of the word, inspiring; it deserves our praise. Search and rescue operations began quickly, and Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao was on a plane to Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan, within hours of the disaster, offering support and comfort to his people. The army was quickly mobilised, the media was on the scene immediately, and vast numbers of Chinese people — some who, I understand, travelled from thousands of kilometres away — came to assist in the recovery efforts. Many thousands of others became blood donors as the extent of the disaster became apparent. It is a response that has rightly received world praise.

Today I am pleased to advise the house that the Victorian government will donate \$500 000 to the Australian Red Cross's China Sichuan Earthquake Appeal 2008 to assist with the recovery efforts in Sichuan Province. As I said, earlier this morning I met with Consul-General Liang Shugen. I advised him of

this donation which the state government will be making. As members would be aware, following this condolence statement today, a condolence book will be available in Queen's Hall for all members of Parliament to sign to show their support and respect for the people of China and our Chinese community.

I want to thank the many Victorians, particularly those in our Chinese community, who have generously donated to the relief efforts in China. All members of the house would know that Victoria and China share a very strong and longstanding friendship and relationship, forged by generations of Chinese Australians. We have deep and lasting friendships. Indeed, our sister state relationship with Jiangsu Province was signed in 1979. We will celebrate the 30th anniversary of that next year; that will be a great occasion for our state and Jiangsu. Earlier this year I visited Jiangsu, Nanjing and Wuxi, as well as Shanghai and Beijing.

The tragedy in Sichuan is felt very deeply here. I want to take this opportunity on behalf of all members of this house and the Victorian community to extend our sympathy and support to Victoria's Chinese community. Our government is working, through the Victorian Multicultural Commission, to support our Chinese community in what has been a very difficult time. The Victorian Multicultural Commission has provided information on the Red Cross tracing service and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's services to Chinese community leaders and service providers who work with the Chinese community. Counselling services are also available through Foundation House, which is jointly funded by the commonwealth government and the state government.

If members of the community are thinking of donating to assist in China, I would certainly urge them to do this now. Victorians can either directly contact the Red Cross or visit my website at www.premier.vic.gov.au and make a donation via the Red Cross link on the homepage.

These are very difficult times for the Chinese nation, and in particular for the people who have lost loved ones during the past two weeks. As I have said, the scale of this disaster — the loss of life, the size of the earthquake, the aftershocks — is something that we rarely see. It is a disaster of truly momentous proportions. Our thoughts go out to the people of China, to all of those who are affected and to all members of the Chinese community here in Victoria.

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) (*By leave*) — The house was reminded just yesterday of

how lucky we are in this country. Again we are here in this house reflecting on the misfortune of others. On 12 May, just a few days after the cyclone disaster in Burma, a massive earthquake struck China, centred on Sichuan Province. It was the most serious quake to strike the region for more than 25 years. Once again the impact has been devastating.

It is difficult to imagine the extent of it and the despair which has ensued. It is estimated that up to 100 000 people have been killed, and hundreds of thousands have been injured. Millions have been displaced. From the luxury and comfort of our homes we have seen on our television screens horrifying images of families fleeing the streets in terror at the aftershocks and others on endless marches, fleeing the misery. It is estimated that more than 5 million buildings have been destroyed — enough, translated to our world, to wipe out most of the state of Victoria.

The Chinese government has moved quickly, as the Premier suggested. In these situations nothing can be perfect but it is significant and a very positive thing that, despite the obvious physical limitations associated not only with the region but the disaster, open and transparent access and reporting has been present, unlike the problems we have seen in Burma. Already the Chinese government has committed the equivalent of some \$15 billion to be set aside for relief and reconstruction.

China is among the most extraordinary of nations: huge in dimension, vast in population and endless in its variety. Unlike many countries, China has the capacity to deal with natural disasters. The Chinese government, by sheer weight of numbers alone, has the ability to respond to this earthquake. But the extent of this tragedy is so enormous that unlike the situation in Burma, the Chinese government is welcoming international assistance. I think that is a tribute to the Chinese government and obviously of comfort to the Chinese people.

Those who have had the good fortune to visit China and travel beyond the major cities marvel at the diversity. There are concentrations of wealth but extremes of poverty and isolation. The resilience and energy of the Chinese people is remarkable. In so many places China is literally rebuilding itself. In many areas it is a huge construction site already, with booming and continuing economic growth, but visitors also know how fragile these regions are and how vulnerable so many of its people are. Obviously this earthquake will have a devastating impact.

As the Premier suggested and as members know, the Chinese community in Victoria is part of our heritage. Our very foundations are connected with the Chinese community. From the gold rush and through 150 years of immigration, business and development, the linkage continues in trade, commerce, culture, tourism and the vital economic links which grow every day, as does friendship.

The response from the community in Victoria and Australia is reflective of that. I note the Federation of Chinese Associations has already raised a significant sum of money. The West Australian, New South Wales and Northern Territory governments have contributed significantly; and the federal government has rightly offered assistance through the Red Cross. I am pleased that the Victorian government, through the Premier, has announced this morning it will be providing additional support, particularly for the Red Cross. I am sure there is more that will need to be done and can be done; with the Premier I join in calls for Victorians to support the Red Cross in its efforts. In contemplating the task of the Red Cross at the moment in dealing with problems around the world, which it does daily — but particularly the problems associated with Burma and China — any support Victorians can offer it should be picked up.

There should be, and I am sure there will be, more support for the Chinese communities in Victoria, particularly those from Sichuan Province. I trust that over time there will be additional support for relocation on a family basis for those who have suffered.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to join the Premier in expressing our collective support for the people of China, and in particular the people of Sichuan Province, and in pledging to do whatever is necessary to assist now and in the future. I am also pleased that China's Consul-General in Melbourne, Mr Liang Shugen, is listening to these proceedings from the gallery. He is a powerful advocate for the people of China and for the enhancing of the relationship between the people of China and Victoria. Our thoughts are with him and with the very large number of Chinese Victorians with family and friends who have suffered as a consequence of this tragedy.

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) (*By leave*) — I rise to speak in support of the Premier's statement. Deng Zuequin, a vegetable seller and resident of Qingchuan, described the terror he felt during one of the many aftershocks the city has experienced since 12 May. He is reported as having said:

I was so scared, I didn't know where to run ... In my mind all things are connected to the earthquake. The earthquake takes up every inch of my mind.

The fear Deng Zuequin describes is understandable given the magnitude of one of China's worst natural disasters. I think that quote best encapsulates what the Sichuan earthquake must have been like to experience at ground level. It must have defied belief. The loss of so many lives, many of them just young children, defies belief. The loss of so many homes — in some cases complete towns and cities — defies belief. The sheer volume of casualties and the number of people whose lives will be permanently affected by this disaster defies belief. It defies belief and yet it has tragically happened. Our thoughts are with the Chinese people, the families and friends of the victims and the thousands of people who are working day and night in the recovery efforts.

Our thoughts are also with Victoria's Chinese community. As the Premier said, we have very close and longstanding connections with China, connections that go back to the gold rush of the 1850s. During the gold rush tens of thousands of Chinese migrants travelled south to a place they called Victoria or New Gold Mountain. Those pioneers battled hardship and discrimination, and in the process helped found our unique multicultural community. Today our Chinese community is one of our state's oldest, most diverse and most vibrant multicultural communities. That is why, besides being Australia's most multicultural state, Victoria is also Australia's most Chinese state. That explains why the Sichuan tragedy is felt so keenly in this part of the world.

Our Chinese community is nonetheless rising to the challenge. As the Leader of the Opposition said, the Federation of Chinese Associations and their affiliated organisations have conducted a number of fundraising activities for the Chinese earthquake and have raised a substantial amount of money. The federation is in contact with a number of our Chinese residents who have friends and relatives in the earthquake-affected areas. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for their tremendous efforts of the past few weeks, and of course everyone in this house wishes them well in the future.

The Premier's announcement that the Victorian government will donate \$500 000 to the Red Cross China Sichuan Earthquake 2008 Appeal is welcome news. I also want to take this opportunity to echo the Premier's comments and thank the people of Victoria for their generosity and encourage others across the state to dig deep and do their bit in supporting our friends in China. Our thoughts are certainly with the

Chinese people at this very difficult time, and we all wish them well in the weeks and months ahead.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) (*By leave*) — I join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition and the Attorney-General in supporting the statement which the Premier has made in support of the Chinese people. The earthquake in Sichuan province on 12 May was a disaster of the most catastrophic proportions: 65 000 people were killed, 30 000 people are still missing, 5000 children have been orphaned and 360 000 people were injured. It is so difficult to grasp the relativity of this. I live in Gippsland. We have a population east of Dandenong of about 220 000 people. What has happened here in China is that something in the order of twice our population base east of Dandenong have either been killed or injured in this appalling event. It is just so difficult to grasp the scale of it. And it is not over yet. As the Premier has remarked, only last Sunday there was a very severe aftershock which took another eight lives and injured so many other people. The scale of the damage in terms of the buildings destroyed is beyond comprehension. All of this of course is made worse by the fact that the region is now enduring torrential rains which have added to the misery of the people who are caught up in this absolute disaster.

By any account, this great country of China has been severely wounded, but one of the features of the Chinese people is that they are remarkably resilient. I must say that by any standard, the response of the Chinese people and its government to this dreadful event has been nothing less than magnificent.

In the order of 50 000 troops have been marshalled to assist those caught up in this disaster. About \$3.7 billion has been dedicated to the relief effort, and more than \$10 billion has already been committed to the reconstruction events in their different forms. It has been an absolutely remarkable response on the part of the government and its people. I am also pleased to say that the response from the Chinese nation, in the sense of welcoming the assistance which has been offered by other nations, is equally something for which, with the greatest respect, the Chinese government is due appropriate accord.

The rest of the world is anxious to help, and forces have been marshalled in so many ways, as the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the Attorney-General have already said. The wonderful thing is that the Chinese nation has opened its doors to all of those who are able to help and to those who have a demonstrated capacity to be able to assist it.

So often it is that these events can seem so far away. As it has been remarked, that is not the case as far as Victorians are concerned. Victoria has more than 50 000 Chinese residents; it has long-established associations. Apart from that, it can be even more personal. Only 40 hours before this tragic event occurred, my sister, Genevieve Tobin, and her husband, Mark, were in Chengdu, which is almost where the epicentre of this shocking event occurred. Only last Thursday my brother Adrian, who is presently visiting China, rang me from Tiananmen Square. A fair proportion of the Ryan family, as it so happens, is presently in China.

It must be said that this great nation, having suffered this grievous wound, is now moving to address the needs of its people. We offer our condolences to those who have died, to the families of those who have been killed and to those who had been injured. I echo the sentiments of those members who have already spoken: there is plenty of capacity in all of us to be able to offer direct assistance. I implore all Victorians to reflect on the welcome announcement of the Premier this morning regarding direct assistance from our government. There are many means whereby we can help; I ask that we all do so. I extend my condolences to all concerned.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask all members to stand in their places as a mark of respect to the victims of the China earthquake.

Honourable members stood in their places.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Hoppers Crossing Secondary College: Fit to Drive program

Mr PALLAS (Minister for Roads and Ports) — I rise to address the house about my recent visit to Hoppers Crossing Secondary College during Education Week. At the time of my visit students at the college were about to embark on their Fit to Drive course, which aims to provide students with a change of philosophy — the idea that young people can change attitudes to risky driving — and support them to take ownership of and responsibility for their own safety and that of their peers. The course continues to provide students with a sequential program across the three senior levels, which will ensure that young people are well prepared to become the safest possible road users.

Young drivers make up a small proportion of road users overall, but they are disproportionately represented in

the statistics relating to Victoria's death toll. I was subject to some intense questioning by the Hoppers Crossing students on the government's recent legislation for P1 probationary drivers, who will be restricted to carrying one peer passenger. The students were keen to understand the finer details of the legislation, and they enthusiastically queried various other aspects of the government's policy. It was fantastic to see that Hoppers Crossing Secondary College has so many enthusiastic students.

The Brumby government has been committed to its Arrive Alive strategy, which has ensured a 25 per cent reduction in Victoria's death toll since its introduction in 2002. I would like to thank the Hoppers Crossing Secondary College principal, Wayne Terrill, the assistant principal, Keith Halge, and the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria on being proactive participants in ensuring the safety of young drivers on our roads.

Racing: future

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — I call on the Minister for Racing to come out of hibernation and provide some real leadership to the Victorian racing industry on key issues. Victorian bookmakers are in crisis and simply cannot wait six months for the minister to introduce long-overdue and much-promised reforms. The minister must also spell out how he proposes to keep his promise that the racing industry will be no worse off after his government removes the industry's annual \$100 million revenue from Tabcorp gaming machines from 2012.

The minister must inform the industry of the implications for racing industry revenues of the High Court Betfair decision, the Tabcorp Northern Territory betting licence application and the exodus of Victorian bookmakers to Darwin. He must come clean on why he has allowed Racing Victoria to sack key officers from its integrity services while Judge Lewis is in the middle of an inquiry into integrity services across Victorian racing. He should also explain to the Victorian racing community why he did nothing to stop 28 race meetings being taken from country clubs the length and breadth of the state.

Finally, he must instruct Racing Victoria Ltd, Harness Racing Victoria and Greyhound Racing Victoria to immediately organise a series of metropolitan and regional meetings to fully brief clubs, owners, trainers, workers, members and all racing stakeholders about the future challenges facing their industry due to state government decisions with respect to wagering licences, gaming machine revenue and the inquiry into

integrity services. The racing industry deserves to be consulted and to be involved. The minister must come out of hibernation — —

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

Glenallen School: achievements

Ms MORAND (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — As members will know, last week was Education Week, the time when schools and kindergartens across Victoria open their doors to the community to showcase activities and welcome parents, grandparents and the community into their classrooms. I took the opportunity to visit two of my great local schools during Education Week. Glenallen School is a specialist school in Glen Waverley providing individual education programs for students aged 4 to 18 who have a physical disability or severe health impairment. Glenallen has been providing this high-quality support for students since 1979. Led by the principal, Elizabeth Green, her wonderful staff and many volunteers, Glenallen does an outstanding job. I greatly enjoyed my visit. I particularly enjoyed the school's choir performance for the visitors who were present that day.

Pinewood Primary School: Premier's reading challenge

Ms MORAND — I was also able to visit Pinewood Primary School, where the Premier's reading challenge ambassador, author Andy Griffiths, was visiting. The principal, Maurice Baker, welcomed Andy and me to a school assembly of children from grades 3 to 6, who were absolutely delighted to meet and hear from an author who is so well-known amongst that age group of readers. Andy's presentation at the assembly was absolutely wonderful, and the children clearly really enjoyed it.

Around 290 Pinewood students are participating in the Premier's reading challenge, and more than 2880 students from Waverley's schools have so far signed up, which is already more students than completed the challenge last year. The Premier's reading challenge has been a great success, with over 7 million books being read by Victorian children since the beginning of the challenge and many more books to be read throughout this year. It has been a great initiative.

Water: north–south pipeline

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — As I walked along the banks of the Yarra River this morning, I marvelled at the magnificent spectacle of the lights of Melbourne. And as the first light came and signalled the start of a new day, I reflected on what keeps country people going through tough times. I remembered waking up at 11.00 p.m. on Easter Monday to the sound of rain gently falling on our iron roof. I then lay awake, like thousands of others, hoping and praying that the rain would continue and give us our first good autumn break in 20 years. A dry April made me think that we had been cheated again.

I then thought of picking field mushrooms last weekend and having fried mushrooms for breakfast. It is a special treat because the field mushrooms are so full of flavour. But it is also special because mushrooms grow when it rains and the soil is still warm. This means that the grass will grow and the crops can be planted. Field mushrooms herald the start of the autumn break. Then my mind turned to helping a ewe lamb on Sunday. When I got the lamb out and placed it in front of the exhausted ewe, she licked it lovingly and then she licked me as if to say thank you.

Country people can endure tough times because of experiences like those I have just spoken about. But what we cannot cope with is a government stealing our precious water for Melbourne which can meet its needs by other means. I have spoken from my heart today. I now ask members of the government and the people of Melbourne to listen to their hearts and say no to the Premier's north–south pipeline. Help us stop it and we will be forever grateful.

South Barwon electorate: football award nominations

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — It is my privilege to inform the house that within my electorate of South Barwon there are three people nominated for the 2008 Telstra country football awards. All three are passionate for the game, drive to improve their clubs and have a tireless work ethic. I would like to congratulate Jeff Ingles of Grovedale Football Club, Peter Swinton of Barwon Heads Football and Netball Club and Scott Edwards of South Barwon Football and Netball Club who have been nominated. Between the three of them they have put in more than 60 years of their time to support their clubs.

It is this type of commitment that produces what are considered true club legends, not just those who have made it to the big time. Take Grovedale Football Club's

Jeff Ingles as an example. He has 34 years with the Tigers and in 2002 was given life membership; he is considered by many in his club to be a loyal, committed and community-minded legend of the game and the true heart and soul of the club. At the other end of the age scale is 21-year-old Peter Swinton, who at the age of five was his Barwon Heads Football and Netball Club's senior side mascot. Peter is considered a passionate, dedicated clubman with over 300 games already under his belt, 200 of which were before he was 18. Peter is also considered a legend among his fellow club mates.

My home club, the South Barwon Football and Netball Club, has nominated Scott Edwards. He has put in a significant amount of time over the last 10 years as a coach, Auskick coordinator, runner, player, umpire, canteen assistant, timekeeper and in many more roles. Scott has won a number of accolades including the club's best club person award; last season he took out the Leon Schram memorial award for junior development for his service to the Geelong Junior Football League. I fully support these nominations for the footy legends awards and call on not only members of this house but also my local community to get behind the awards and nominate — —

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

Ambulance services: Wodonga station

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) — Wodonga ambulance station was first built over 40 years ago and was extended in the early 1990s to accommodate 10 staff. The current staffing is 20. In order to be able to operate a full 24-hour roster, 22 ambos are required. Ideally this number would be 30 to enable staff to cover things including secondment, leave, and also having sufficient peak time coverage to best serve community needs, rather than leaving gaps in rosters or relying on the goodwill of our ambulance officers.

The recent announcement by the government to amalgamate metropolitan and rural ambulance services concerns me greatly. I am concerned that this city-centric government will relegate rural stations to the backburner. Why else would Wodonga station, so obviously overcrowded and understaffed, not have been included in the 48 stations around the state to be either rebuilt or upgraded? I commend the staff of the Rural Ambulance Victoria for their commitment to their communities and their dedication to their jobs. It is time this government started doing more to support these men and women and the wider rural community.

Protective service officers

Mr TILLEY — On another matter in relation to the protective service officers who we see around this place keeping us safe while we go about our business, they are not entitled to the National Medal in recognition of their service — —

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

James Penson

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — I rise to congratulate Mr James Penson from Greenhills Primary School for winning the Victorian Teachers Credit Union outstanding primary school teacher award. Winning this award means James has been recognised by his peers as a teacher who is prepared to go beyond what is expected of him and has made a major effort to make education enjoyable and rewarding for his students. It is teachers like James who students will remember in their later years. They will recall fond memories of a teacher who was willing to push the boundaries of education to make it fun and exciting to learn.

Whilst this award recognises James's innovative and dedicated approach to education, it also recognises the efforts of a terrific team of teachers. I have visited Greenhills primary on many occasions, and I have been immensely impressed by the school's leadership, by its outstanding educational results, by its genuine community engagement and by the passion the entire school community brings to education. This award recognises not only James's educational efforts but those of all the outstanding teachers who are creating enjoyable and rewarding experiences for thousands of students. As part of this award James has won a well-deserved grant of \$10 000, which will allow him to do further study, travel or undertake professional development courses. My own daughter, Eliza, who attended James's previous school, Ivanhoe East, asked that I pass on her congratulations and those of all previous students to a teacher who is truly outstanding. Congratulations to James. We all hope he continues to grow as an educator and to provide a great education to thousands of students well into the future.

Taiwan: election celebration

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — Last week I was honoured to be a guest of the presidents of the Chinese Community Society of Victoria and Taiwanese Chamber of Commerce at a dinner to celebrate the 12th presidential inauguration of the Republic of China (Taiwan). It is a very important day for the people of

Taiwan. The recent election result is another milestone in Taiwan's move to a more democratic government, and I wish President Ma and the people of Taiwan well in their desire to develop a cooperative relationship with mainland China. As well as being entertained by traditional Chinese lion dancers and singers, the 450 guests were enthralled by the excellent rendition in Chinese of *Mei Hua — Plum Blossom* in English — by Peter Kavanagh, a member for Western Victoria Region in the other place. My hosts complimented Mr Kavanagh on his mastery of the Chinese language, and I personally very much enjoyed his melodious delivery of a beautiful Chinese song.

Healesville High School: maintenance

Mrs FYFFE — I have been contacted by a staff member from Healesville High School who has described the appalling work conditions for staff and students. The letter highlights a dark damp environment, rusting roofing materials that need constant repair, burst 45-year-old copper pipes, an ageing and inadequate water boiler, ancient electrical wiring, rooms freezing in winter and buildings leaking like sieves during any slight rainfall. Teachers dissatisfied with their workplace move on, and sadly students are following suit. Healesville High School has reached a point of crisis. The school is in urgent need of a rebuild. The eastern regional office agrees, and as the letter asks, why was Healesville High School overlooked in this year's budget?

Ashburton Community Soccer Day

Mr STENSCHOLT (Burwood) — I rise to celebrate the Ashburton Community Soccer Day held on 18 May at Warner Reserve. I thank all those involved in what was a very successful day. The day started off with a halal barbecue. There was a kids soccer clinic organised by the Ashburton Junior Soccer Club followed by a kids game with the Victoria Police team. After that there was an adult game against the Victoria Police team, resulting in a 3-all draw, which is always a very good result. I am sure all participants will be looking forward to the repeat game next year.

Lots of people got together to work on this day, including the Victoria Police Soccer Club; the Victoria Police Blue Ribbon Foundation; the Ashburton United Soccer Club, especially Paul Crisp from the juniors and Derek Cafferty from the seniors; the Inner East Community Health Service — I thank Mark La Frenais, the IECHS community development worker who put this marvellous day together, which many kids and families came along to; MonashLink; the Ashburton Ashwood and Chadstone neighbourhood

renewal team; the City of Boroondara; the Craig Family Centre; and the YMCA. The funding for the day was largely provided by the Victorian government, with the Victoria Police Blue Ribbon Foundation pitching in as well.

Certificates and awards supplied by the foundation were presented to participants — adults and kids — including an encouragement award, a best player award and a spirit award. A commemorative plaque was handed over to the Ashburton soccer club to keep for next year when games will be played again.

Tertiary education and training: regional and rural Victoria

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — In the last parliament the then Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee made a number of recommendations to address the barriers to tertiary education being experienced by most rural and regional students. Many of these recommendations have not been implemented. The Parliament's Education and Training Committee has recently visited Gippsland and again heard about the same problems of barriers to access to tertiary education. One of the main issues is living expenses and the cost of accommodation for regional students studying away from home — and for many this barrier is insurmountable. This cost is at least \$20 000 per student on top of school fees and other expenses. A major reason for students deferring study and forgoing scholarships is so they can qualify for the independent living allowance.

To explain the impact on individual students, I will give an example. I refer to a young East Gippsland man studying in Melbourne. His parents and both of his grandparents are basically funding his education while he lives away from home. They would not be described as well heeled. This type of arrangement is very common. This burden increases the pressure and obligation on those students, knowing as they do how much their families are forgoing.

Both the state and federal governments must address this inequitable burden on rural students, because it is a major barrier to tertiary education. A simple solution identified by the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee was to change the criteria for access to the independent living allowance to make it as of right for students who reside a set distance from their place of tertiary study. This is just one issue the government must address to ensure we are providing skills and education to all students, no matter where they live.

Diamond Creek: volunteers

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — Today I want to congratulate the many volunteers of the service clubs of Diamond Creek on another great evening in support and celebration of the great work they do. The event was held last Friday at the Diamond Creek Bowls Club. This year's event was hosted and organised by the Diamond Creek fire brigade, and the funds raised were donated to the Salvation Army's emergency services branch. Each service club in attendance was afforded the opportunity to report to the community on its activities in Diamond Creek over the last year and to encourage attendees to get involved. Reports were given by the Diamond Creek Living and Learning Centre; the Diamond Creek RSL, which is the newest sub-branch in Victoria; the Diamond Creek Progress Association; the Diamond Creek fire brigade; the Nillumbik Historical Society; the Diamond Creek Blue Light Disco Committee, which is Victoria's largest and most successful Blue Light organisation; the North-East Road Safety Committee; and the Diamond Creek scouts.

Warwick Wilson from the Salvos stole the show with his humorous presentation and showed why emergency service volunteers value the support and many meals provided by the Salvos whenever they are needed and whatever the emergency, whether it be flood, bushfire or this year's fire at Apollo Parkways Primary School. I thank the guest speaker, Superintendent Andrew Crisp, for his positive message about our young people. I say well done to the Diamond Creek fire brigade, ably led by Captain Peter Perkins, for organising a great night. I thank in particular the scouts for their great table-waiting skills, especially young Jacinda, who looked after our table. While I am thanking scouts I want to also thank the Hurstbridge scouts, and in particular Peter Adams, for their presentation to me of a 100-year scarf.

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

Rail: Ringwood station

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — Once again I rise to voice my concerns regarding Ringwood railway station. In this year's budget Ringwood transit city has once again been overlooked for funding. The Brumby Labor government has proved that it is only interested in funding Labor-held seats. The proof is that more than \$51 million in transit city funding has been allocated to Broadmeadows, Dandenong and Geelong, with nothing at all for Ringwood. QIC, formerly the Queensland Investment Corporation, has made a strong

commitment towards a major multimillion dollar development in Ringwood, and the vision that QIC and Maroondah City Council have for the area is a huge opportunity for Ringwood to move forward in the areas of housing, transport, education and shopping.

Maroondah City Council has now voiced its concern that the lack of funding commitment from the Brumby government to Ringwood railway station will cost the area dearly in terms of investment and employment. It is feared that the government's lack of support for the development may see it scaled down considerably. It is laughable that a Labor member for Eastern Metropolitan Region in the other place, Shaun Leane, is quoted in the local paper as saying that the government is still committed and that he will still work harder to ensure the station will receive its upgrade. His work to date — if he has done anything more than mouth government platitudes — has produced absolutely nothing for Ringwood.

I can assure the house that any funding that may come in the future will be as a result of pressure from the Queensland Investment Corporation and the opposition campaigning and not due to Mr Leane. I concur with the statement made by one of my constituents, Margaret Stevens, who is chair of the Victorian Disability Advocacy Network, when she said:

The government is dooming our community to many more years of poor-quality transport infrastructure, downturn in local economic activity and a decrease in employment by its decision not to include funding in the 2008–09 state budget.

Brunswick Secondary College: newspaper report

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) — As all honourable members are aware, you cannot believe everything you read in the newspapers, and that is certainly true in relation to the article in the *Sunday Herald Sun* of last weekend about an incident that occurred at the Brunswick Secondary College. The suggestion in the article is that the school has been too lenient on a student who was involved in this incident. This article is a result of an anonymous letter written by three students that was sent to the shadow Minister for Education, the member for Nepean, and it somehow ended up in the hands of the newspaper. There are inaccuracies in the article. The facts were not checked with the school. The school was incredibly decisive and showed enormous leadership. When the incident occurred the student involved in it was suspended for a week.

I must say Brunswick Secondary College is an extremely safe school. It has a great reputation. I send

two of my children to that school. I realise it is a great school and they realise it is a great school. The school has worked hard to get a good reputation and be considered safe; it does not need this sort of inaccuracy presented in newspapers as a result of a leak like the one made by the member for Nepean. It has been a very distressing incident for the school community. I know the school community will rally behind the school leadership, the acting principal — —

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

Rail: Ferntree Gully station

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) — On many occasions I have raised in this house concerns regarding the safety at the unmanned Ferntree Gully railway station. A number of violent incidents have occurred at the station, and consequently many residents feel reluctant to use this facility. It appears that not only the Ferntree Gully community has called for the provision of staff at railway stations, but so too has the government's own members, with the *Age* recently reporting that the ALP's transport policy committee called for the provision of staff at every metropolitan railway station.

The facts are very clear. The Minister for Public Transport should not only listen to the concerns of my community but should also start to listen to the concerns of her own transport committee and immediately announce the provision of permanent staff at the Ferntree Gully railway station. Furthermore the minister should ensure that it is upgraded to premium status with the construction of an enclosed waiting area on the city-bound platform.

Schools: Catholic sector

Mr WAKELING — Many residents in my electorate are concerned at the level of state funding provided to Catholic schools. St Simon's, St Joseph's and St John the Baptist primary schools and St Joseph's Regional College provide a fantastic educational service for students in my electorate. However, it is very disconcerting that the Brumby Labor government is failing to adequately resource this important education stream. The diocesan Catholic Education Office has made it very clear that the Brumby government has failed to fully index all state recurrent and targeted grants. On behalf of Catholic school students and parents, I will continue to stand up for my community to ensure that the Brumby government stops treating Catholic school students as second-class citizens.

Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre: radiation therapy

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — On Monday, 19 May, I attended with other MPs, including the member for Melton, a tour of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in East Melbourne, which is Australia's largest specialist radiation therapy centre, to see firsthand its comprehensive range of specialist and general radiation therapy services. The Peter MacCallum radiation therapy department administers approximately 6000 new courses of treatment each year, with general radiation therapy treatment and planning services offered.

I have a better understanding of the research that radiation therapists are involved in, including the impact of fluorodeoxyglucose (FDG), which is a glucose analogue, and positron emission tomography (PET) scans on patients receiving radical radiotherapy. FDG is most commonly used in the medical imaging modality positron emission tomography, as once FDG is injected into a patient a PET scanner can form the images of the distribution of FDG around the body.

PET is a nuclear medicine imaging technique which produces a three-dimensional image or map of functional processes in the body. If the biologically active molecule chosen for PET is FDG, a derivative of glucose, the concentrations of tracer imaged then give tissue metabolic activity in terms of regional glucose uptake. Although use of this tracer results in the most common type of PET scan, other tracer molecules are used in PET to image the tissue concentration of many other types of molecules of interest. This in very simple terms means that almost 50 per cent of PET images provide information on other areas of the body that may need medical attention which would otherwise have been missed and thus save lives.

Solar energy: rebate

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — The Rudd federal government decision to means test photovoltaic rooftop cells will considerably dim Victoria's response to climate change. In Mildura a buying group had been organised. I would like to pay tribute to the work done by Mr Paul Geering and his friends, who showed that by working collectively and ordering in lots of 50, the cost of a 1 kilowatt system was under \$10 000 installed. A further financial accommodation had been arranged for those who could not pay up-front, and there were many lots of 50 on order for Mildura. The Rudd federal government has decimated the Mildura buying group, with over 50 per cent having to cancel because of the recently introduced means test, and with it Victoria's

solar future has been dimmed. The Victorian government should use its much-talked-about spirit of cooperative federalism to reverse this decision.

This is proven technology which is about to gain wide acceptance but is now being widely overlooked as a result of this Rudd government decision. It will remain under a shadow — a shadow which will get larger as Australia grows and approaches the energy shortage abyss as the spinning reserves of our thermal capacity will near exhaustion in the not-too-distant future. I call on the Victorian government, with the Rudd government, to change the means test and make it fair for Australians to use this new technology.

Community cabinet: Hepburn and Central Goldfields

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — Last week the Brumby government held the 83rd community cabinet since Labor came to office. This time the cabinet came to Hepburn and Central Goldfields shires. As with other community cabinets I have attended, this was another very successful one which lasted two days. Community members appreciated the opportunity of meeting the Premier and other ministers in their local community. They clearly appreciated knowing that the Premier and cabinet were interested to hear their views and to take an interest in local proposals and projects.

Community members were also delighted to learn of further government support for projects, including the Creswick Interpretative Centre for which the Minister for Regional and Rural Development announced a \$212 000 funding contribution. The announcement by the Minister for Housing of over \$400 000 to upgrade government housing in Daylesford was also greatly appreciated by residents in those houses. The residents and patients of the Trentham campus of Hepburn Health Services also appreciated meeting the Premier and the Minister for Health, who talked about the benefits of an \$8 million redevelopment which was recently announced in the state budget.

The students of Daylesford Secondary College also enjoyed seeing the Premier and the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs participate in sporting activities in the new aquatic and recreation centre, while the Hepburn Country Fire Authority volunteers appreciated having the Premier and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services hand over keys to their new four-wheel-drive pumper. Many other events were held, including the community consultation at Creswick Novotel, and all events demonstrated that the Brumby government continues to take action to be accessible and govern for all Victorians.

Budget: taxation

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — This statement condemns the Brumby Labor government for its continuing failure to provide Victorians with value for money from the doubling of the state budget since 1999. Victorians are faced with maximum taxes for minimum services at a time when the Brumby government is going on a debt-driven spending spree. Whilst the Brumby government is swimming in a sea of record state taxes and GST revenues, total public sector net debt is expected to increase more than five-fold to a disturbing \$23 billion by 2012 to pay for Labor's excesses and cost blow-outs and will become a heavy millstone around the necks of future generations.

With state government spending having doubled in eight years, Victorians have not seen a credible increase in the level or quality of state government services or infrastructure during that time. Through its ineptitude and financial mismanagement, the Brumby government has simply failed to deliver real improvements in services and desperately needed infrastructure to Victorians. The Brumby government's complacency and arrogance about Victoria's increasingly heavy reliance on property taxes defies common sense. In 1999 property taxes and land taxes accounted for only 15 per cent of total state taxes; now they account for nearly 37 per cent.

The Premier and the Treasurer are simply banking on the good times continuing to roll on forever. It is of grave concern: when the inevitable economic downturn hits Victoria there will be dire consequences for the state budget revenue, and that will mean even less — —

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

Children: Don't Trade Lives campaign

Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) — World Vision Australia is currently taking up the fight against child slavery through its Don't Trade Lives campaign, and I am fortunate enough to have been invited to attend a forum shortly in Frankston to discuss the issue. World Vision's campaign is focused on a particularly abhorrent modern form of slavery, human trafficking, the victims of which are both adults and children and which occurs when people are transported, sold and forced to work in slave-like conditions. Essentially it is the practice of treating people as subhuman — as a commodity rather than as an individual with rights and dignity.

While last year marked 200 years since the introduction of the United Kingdom's Slave Trade Act, which abolished slave trade in the British Empire, a cursory glance at today's statistics reveals that we still have a long way to go. Some estimates suggest that over 27 million people are affected by human trafficking today. They are taken from their families and forced to work as farmhands, prostitutes and child soldiers, among other things. Although we may justifiably marvel at our progress over the past 200 years, the undeniable reality is that, for many people, life is no better today than it was in the Dark Ages, or in the most brutal years of colonialism.

Even developed countries like Australia are implicated in human trafficking. We buy the goods produced by forced child labour, and we too often neglect the crippling poverty which causes it. I would like to thank all those in my electorate who are involved in campaigns against human trafficking, especially the school students who are part of Vision Generation and the Oaktree Foundation.

Turkish Golden Directory

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — Last Monday night I paid a nostalgic visit back to Broadmeadows, which was part of my electorate in 1982. I was the guest of the Golden Directory, which is a Turkish directory for business people. The directory is celebrating 10 years of successful publication for the business community, the Turkish community and the wider community. It gave me great pleasure to be invited there and to represent the government at that auspicious occasion. Having revisited the area, and seen over the past 25 years the growth of the Turkish community — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The time for members statements has now ended.

GRIEVANCES

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Australian Labor Party: regional and rural Victoria

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — I grieve today for country Victorians who are languishing under governments, both state and federal, under the administration of the Labor Party. These governments at both levels are seeking to change the way of life of rural and regional Victorians, and in many respects are doing so.

The change they are making is much for the worse. The mixture of activity by both governments is leading to an unfortunate outcome across a number of areas ranging from poor policy decisions, particularly with regard to resource management, poor execution of policy, a litany of broken promises and a complete failure to understand the way in which rural and regional communities actually function. At both levels of government there is continually a turning of backs on the most vulnerable in our communities. These facts are demonstrated in many ways. Examples are replete across country Victoria. I live in Gippsland, which provides but a snapshot of the way Labor treats country Victorians with disdain.

It plays out in a number of areas. First, insofar as the issue of water is concerned, we still have the state government fiddling with the notion of piping treated water across 135 kilometres from the eastern treatment plant and bringing about 128 gigalitres of water annually into the Latrobe Valley to be used in the power stations. All of this is in an environment where the power industry simply does not want this to happen, where no arrangement has been struck with the government about the use of this water, and when in fact the water should be piped back and used in Melbourne. The government itself has explored the prospect of putting that 100 gigalitres of water back into the Yarra River and then taking water from the Yarra so that it can be used for potable purposes. The government should pursue the policy initiative that it has described as opposed to trying to persist with this silly proposition of piping the water back into the Latrobe Valley.

Insofar as the issue of agriculture is concerned, the government should build more dams. It has its myopic, ideological blind spot in relation to the construction of more dams. If dams are not built, then at least it should build more off-stream storages. There are many options which can and should be explored. Only about 11 or 12 months ago we had the equivalent of the Thomson Dam's total capacity flowing out to sea because the government allowed that to occur in circumstances where it has not built any water storages in Gippsland. Imagine the wealth which could be created and the jobs which would follow if we had more dams in Gippsland to capture the available excess water.

No-one suggests that it can all be captured; of course we have to protect the Gippsland Lakes. These things are vitally important. But you only need look in other jurisdictions around Australia — for example, the work being done by the New South Wales Labor government in the headwaters of the Hunter River, where it is going to build a 350-gigalitre dam — to find the style of thing

which can and should be done around Gippsland streams. I implore the government to do some proper work and have this happen.

One need only look at the timber industry to support my grievance. Over a period of years, state and federal governments of different persuasions cooperated to develop the regional forest agreements. Under Labor those agreements have been destroyed; they have been torn up. Labor is constantly paying homage to the ridiculous policies of the Greens, blueing with them when it suits them for public purposes, but when push comes to shove, there they are, the two of them, arm in arm, the inseparable Greens and Labor Party.

The timber industry has been streeeted by the Labor Party at both the federal and state levels. The state government developed the Our Forests Our Future policy to enable the industry to be restructured — the delightful term that is used. In fact so many people who should have been entitled to payments under that \$80 million package were unable to get their benefit simply because the government's package ran out of money. The government should honour the promises it makes to people at all levels of our community.

Now we have the silly situation of VicForests, the state government agency, operating a tender system for the sale of logs, which system has in some instances resulted in the sale of those logs to interstate competitors. We now have the silly situation of Victorian timber being sold under a tender system, designed by this government, through its agency, across the border to New South Wales. In effect we are exporting the jobs which should be secured not only in East Gippsland but also in other parts of Victoria.

The Greens are still talking about the dangers represented by the timber industry, a commentary I heard repeated yet again at the candidates' information night at Yarram last Thursday evening. The Greens representatives had the temerity to stand up and say that a majority of communities in Gippsland are opposed to the timber industry. Do you mind! Do not worry about the jobs that will be lost if the Greens and Labor have their way; they are happy to have these jobs destroyed because the Labor Party, both federally and at a state level, has no idea what makes these country communities tick.

Then you have the coal industry. Clean coal is the topic of the day, but of all the areas where we have dog whistling on behalf of the government, at both state and federal levels, it is surely over the coal industry. I pay tribute to the former federal member for Gippsland, Peter McGauran, who was able to achieve a

\$150 million grant to enable initiatives with clean coal in the Latrobe Valley to be explored.

He knew, as we all understand, that this is a crucial issue for jobs. Everybody knows that we have about 500 years of resource available to us by way of coal reserves in the Latrobe Valley. The issue is: how do we get it out of the ground while suppressing greenhouse gases, yet enabling the use of that coal not only for future power generation but accordingly for the growth of jobs in this wonderful part of Victoria?

The state and federal governments are happy to say plenty about clean coal technology, and they are, in fairness, prepared to contribute money insofar as further initiatives to be undertaken on clean coal are concerned. However, the issue they will not give an answer on — perhaps today we will hear from them about it — is that if the clean coal technology proves up as is hoped will be the case over the next 10 years or so, do Labor governments at both the state and federal levels agree that clean coal technology should be the foundation of additional power generation in Victoria? Does Labor agree that we need more power-generating capacity in our state? At the moment we generate about 8500 megawatts of power.

Interestingly, China adds about another 1000 megawatts of power generation to its system every single week; it replicates the Victorian system about every eight or nine weeks and the Australian system, about every eight or nine months. What do the Labor governments, both state and federal, say about generating more power in Victoria from our coal resources but on the basis of using clean coal technology? I would love to hear from governments, both state and federal, about this.

The house should remember that Victoria has forever, while Labor rules at the federal level, the shadow of federal environment minister, Peter Garrett, hanging over this issue. He will in due course be unleashed on this industry. No-one surely pretends that Mr Garrett has any view other than those he has espoused so often over the years. If he had his chance, he would shut that industry down this afternoon.

The Garrett factor is important in terms of not only preservation of jobs in the Latrobe Valley but of what the future may hold. It is why in this impending federal Gippsland by-election it is so imperative to have someone like Darren Chester from The Nationals who is prepared to stand up for the people of the Latrobe Valley. It is why it is no good having someone going up there on behalf of the Labor Party as yet another yes-man stuck on the back benches of the Labor

government but who does not really care about the people of the Latrobe Valley. As I said in here the other day, searches of federal *Hansard* show Mr Rudd has never used the word 'Gippsland' insofar as *Hansard* is concerned on behalf of the people of that great region. All of a sudden he seems to have an interest in it. We will see how it all plays out. The people in the valley know where the real threat to their jobs lies; and they know it lies with Labor, because they know Labor lies.

At the state government level there is the issue of the failure to properly use the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. About \$300 million which has been promised in budgets remains uncommitted. Wouldn't local government love to have that money available to build more roads and more bridges, and for infrastructure purposes? Wouldn't it love to be funded properly?

At the state government level, playing out as we speak is the disgraceful position concerning the Maffra Secondary College — a promise made by this government to provide that great school with \$5.7 million in this year's budget. A press release from the Treasurer confirmed it, and now the government is trying to tell the Maffra Secondary College community that it was a dreadful error, a shocking mistake. The government is full of apologies, but it should fund the promise that it made; it should provide that money this year to the people of the Maffra community to enable that work to be done. To his great credit, Darren Chester has been magnificent in being a strong voice on behalf of the Maffra community to see that this occurs.

The federal government, as we now know it, is rampaging around Gippsland and other parts of Australia with its series of broken promises. It has destroyed the regional partnerships program. Therefore wonderful projects, such as the renewal and refurbishment of the RSL facilities at both Stratford and Warragul, are threatened because this government will not honour the promises which should be honoured. It means that the people who fought for this nation and made our democratic system possible in Australia are going to be the ones at the blunt end of this terrible instrument that Labor is using for the purposes of, again, breaking promises and abusing the people across country Victoria and across country Australia. It is an absolute and unmitigated disgrace.

There is the same impact on the proposed reconstruction of the TAFE facilities happening at Sale, where we need \$5 million out of the regional partnerships program. This government has taken it away. There is the prospect of the multisports indoor centre, which was to have been built in East Gippsland

and located out at the Lucknow Recreation Reserve. It was the subject of a letter of offer of \$630 000 from the former government. The community has done an enormous amount to fundraise and help that project occur, and this government has now taken the axe to the program. Now it is all under threat, when these people would otherwise have had this wonderful facility.

This is Labor at its best, this is Labor doing what it does in relation to rural and regional Australia, and in this case it happens to be Gippsland. A million dollars was promised for the community centre down at Yarram. The government now says that the program which would have provided that money has also gone.

Then there is the issue of the Princes Highway duplication between Sale and Traralgon. At the last federal election the federal government promised \$140 million. What was its allocation in this year's budget? Only \$500 000 — that is, \$139.5 million short of its promise. What about the state government? Where is its contribution to a road it recognises as being a major arterial connection between Sale and Gippsland? This road carries tens of thousands of people daily. What about all this rhetoric from Labor about the need to have safer road systems throughout country Victoria? It had its chance to put up or shut up, but what have we got from it? An allocation of just \$500 000 in the federal budget.

What about the pensioners? What is the federal government thinking, with the way it has ignored pensioners in its recent budget? It has deserted those people who have paid their taxes and done their bit for this nation. Now government, particularly at a federal level, has turned its back on them.

Even as we speak there is breaking news about the way the Rudd government is failing to live up to the clear promises it made during the last federal election. It said it would reduce petrol prices, that it would reduce interest rates and that it would control inflation. This last budget was going to be the budget that would slay the inflation dragon. Let it be known that the federal government has now taken charge of this issue. Whatever happens now by way of inflation in this country lies at the feet of the federal Labor Party.

I say on behalf of country Victorians, on behalf of those of us who live in Gippsland in particular: we need Labor governments at all levels to live up to their promises. Most particularly we need someone up there in Canberra on our behalf, looking after Gippslanders, fighting for their future and for their jobs in particular. Darren Chester is the man!

Liberal Party: performance

Ms RICHARDSON (Northcote) — Today I grieve for the Victorian Liberal Party. As a member of the Labor government, I delight in the incompetence and lack of policy direction shown by the Liberals and sincerely hope that Labor majorities continue into the future. Nevertheless I am ever mindful of the lessons of history. In short, good government is aided by good opposition, because even the best team is made better by good, spirited competition. But we are so very far away from describing the current Liberal opposition as good by any measure, no matter how low we set the bar — and you do not have to take my word for it, simply look at what one of their own says about the party. A former Liberal leader in the other place said the party stands for nothing and is bereft of ideas.

Why are the people of Victoria so badly served by the Liberal opposition? A range of suggestions have been made in response to that question. Bloggers and ex-Liberal Party staffers Simon Morgan and John Osborn lay the blame squarely at the feet of the Leader of the Opposition. Their website has been restored to the internet — you simply google ‘Ted Baillieu must go’, and there it is. On it they say he is lazy, that he leans too much to the left, that he is bad with the media, and is insecure and incompetent. The glaringly obvious deficiencies in the Leader of the Opposition have led others to frantically search for —

Ms Asher — On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, if the member wishes, albeit by way of quotation, to cast an adverse observation on another member of this chamber, she can only do it by way of substantive motion. I call on you to —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I understand the point of order the member for Brighton is taking. I do not uphold it. I am sure the member for Northcote is aware of the standing orders of the house.

Ms RICHARDSON — Of course they have been searching frantically for an alternative to the Leader of the Opposition. They have talked up the members for Malvern and Polwarth. Unfortunately for those desperate to find an alternative, the member for Polwarth, much like a former federal Treasurer, suffers from a lack of ticker and from a lack of support. As for the member for Malvern, we have not heard much from him since he suggested we bankrupt the state by providing a big, fat payout to Tattersall’s and Tabcorp.

This inability to find anyone worthy of replacing this lame duck leader has led to the conclusion that the Liberal Party’s ills lie in the lack of talent being

preselected into its ranks. This point is worthy of further investigation. When you look at what happened in the last round of preselections in the Liberal Party, you certainly struggle to find any push for talent to be brought into this place. Liberal Party members themselves only point to the members for Malvern and Doncaster and a member for Northern Metropolitan Region in the other place, Matthew Guy. That’s it! They are the three so-called new talents in Parliament — 3 out of 38 members!

What the Liberal machine did instead at the last round of preselections was recycle a lot of Liberal members who had been rejected by the voters. The member for Evelyn and members for Western Metropolitan Region and South Eastern Metropolitan Region in the other place, Bernie Finn and Inga Peulich respectively, are all MPs who have been previously rejected by the voters. As for the remaining bunch of new Liberal MPs, we all know that members opposite describe them as neo-conservatives who are bereft of any talent whatsoever.

The other deficiency that is highlighted as the cause of all that ails the Liberal Party is its rules. David Kemp has taken up the challenge of reforming the party’s rules, to address the crisis facing it. But even with those solutions we are reminded of just how sad and desperate members opposite have become. David Kemp’s bold new plan to reform the party’s rules will deliver local plebiscites to select party candidates in 2010. This will open up the Liberal Party’s processes and in fact replicate what we do in the Labor Party. The problem is that, unlike the ALP, the average age of membership of the Liberal Party is 65 years. What they are doing through this reform mechanism process is delivering reform to the Liberal blue-rinse set.

What about reform of the decision-making bodies of the party? Will the Liberals finally embrace power sharing as the way ahead? The answer to that is absolutely not. The Liberals are dominated by a winner-takes-all approach. That is why in the recent elections, 20 out of 20 of the members who secured selection on the administrative committee were from one faction — the Kroger-Costello faction. Even with 48 per cent support, the Leader of the Opposition’s faction did not gain a single person on the administrative committee. Of course the Leader of the Opposition attends those meetings because he is still the Liberal opposition leader, and he is only there for the time being. But he is about as welcome at these meetings as Sam Newman would be at the Age’s Christmas party.

If the Labor Party had not embraced power sharing in the 1970s, then our party organisation would be as dysfunctional as that of the Liberals. Unfortunately the Leader of the Opposition, like so many Liberals, refuses to embrace the principle of power sharing. His decision to oppose the introduction of proportional representation in the other place reflects that fundamental view.

Factional warfare has also been suggested as the root of all ills. Certainly over the years I have found the Liberal Party's finger-pointing at the Labor Party's factions, as though it does not have any, rather amusing. Recent events have surely killed off this great deception. The Leader of the Opposition himself is a great, big factional player who is very keen to throw his weight around the place. Only a factional warrior would leak private emails to the media in the way that he did. Only a factional warrior would, at the expense of the party, use the bloggers episode as an opportunity to drive out his critics. The politically smart option was to leave well enough alone. These bloggers, or 'traitors' as the Leader of the Opposition likes to describe them, were sacked over a month ago, but as a factional warrior the Leader of the Opposition could not resist the opportunity to settle old scores.

The truth is the Labor Party has factions. They exist, but they operate for the overall benefit of the party. At times they get it spectacularly wrong and all of the details are played out in the papers, but the factions are, at their very best, silently delivering good outcomes for the Australian Labor Party. By contrast, the Liberal factions are not dominated by what is in the best interest of their party or even policy; instead their factions are entirely based on personalities.

Another oft-cited reason for the Liberals failure to make any sort of mark on Victorian politics is their lack of policy direction. Let me give just one example. The fundamental question every Victorian asks about any opposition in the lead-up to a state election is, 'What do you stand for?'. The Liberals respond by saying, 'We should be supported because we are better economic managers'. The trouble is that it is not really a policy at all, it is a statement about good management.

At the heart of every good state government's economic strategy is keeping the books in good order. When state Liberals say they are committed to being sound economic managers but propose policy measures that would bankrupt the state, their feeble claims about being sound economic managers are blown out of the water. Costings of their policies before the last election revealed a massive blow-out of the state's finances had

they been elected. What is left when their claim to be economic managers is in tatters? A big policy vacuum!

Into this great policy vacuum other ideas flourish. Ideas like selling our state schools and profiting from their sale; ideas like closing country rail lines and ripping the heart out of country communities; ideas like closing hospitals and slashing health funding; ideas like sacking 8000 teachers and driving education standards into the ground. Even the Liberal bloggers understood this point, when they wrote, 'If you stand for nothing, you will fall for everything. You will fail to see through heartless ideas and fail to see their consequences for real people'.

It is certainly true that a lack of policy direction, the lack of good party rules, the lack of new talent, the failed Liberal leadership and the party factions can all be pointed to when talking about what is wrong with the Liberal Party. These are all just symptoms of a much deeper and fundamental problem that has always plagued the Liberal Party. The fundamental problem that will never go away and that just cannot be wallpapered over is that the Liberals have no core values other than 'every man for himself'. That is why the division in the Liberal Party is a division of personalities, not of policies or core values.

This fundamental value has always been played down and denied since the party's inception. The classic Liberal Party approach and former Prime Minister John Howard's approach was to play down this lack of core values by describing the Liberal Party as a broad church rather than addressing it as a fundamental weakness. In the absence of core values, the Liberals are beset by the cult of personality, and that is what drives the Liberals today. You are either in the Costello-Kroger camp or you are in the Kennett-Baillieu camp — it is as simple as that. Their debates have nothing to do with merit or with principles; it is just who you like and who you support. At the next round of preselections we will see this lack of core principles played out spectacularly once again. Sitting Liberal members will be targeted because of who they are aligned to, and merit will have no place to play in determining the outcomes.

Let me give members two standout examples of this. I understand that the member for Scoresby is set to be replaced, along with the member for Caulfield. Michael Gidley, who has challenged the member for Scoresby in the past, is waiting in the wings and, yes, that is a gun in his pocket! David Southwick ran as a candidate for membership of the upper house at the last election and lost, and is now determined to replace the current sitting member for Caulfield. Both these men are from the Kroger-Costello faction; both of them have the

numbers and support of members on the ground; both these men and the heavies behind them care nothing about the fact they are challenging Liberal Party shadow ministers; and both these men are not driven by merit or what is in the best interests of the Liberal Party — they are driven by their own personal ambition.

In contrast, Labor has a core set of values that drive our decision making and our organisational structure. We believe in a fair workplace for all Victorian workers. We believe in job security and a job for everyone. We believe in power sharing and reforming our democratic institutions so that every voice is heard. We believe in governing for the whole of the state and that services should not be dependent on the postcode in which you live. We believe that every child must be afforded the opportunities that only education can bring in order that he or she can reach their full potential.

We believe that the health care you receive and your family receives should never depend on the size of your wallet. We believe that we do not inherit our environment from our parents; we borrow it from our children. We believe in listening and responding to the needs of the most disadvantaged in our community, knowing that ultimately that is how we will be judged and how we will judge ourselves.

These core Labor values are the ballast of the Labor Party and for its parliamentary representatives. We are fortunate indeed to have rank and file membership that hold these values dear and a union movement that stands up for working people. Like all political parties, some are drawn to our ranks merely for the pursuit of power. Because they stand for nothing and have no reference to these core values, they are ultimately drawn into personality cults just like members opposite. The lesson for these few is the same as the lesson for Liberal Party members and for Liberal members opposite — personalities fall but core values do not. It is all too late for the Liberal Party. They have been dominated by me-tooism for too long, by ambition first before the community, no matter what the cost. It is all over for the Liberal Party.

The chickens have surely come home to roost and this latest blogging episode has clearly exposed what we all know to be the case. What is wrong with the Liberal Party is just not symptomatic, it is fundamental. They stand for nothing; they believe in nothing.

Water: food bowl modernisation project

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — The hubris of a long-term member of a long-term government! I

congratulate the member for Northcote for reading out so beautifully that little presentation to Parliament, which presumably someone else wrote for her. I advise her very strongly to concentrate on the Greens in her seat because that is where the threat to her career lies.

I grieve for northern Victorian farmers and communities because of the projects announced by the government on 19 June 2007 — that is, after last year's budget. One element of that particular program to which the Liberals and The Nationals object is the so-called food bowl modernisation project and the Sugarloaf interconnector. This is an irrigation upgrade that on its merits for country Victoria is an excellent project in isolation from the Sugarloaf interconnector, which is the objectionable feature of that project.

I have a couple of comments to make about this project. In particular we dispute the water savings, as indeed do others, put forward by the government. The government's figures when they announced the project said there would be up to 900 billion litres of water lost in the Goulburn and Murray irrigation systems and that the project overall in its entirety would save 450 billion litres.

The government claims that stage 1 of the project, which is the stage the government announced last year and the one we are discussing now, will save 225 billion litres, with the allocations of these savings being a third for farmers, a third for Melbourne and a third for the environment. Those savings are disputed, but also the equity, more importantly, of the Sugarloaf interconnector is strongly disputed by this side of politics. The first 75 gegalitres, under the government's proposal, is designated for Melbourne just for the year 2010. The full 75 gegalitres is not designated in any other year: 2010 is the only year that is guaranteed. The pipeline component of this project, as I said earlier, is the element of this project that is not supported, and I just want to make two observations that are important to this particular political debate.

First of all, the government has said it would not take water from northern Victoria for Melbourne, and in its *Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy — Action to 2055* policy statement at page 64 the government said:

The government considers that Melbourne must tap the significant potential for conservation, efficiency and reuse and recycling gains within the central region rather than connecting with northern Victoria and buying water from northern Victorian irrigators.

The policy document goes on to say:

Due to the magnitude of water required, the significant potential alternate —

it says 'alternate' but it means 'alternative' —

options to meet Melbourne's shortfall and the challenges already facing the irrigation community, the government does not support Melbourne buying water from irrigators in northern Victoria to meet Melbourne's future consumptive needs.

The first point to make about the Sugarloaf interconnector is that the government has switched its policy from the one it released prior to the election in 2006. The second point I want to make is based on the observations from the Auditor-General. The Auditor-General has commented in some detail on this project, but I just want to quote from his most recent report, *Planning for Water Infrastructure in Victoria*, at page 31, where he talks about the lack of rigour for this particular plan, and I quote:

The level of rigour applying to the components of the plan varies considerably. For example, the food bowl upgrade costs represent the lowest level of rigour and were, at that time, based on a preliminary study by a stakeholder group (the Food Bowl Alliance).

The project has plenty of critics and obviously this side of politics is one. The key failing of the Labor government in relation to water is its failure to secure Melbourne's water supply in its two periods of office, from 1999 to 2002 and then to 2006, and again we will see failure from 2006 to 2010. The government has a number of options available to it and I want to briefly run through those options. There were also options that the government could have adopted previously. It was elected in 1999 and in that period it could, for example, have built a dam.

Mr Nardella — Where?

Ms ASHER — The Leader of The Nationals has gone through some considerable detail of options for that. I refer the member for Melton and other people to the Institute of Public Affairs report, *Water Supply Options for Melbourne*, where it is quite clear from that study that there are good cost options in terms of the siting of a dam.

Mr Nardella — Where?

Ms ASHER — I would encourage the honourable member to read that particular paper. The government also could have built a desalination plant.

Mr Nardella — We are!

Ms ASHER — Years ago, you fool! For example, the West Australian Labor government managed to build a small desalination plant. That plant cost \$400 million, was built in two years, on time and on

budget, and 17 per cent of Perth's drinking water supply comes from that desalination plant. There are a number of alternatives now for the government, and I will run through them.

The first option is the upgrade of the eastern treatment plant. Forty-two per cent of Melbourne's sewage is discharged at Gunnamatta. There is an average of 450 million litres a day. The government announced it would do this project in 2002, but it has not got on with this project, and as far as I am aware there are no opponents to the upgrading of the eastern treatment plant. Tenders for design and cost were let only in April 2008. It has taken the government six years from its announcing the project to its actually calling for tenders for design and cost. In a drought, when Melbourne's water supply is at a critical level, that is an unforgivable omission of duty by a range of water ministers.

Given the government's record on major projects, I am not at all certain, and indeed Victorians will not be certain, that the government will be able to deliver on this project. I was horrified to see in a press release issued by the Minister for Water dated 27 February 2008 where the minister was boasting that 'scientific trials had commenced this month to identify the best treatment and technology for the plant'. The plant was announced in 2002. The technology is available. The eastern treatment plant should be upgraded — not by 2012; it should have been upgraded years before — and if the government wants to take action now, the government can bring forward this particular project.

Another thing the government could do is fix the leaks in the Melbourne water system. People would be surprised to know that about 10 per cent of Melbourne's water system is lost through something called 'non-revenue water', which is in the main leaks in an old system. We found out under FOI — and these figures are not reported by the water authorities; some do, some do not — that 51 billion litres was lost through leaks in the Melbourne water system in 2005–06. Much larger amounts in previous years were accounted for. Again, I can give the example that there was a total of 209 billion litres of water lost through leakage for the period 2000–01 to 2005–06.

Again we make the observation that had the government committed some of the water dividends it has taken from authorities to fixing these leaks, there would have been alternatives for Melbourne's water supply. The government of course is busy pocketing the dividends gained from the water authorities rather than allocating that money to water infrastructure projects at a time of drought when Melburnians are facing basic water use restrictions.

The government could do other things to recycle water. In our policy prior to the last election we indicated that we would have a dedicated water recycling unit within the Department of Sustainability and Environment to cut through some of the red tape and some of the problems associated with the use of recycled water. Again I make the observation that there are substantial problems with the pricing of recycled water; it is not set at a level which encourages the use of that water. That is something the Essential Services Commission and the government should look at.

Instead of taking water from distressed farmers and country Victoria, which the government is proposing to do, another option that could be pursued in regard to Melbourne's water supply is outlined in the Victorian Water Substitution Target Bill, which is a private members bill put forward by the coalition. This bill proposes a target of 129 gigalitres of potable water by 2020 — which is obviously substituted for water from other sources — for industry, parks and gardens. That would provide 129 gigalitres, whereas the government wants to take 75 gigalitres from farmers in northern Victoria through an immoral and unjust proposal.

The target in our bill is 30 per cent of Melbourne's current water consumption. The target under our bill is a 10 per cent saving by 2010, which would represent 43 gigalitres; and a 15 per cent saving by 2015, which would represent 86 gigalitres. This is a good scheme, but the government has rejected it. Again, there has been substantial debate on this issue — not on our bill — in the Legislative Council. The idea is to use recycled water instead of drinking water to ensure Melbourne has an adequate water supply instead of taking water from the north of Victoria.

The government announced other recycling projects in last year's budget. For example, it announced the project in Altona, the BlueScope steel project and the Australian Vinyls and Qenos project. As I look through last year's budget papers, I see that the amount of water involved in those projects that the government has trumpeted is nothing in comparison to the water recycling targets that we have set in the Victorian Water Substitution Target Bill. These are clear alternatives for Melbourne. I do not want Melbourne to be on stage 3a water restrictions. I want Melbourne to use water responsibly, but I do not think it is right that Melburnians be told they must water their gardens at certain times of the day or let their gardens die. I do not think it is right that public parks and gardens do not have enough water. It is the responsibility of the government to provide a supply of water; it could have done that by building a dam or a desalination plant, by fixing the leaks in the Melbourne system and by

embarking on a very large program of water recycling. It has failed to do all of this.

In conclusion, we are calling on the government to stop the pipeline. Clearly the government is considering stopping the pipeline. From reading the *Australian* of Friday, 2 May, I learnt that a senior Labor source said that the pipeline was under review and that:

There's concern that it is a problem and it might cost us a seat.

I would prefer the government to look at the morality, ethics and fairness of taking water from a drought-affected area and giving it to Melbourne and to embark on other projects for Melbourne. The government has embarked on an advertising campaign — the government's myth campaign. The government has advertised as myth no. 4 in *Our Water Our Future*:

Melbourne is going to steal water from irrigators using the Sugarloaf pipeline.

That is not a myth. The government is using taxpayers money to counter the argument that the Liberal Party and The Nationals have been making since this project was announced. It is not a myth, it is an actuality. Melbourne is going to steal water from irrigators, farmers and northern Victorian communities via the Sugarloaf pipeline when there are other options for Melbourne's water supply.

I am a Melburnian; I would never argue that we should have no water. We have other options, and I have clearly outlined them in my grievance matter today. I am saying to the government that I think it should stop using taxpayers money on its appallingly misleading advertising. More importantly, the government has better options for Melbourne's water supply, and it should stop this absurd pipeline proposal.

Mental health: awareness

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — I will use a tragic but true quote from the Mental Health Research Institute. It is:

... if you say your child has cancer, everyone comes to visit bringing cakes and casseroles. If you say they have a mental illness ... they all run the other way ...

Mental health is an issue which affects one in every five people and touches the lives of many people around them. I agree that in today's society, people in the community and, dare I say it, even our elected officials use mental health as a political tool. I would have thought and hoped that as a society we could have

moved beyond such cheap political tricks as a scare campaign involving mental health.

Mental health facilities are not new to the electorate of Ivanhoe. Macleod, where I was raised, is right next to the mental health facilities of Mont Park, Larundel and others. All through my childhood, as I was growing up I had the knowledge that we lived next to major mental health facilities. For years patients would walk past going to the milk bar or would just walk to have fun; that was never without incident and never without fear for those who lived in the area. The Mont Park and Larundel facilities were closed in the late 1990s and many of those facilities transferred to the then Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. The repatriation hospital was established in 1941, and had a veterans mental health unit known locally as wards 17 and 18. It is believed in the past it may have accommodated up to 600 veterans at one time. Currently it has 25 beds and an annual turnover of patients of about 600.

In 1999 the Kennett government moved 55 patients from the former Mont Park and Larundel facilities into the Flanders wing of the hospital. This move was supported by the previous Cain government as well, and it all ran quite smoothly. It would be fair to say there were not a lot of community announcements; it just occurred without fuss or concern for the local residents. I am pleased to say that in 2006 the unit was moved to a new \$18 million facility at the Austin site in Upper Heidelberg Road right next to the residential areas of West Heidelberg. That had been flagged throughout the term of the Bracks government, again without a complaint or concern mentioned. I am pleased to say to everyone in this house I am still yet to hear any concerns about that facility. Regarding the Austin Hospital, apart from the \$376 million development, which I am exceptionally proud of — —

Mr Cameron — I was waiting.

Mr LANGDON — The Minister for Police and Emergency Services, who is at the table, always seems to be in the house when I mention the Austin. I can tell the house that it has been said for some considerable time that new facilities would be built on the repatriation hospital site. I am pleased to say that the budget that has just been delivered allocates \$15.5 million for the redevelopment of the veterans unit, previously known as wards 17 and 18, which is being reconstructed on the repat site. For the last couple of years the government has been discussing what should happen to the repat site.

For members who do not know the repat site, a lot of its buildings were built in the 1940s. They are very old

weatherboard buildings, and I suspect there may be pieces of asbestos in various parts that will have to be removed carefully. The government has flagged that it will build a new 120-bed aged-care facility. It has also flagged that it will build a new mental health rehabilitation centre consisting of 100 beds in six independent units, focused on intensive treatment and rehabilitation, with flexible programs to help people return to the community and a specialist workforce of medical and allied health staff. It should employ about 220 people. It will also have a co-located community care unit adjacent to it, and there will be a 22-bed step-down unit for patients building independent living skills. These facilities and, might I say, all the facilities of the Austin and repatriation hospitals, which have been going for over 60 years, have been run brilliantly well by the staff, doctors and nurses, again without complaint.

Members may ask why I am raising this, and I will get to that shortly, but I also want to expand on what the Austin does. Apart from what I have already said, it has an adult mental health service providing services to the Banyule and Nillumbik areas, known as the North East Area Mental Health Service. The Austin mental health service consists of an acute psychiatric unit which also provides programs for eating and mood disorders and parent-infant programs. A range of community services supports this unit.

There is also the Austin Health Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service, which provides a range of free services, delivering mental health care for children, adolescents and their families or carers. It comprises a statewide child inpatient unit for children 12 years and under, a regional adolescent inpatient unit, three regional community outpatient teams, an adolescent intensive management team, mental health promotion officers, a dedicated intake team, and administrative and support staff.

The Victorian brain disorders program is a unique statewide specialist service providing community and inpatient-based neuropsychiatric rehabilitation. The service is designed to meet the needs of individuals aged between 16 and 65 years with acquired brain injury or neurodegenerative disease and associated psychiatric disturbance. The service has a rehabilitation focus and aims to assist people to regain function and live as independently as possible.

The department of clinical and health psychology at Austin Health has strong links with the University of Melbourne through the joint appointment of a professor-director of psychology with responsibilities for professional psychology services at Austin Health

as well as research and training. The general hospital psychiatry department is a multidisciplinary team that works in conjunction with non-psychiatric general hospital services to provide psychiatric and mental health care to medical and surgical patients. The service operates within the three Austin Health sites: Austin Hospital, Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital and the Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre. Referrals are accepted from services operating in any of these locations as well as from external sources.

Based at the Austin Hospital, the drug dependence clinic provides a multidisciplinary service to consumers from the northern metropolitan area. The service provides assessment and treatment of consumers with multiple difficulties, including polydrug abuse, psychiatric disorder and/or a medical condition. All these services are based at or around the Austin Hospital or Austin Health in general terms.

The City of Banyule also has services not far from the Austin Hospital. The North East Alliance for the Mentally Ill in Upper Heidelberg Road has psychosocial rehabilitation day programs and home-based outreach, the Apollo program is a youth residential rehabilitation service in Waiora Road, Rosanna, and the North East Community Mental Health Service mobile support team is based in Hawdon Street, Heidelberg.

Why do I grieve about mental health? Unfortunately, as I said earlier, elected officials have gone out of their way to use mental health in a scare campaign. Just prior to the state election someone who has been on the community consultative committee with me at the rehab centre, and who has never spoken a word against these facilities, put out a press release saying things such as:

The state government are proposing to transfer patients from the Fairfield Centre 'J Ward' —

which is a misnomer, as it does not exist —

for the criminally insane to the Heidelberg repat.

In what was supposed to be a much needed facility for adolescents/adults with minor mental health conditions is now proposed to house the worst insane criminals in Victoria.

It goes on to use inflammatory terms and say that we are selling the Thomas Embling Hospital so we can get the money to do all these things. This press release was put out just before the state election. I wrote to the then Minister for Health, who is now the Minister for Education, showing her a copy of the press release, and she responded, saying about the press release that:

It contains serious errors of fact and misinformation and it is highly offensive to people who live with a mental illness. Stigmatising people with a mental illness is one of the major barriers to recovery.

I can confirm that there are no plans to relocate the Thomas Embling facility, a 120-bed hospital that provides mental health care, from Fairfield to Heidelberg. Nor is there any intention to build another 'Thomas Embling' hospital in Heidelberg.

It goes on to say:

The new veterans facility will treat over 600 veterans each year ...

People perhaps think of World War II veterans when we talk about veterans, but this hospital also treats people such as those injured in the Bali bombings and the Indian Ocean tsunami as well as Gulf War soldiers. All those people are now veterans who have experienced things that I am sure no-one in this house would want to experience, and they often need counselling when they come back. The minister's letter goes on to say:

It is intended that this facility will provide a level of medium security but it is not intended to cater for prisoners who require intensive treatment.

It continues:

I note that Cr Mulholland's media release also makes comment that 'criminally insane detainees' will be located next to patients who suffer eating disorders or mothers with serious psychiatric illnesses. This is complete fabrication as a new eating disorder service and mother-baby unit has already been developed and built on the Austin site.

The Thomas Embling Hospital was built only in 2000, and I can tell the house that just over 12 months ago I went to see it, prior to the opening of its new extended care unit on 22 May last year. It was a complete fabrication to say we were going to close the Thomas Embling facility; we are actually still building it.

To add insult to injury, the back of the how-to-vote card that Jenny Mulholland put out for the 2006 election says under 'Health':

No centre for criminally insane on the repat site.

It does not explain what it does and is totally wrong. The Austin Hospital has had a master plan for the repat site for two or three years now. I have been chairing the meetings, and of the 12 meetings, Cr Mulholland has attended only 8. At the meeting when the committee had a long discussion about the Thomas Embling facility, Cr Mulholland was strangely absent. Did she ask for another briefing on it? No. Has she raised her concerns at these meetings? No.

Austin Health has tried to consult as much as possible. On 22 April this year it held a public meeting, which had been advertised widely in the papers and elsewhere. I noticed that just a few days before the meeting, Cr Mulholland published a letter in which she took credit for the public meeting, which, she claims, she forced us to call. There was nothing further from the truth. In her letter she comments:

I encourage you to attend as this may be your last chance to have your objections heard on this facility.

'Last chance'! The facility has not even been budgeted for; it is only a plan. I advise the house that I wrote a letter to the Ivanhoe electorate; basically it was an open letter to Cr Mulholland. I put these questions:

Why was your publicised 'grave concerns' campaign about mental health facilities at the repatriation hospital conveniently timed before the last state election, in which you were a candidate, and now just prior to the Council elections which are due in late November?

If you are so concerned about mental health, why have you only attended 8 of the possible 12 consultative committee meetings regarding the repatriation hospital in the past few years, missing the most vital meeting which discussed mental health?

You maintain that you are supportive of veterans' mental health while attacking mental health; how and why do you differentiate between the two?

Austin Health is considering building a 120 bed aged-care facility at the repatriation hospital. Does this mean that the residents of Ivanhoe should be fearful of an increase in patients with dementia, a form of mental illness, being treated at the repat site?

Austin Health, Veterans' Affairs and the repat staff have a 60-year history of dealing exceptionally well with mental health issues without complaint. Why are you derailing their work?

I stand here before the house as the member for Ivanhoe, very supportive of the Austin Hospital, the repat and its staff, and all their work in the treatment of all illnesses, not just mental health. Mental health is a major illness. I grieve for society in which a political candidate and an elected official can run a fear campaign on mental health. We should be beyond that, but Cr Mulholland wants to take mental health to the gutter, and I condemn her for it.

Water: north-south pipeline

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — I rise to grieve for all Victorians because the Premier is so intransigent that he is not prepared to admit circumstances have changed when it comes to the proposed north-south pipeline that is intended to supply water to Melbourne. In so

grieving, I am reminded of a quote from John Maynard Keynes, who said:

When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, Sir?

I repeat that:

When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do, Sir?

There has been a major change in the information available about the north-south pipeline and the proposed water savings from the food bowl project to supply that pipeline. Quite a few organisations have reviewed that information and made intelligent, informed decisions; they now question the viability of the north-south pipeline project. Every week the government is losing support for this project.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr WALSH — I want to quickly respond to the member for Melton's interjection. I most definitely reckon that the government is losing support and more people are waking up to the fact that it is not a viable option.

There was a meeting in May of the MAV (Municipal Association of Victoria), when a motion was moved by Murrindindi Shire Council and was, interestingly, seconded by the City of Boroondara. It was:

That the MAV, on behalf of Victoria local government, requests a review of the state government decision to construct the Sugarloaf interconnector pipeline for the following reasons:

inadequate consultation prior to the decision being made;

no environment effects statement;

unsatisfactory audit of the proposed savings that form the basis of justification of the project.

The peak organisation of local government here in Victoria passed that motion only a few weeks ago. It is a major change from the discussion that went on there 12 months ago, when the Treasurer forced his way in and lectured the councils before they debated a similar motion on the pipeline. He said if they did not pass that motion, they would get no money from the state government. The money was conditional on them passing this motion, and then supplying water to the pipeline.

However, this time the councils were not intimidated. There was actually a competition to see who could second that motion. Swan Hill Rural City, which moved the motion 12 months ago, wanted to second the

latest motion because it still feels very passionately about this issue. There was a competition among the city councils who wanted to be seen seconding that motion. They were no longer intimidated by this government and have actually realised the pipeline is not a good project.

As we speak, down the road at the Melbourne Town Hall, the Country Women's Association of Victoria is having its annual meeting.

Mr Cameron interjected.

Mr WALSH — The Minister for Police and Emergency Services, who is at the table, might laugh about the CWA but it is a very respected organisation in this state. Its meeting will debate a motion to oppose the north–south pipeline. They are a group of very articulate and intelligent women; they have reviewed the information and realised it is not a good project.

Members should understand that other organisations have now changed their views about this project and become a lot more vocal. The Premier has stood up on numerous times in this house and said the Victorian Farmers Federation supports the projects he has been talking about. However, in *Stock and Land* of 22 May, Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) president Simon Ramsay made comments about the project, saying that:

Water shortages are limiting food production, adding to rises in food prices and restricting environmental flows, placing significant pressure on the Murray River ...

Taking more water out of the basin will not help resolve these concerns.

The VFF is becoming a lot more vocal in its opposition to this project, because its members realise it is not a good idea.

For members who want to analyse the information these organisations are using to change their minds, probably the major report is the Auditor-General's report of April 2008 into planning for Victoria's water infrastructure. The Auditor-General has looked at the food bowl and the north–south pipeline project in detail, and some of the comments he made in his report are quite damning of the government's decision-making process and add fuel to the debate occurring, involving organisations that now question the logic of the project.

The Auditor-General said:

There was minimal consultation with stakeholders outside government before the decision to commit to the plan components

And that:

The community was not told that the rigour of the cost estimates varied significantly across the plan components.

The Auditor-General also said:

The announcement of the food bowl project in June 2007 was not informed by a rigorous cost analysis and full validation of the water savings estimates.

At that time the supporting documentation consisted of the submission by the Food Bowl Alliance advocating the project. We found this documentation did not have the depth of analysis and level of rigour commensurate with a project business case.

The Auditor-General said further that:

... the food bowl upgrade costs represent the lowest level of rigour and were, at that time, based on a preliminary study by a stakeholder group ...

This government has been making decisions based on a preliminary study by a stakeholder group! The Auditor-General found that:

A wide range of individuals and organisations raised concerns about the basis for the projected water savings —

and that the food bowl steering committee plan that followed the initial announcement —

provided no new information to address stakeholder concerns about the water savings.

He found:

Information provided on the food bowl project did not adequately explain the basis for the water savings estimates.

The organisations having grave doubts about this government project have no doubt read the Auditor-General's report in detail and are questioning the logic of the government's decision making.

If you look at the other reports that have recently become available to assist with the decision-making process, you will find a report released this month by the CSIRO, entitled *Water Availability in the Goulburn-Broken*. As part of that report's analysis it has a statement, which says:

If the recent (1997 to 2006) climate were to continue, average surface water availability would be reduced by 41 per cent ...

Dr Sykes — How much?

Mr WALSH — By 41 per cent. We are talking about a government spending over \$1 billion — —

Mr Nardella — Excuse me: it is \$2 billion!

Mr WALSH — Can I finish? The government is spending over \$1 billion of Melbourne Water customers' money to build a pipeline to — —

Mr Nardella — No, it is \$300 million and then \$600 million from Victorian taxpayers — get it right!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Beattie) — Order! The member for Melton is next on the list to speak.

Mr WALSH — If the member for Melton would actually listen, he would hear that I am talking about the north-south pipeline, not the food bowl project.

Mr Nardella — That's what I'm talking about.

Mr WALSH — No, you're not. You have your figures wrong. Go back and read it again.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Beattie) — Order! The member for Swan Hill should speak through the Chair.

Mr WALSH — Through the Chair I say the member for Melton has his figures wrong. The government is going to spend \$1 billion of Melbourne Water customers' money to build a pipeline to pipe water away from a catchment that is potentially going to have 41 per cent less water than it has now, to supply Melbourne, when Melbourne has other options.

Some of the other figures released by the Plug the Pipe group were quoted in the editorial of *Stock and Land* of 15 May:

... last week the Plug the Pipe group released new figures which suggest Melbourne Water may have drastically understated the impact of taking that water out of the system.

Rather than a 3 to 6 per cent of stream flows Melbourne Water estimated, the group believes the extraction rate —

out of the Goulburn River —

would equate to closer to 10 to 15 per cent of flows and up to 100 per cent in some irrigation months.

People are now questioning the effects that pumping water out of the Goulburn River to Melbourne will have on the Goulburn River into the future. You can also look at some of the other reports coming out about the cost blow-outs, in particular irrigation upgrades. I refer to the Shepparton *Country News* of 19 May, which refers to the Shepparton East upgrade or modernisation, whose costs have increased by something like 50 per cent, because of the cost of petroleum-based products that go into pipelines. There has been a major blow-out in those costs, and there is a real concern on the part of the irrigators in that system

that they will just not be able to afford the water in that system if they have to pay for the additional project costs.

I turn to some of the other information coming out. Everyone is very aware of the issue of climate change and CO₂ emissions. The north-south pipeline is going to create something like 131 000 tonnes of CO₂ emissions every year by piping that water over the Great Dividing Range. The north-south pipeline will have a very unfriendly environmental footprint in that regard.

There is a whole range of issues and sources of information out there that community organisations, representative organisations and individuals have reviewed, leading to them deciding that the north-south pipeline is not a good project for Victoria into the future. But the Premier is not prepared to change his mind. Not only is he not prepared to change his mind but also he is resorting to intimidation and personal abuse of those who oppose this project.

In this place the Leader of the House has called those who oppose the pipeline ugly, ugly people. The water minister has called them quasi-terrorists and a sorry bunch of people. The government does not have a real argument to support its case; all government members are doing is resorting to personal abuse. In trying to rush this project through, the government is breaking its own rules in a lot of ways. We saw recently that seismic blasting was going on in the Toolangi Forest without permission. That was stopped. If someone else in the community wants to carry out a very small project, they have to fill in a heap of paperwork and go through a whole heap of red tape, but the government tried to do seismic blasting without the necessary permission.

We have just seen in recent times Melbourne Water doing some geological drilling in the area. I will quote from an email:

Protesters holding up geological drilling work on the Brumby government's north-south pipeline have been told by police that police will not remove the protesters because Melbourne Water does not have the proper paperwork to sanction drilling near a river.

This underlies the Brumby government's approach to pipeline construction. They are so anxious to get the project started they are prepared to break its own laws.

I am gladdened by the fact that the member for Melton is silent on this issue, because the government is continually breaking its own rules as it rushes through this particular project.

Talking about breaking rules, one of the things we would all like to think we do in this house is make sure that taxpayers money is well spent, but we find that on this particular project taxpayers money is not necessarily being well spent. The first contract for the automation of the irrigation system has been let without any tender process at all. I would like to quote from an article by Peter Hunt that appeared in the *Weekly Times* of 7 May:

The Victorian government has handed the Rubicon Corporation a \$50 million monopoly to supply channel regulators for northern Victoria's irrigation infrastructure upgrade.

The government has refused to release a critical report justifying the decision, which is part of the \$2.2 billion northern Victorian irrigation renewal (food bowl) project.

The NVIRP spokeswoman said the report contained commercial in confidence material on Rubicon and its rivals and that could not be released to the public.

The government is prepared to let contracts of that sort of magnitude without any tender process because it is panicked. It knows it has to get on with this project before the mounting pressure is there to stop it.

I would like to touch on two things briefly before I finish. Firstly, there are options for Melbourne. One that I would like to see is the government support the private members bill in the upper house, the Victorian Water Substitution Target Bill 2007. This is an excellent piece of legislation that sets out the framework for Melbourne to become responsible for its own water supply out of its own catchment. Currently 300 000 megalitres of wastewater is pumped out to sea and something like 500 000 megalitres of stormwater that could be used runs off the roofs and streets of Melbourne. The last thing is that the government has resorted to spending millions of dollars of taxpayers money to advertise this project to try to persuade public opinion. It is not working. What we see now is that the Victorian government is the eighth largest purchaser of advertising anywhere in Australia in trying to justify its case.

Liberal Party: factionalism

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — Today I grieve for the factionalism within the Liberal Party, episode IV. I ask members to imagine for a moment that they are in a picture theatre. It is all dark and then the music starts. It goes: Da, da, da, da — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Beattie) — Order! I think Hansard might have trouble recording that.

Mr NARDELLA — It is the music from *Star Wars*. Then there is the description, with the words flowing from the bottom of the screen to the top, 'In a Liberal head office far, far away'. That is how it starts. Suddenly, the Imperial star destroyer starts to come into sight, firing at a much smaller spaceship. The forces of evil, the uglies, are attacking the forces of light — that is, the Leader of the Opposition.

Let me go through the characters of this saga. There is Luke Skywalker, the hero of this episode, who is the Leader of the Opposition. We have Princess Leia, who is the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the honourable member for Brighton. We have Han Solo, who goes in to clean up the mess after everybody else has made it, and that is Mr Tony Nutt. But who is Chewbacca? It is Julian Sheeziel. The drones, the experts in the use of internet blogging and all things electronic, are C3PO, who is John Osborn — if members know John Osborn, they will understand what I am talking about — and R2D2, who is Simon Morgan. Obi Wan Kenobi — now this is interesting — the wise one, the mentor, is Andrew Olexander. Then you have Darth Vader, the evil dark force of this saga. He is still masked, yet he could be David Kemp, Alan Stockdale, Michael Kroger or Peter Costello. He will be unmasked in further episodes of this saga. The Death Star, which looms in this picture theatre, is the Liberal Party head office at 104 Exhibition Street.

Then you have Anakin Skywalker, who is the younger Darth Vader, before he turns evil. He could be a number of people. He could be any one of the honourable members for Polwarth, Malvern or South-West Coast; he could even be Matthew Guy, a member for Northern Metropolitan Region in the other place, but that is still to be determined. Then you have the stormtroopers, who are the Liberal Party Administrative Committee and some of the backbenchers as well. Then you have Lando Calrissian, the loyal deputy in the coalition, who is the honourable member for Gippsland South and Leader of The Nationals.

This grievance is about the disunity and undermining that is occurring within the Liberal Party at the moment. It revolves around the blog site that was run by John Osborn and Simon Morgan entitled 'He who stands for nothing'. It shows a picture — an awful picture because the Leader of the Opposition was trying to do the honourable thing on Red Nose Day and is wearing a red nose and holding some balloons — mocking the Leader of the Opposition and putting him down. It was a treacherous act. Osborn and Morgan did work for the Liberal Party. They were in the Death Star at the Liberal Party head office. The blog site is about

undermining the progressive elements within the Liberal Party — the Hamerites, as some of them call themselves. The blog site has scathing comments about many people.

The Liberal Party has form with blogging. Members will remember that back in 2004, Gary Anderton, who was the candidate for the federal seat of Lyndhurst in 2006, wrote disparaging remarks on his blog site, and I refer them to that. Let us go through the recent comments that characterised the Leader of the Opposition as a ‘vile communist’ and a ‘vacuous moron’. Page 28 of the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 17 May quotes the blog site in claiming the Leader of the Opposition has ‘a Machiavellian pursuit of power’ and that he has the attributes of a Roman emperor without the greatness. It also has headlines like ‘Ted Baillieu must go’. It nicknames the leader ‘Cottees’ and ‘Red Ted’, and goes on to attack other people in the Liberal Party. It says of Fran Bailey that she is a ‘stupid fat bitch’.

Let me talk about Fran Bailey and John Osborn for a moment. I met John Osborn when I was scrutineering in McEwen. He was there for the Liberal Party, and he said this, ‘We’re not here for Fran Bailey; we’re here to save the seat’. He did not care whether McEwen went to a by-election because they could ‘preselect somebody better’. He actually wanted preselection against the person he called ‘the stupid fat bitch’.

The blog site refers to the statesman and principal Liberal member, the Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser, as ‘that epitome of treachery’. That is on the blog site attacking the Liberal Party leadership here. Petro Georgiou is a ‘waste of space’. It also refers to Angelo Kakouros, the Liberal federal candidate for Corio. I have got to say that when you stand for a party, especially in a safe seat, whether you win or lose you are doing a very honourable thing. But this website called him ‘a piece of excrement’, and the ‘excrement’ word started with a ‘t’ and ended with a ‘d’. It also used the ‘c’ word against this particular Liberal Party member. It is outrageous!

Adam Held, the Melbourne Ports Liberal candidate, was ‘a low, low dog’ according to the site:

He is a snivelling dyspeptic who is painfully unaware of his limited cerebral capacity

Members might be aware that ‘dyspeptic’ means gloomy, pessimistic, and irritable.

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition. I refer to page 28 of the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 17 May 2008. It states:

We have some cancerous elements within our party and they are destroying the Liberal Party for all of its members ...

This is unacceptable conduct, and there is no place for these people in the party.

I agree absolutely and totally with the Leader of the Opposition.

The bloggers, Osborn and Morgan, were sacked and other fallout occurred. Susan Chandler’s email, which was leaked by the bloggers, had anti-Semitic comments. Rightly she has gone, but she was a supporter of the opposition leader. The other fallout involved Luke Dixon, who resigned from the party after being exposed when he criticised the Leader of the Opposition in regard to his stand on channel deepening for not supporting business and for not doing the correct Liberal thing. These emails were then leaked. Michael Kapel, the opposition leader’s chief of staff, and Simon Troeth, the media adviser, denied leaking the emails.

Tony Nutt, the new Liberal state director — the Han Solo of this episode — is undertaking an investigation into this mess. But the Leader of the Opposition was warned about the undermining by Obi Wan Kenobi. Who? Andrew Olexander — he was warned about this two years ago. On page 3 of the *Age* of 20 May 2008 an article by Paul Austin is headed:

Baillieu told of ‘treachery’ two years ago.

He warned him of disloyalty and said, ‘Some of the traitors were working at the highest levels of the party’. Then what happened? The light sabres came out ‘bzzzt’, and he was struck down by Darth Vader and the dark forces in the Liberal Party. You can just imagine that in this picture theatre scenario!

The Liberals are in a mess everywhere. Brendan Nelson versus Turnbull — their leadership at the federal level is a mess. Troy Buswell, the Western Australian leader, is the epitome of our society and our community — a chair-sniffer extraordinaire! Then you have New South Wales with its fanatical right-wing religious right controlling the party. Now the uglies, these fanatics, these ideologues, are taking over here in Victoria. The factionalism is out of control.

We know about the Kroger-Costello faction versus the Kennett-Baillieu faction, but Kroger and Costello have fallen out; they have created subfactions of the factions within the Liberal Party. Now we have Kroger versus Costello versus Kennett versus Baillieu. You have Kennett versus Kroger, Costello versus Kennett. It just does not stop. The subfactions are absolutely out of control.

Indeed this factional warfare was confirmed by Alan Stockdale, federal Liberal president. On page 7 of the *Age* of 17 May 2008 Alan Stockdale said that 'blogging exposed the evils of excessive factionalism' within the party. They are not my words but the words of Alan Stockdale, federal president of the Liberal Party. He said:

Liberal members should not be like that.

That means Liberal members should not be putting other members down. He called the bloggers 'disgraceful and intolerable' and 'just plain stupid'.

On page 21 of the of 17 May 2008, with reference to the Higgins preselection it says:

Costello is supporting Julian Sheezel. Kroger is supporting Jason Aldworth, an ex-Crosby/Textor employee. They are splintering all over the place.

This is so destabilising that it was reported in the *Australian* that the opposition leader hit the phones to his MPs 'to explain himself and shore up his support'. He got support from the member for Scoresby, who criticised Liberal head office and Julian Sheezel, saying:

If people didn't know what was going on, then why didn't they know?

That is very rhetorical but Julian Sheezel knew. I have an interesting fact for members on the other side. Sheezel knew what was going on because at the scrutineering for the McEwen seat, where he was and our scrutineers and I were, he was talking about the blog site, the factionalism and the division within the Liberal Party. He was in the know.

This was at a time when the polls were showing the Leader of the Opposition at 23 per cent as preferred Premier and 42 per cent as preferred two-party preferred Liberal Party versus Labor Party. The Liberal MPs are distraught by all this. The words used by the Leader of the Opposition — 'treacherous', 'cells', 'traitors' — were used in an article by Andrew Bolt on page 36 of the *Herald Sun* of 16 May. It says that Baillieu's purge of the party is reminiscent of Lenin's purge of the Mensheviks. That is how extreme the Leader of the Opposition is being in trying to protect his leadership and his position in here. In the *Herald Sun* of 16 May John Ferguson said on page 26, 'Baillieu has three months to go'.

I want to touch on the role of The Nationals. The Nationals must be rueing the day when the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for Brighton, talked to and convinced The Nationals to go into

coalition with the Liberals due to the factional dysfunction within the opposition. Members of The Nationals are now relegated to asking questions about metropolitan matters and issues at the expense of country and rural constituencies and people, and they are losing their identity and credibility. It harks back to the seven long, dark years, when The Nationals were just the coat-tails of the Kennett government, of the Liberals. At least in Queensland they are doing the honourable thing. They are not dancing around and saying, 'No, we are not really dancing together; we are not really going out together'. In Queensland they are doing the honourable thing by formally amalgamating both the Liberal and National parties.

All I can say is this: use the force, Luke, use the force, and strike down with your light sabre — go 'bzzzt' with your light sabre — and destroy the evil, dark forces that are attacking you in the Liberal Party.

Gaming: public lotteries licence

Mr O'BRIEN (Malvern) — I grieve for the integrity of lottery licensing in Victoria under this Labor government. Recently a select inquiry of another place handed down a report into this process. The inquiry heard extensive evidence, but not as much evidence as there could or should have been, because this government attempted to frustrate this inquiry at every single turn. This Labor government refused to let its ministers appear. It gagged witnesses. It withheld documents. It gagged public servants. It did everything it could to stop the truth coming out. And notwithstanding all its efforts to stop the truth coming out, so much of the truth has come out to indicate that this process stinks.

This upper house inquiry — and also the report of an inquiry that was conducted by Mr Ron Merkel, a former federal court judge — investigated these processes. What did it find? It found confidentiality breaches left, right and centre. It found that allegations of improper interference in this process were investigated inadequately or not at all. It found bullying and interference by the government in the corporate organisation of Tattersall's, and most damningly, corruption of the process, where a pipeline of information flowed from the office of the then gaming minister to that of the Labor Party mates at lobbyists Hawker Britton, and in particular its principal director, Mr David White.

In relation to the question of this government's attempt to interfere with the way in which gaming companies operate in this state, nothing could set that into starker relief than the decision of Tattersall's to go from being

a trust to a public company. The minutes of the meeting of the board of the estate of the late George Adams conducted on 25 March 2004 state:

Estate structure

It has become apparent to the trustees that the estate of the late George Adams in its current form will need to change due to commercial, political and beneficiary imperatives.

It goes on to say:

The trustees also met with the Treasurer —

who, I note, Acting Speaker, is now the Premier —

and the Minister for Gaming to confirm the political preferences, and it was confirmed at that meeting that the government's preference was for Tattersall's to be a 100 per cent listed entity.

So far, so good. The government is entitled to express a view. But the minutes continue:

Furthermore, it became apparent that, if we did not follow this course of action, Tattersall's could be at a disadvantage in any future tendering processes or extension of our licences.

Even in the sanitised world of corporate minutes, it takes little to understand what the minutes are really saying has occurred here: political threats, political interference, political bullying and political blackmail by this government.

Let us turn to some of the players. We had David White, lobbyist of Hawker Britton, a rolled-gold Labor Party mate, a former gaming minister, who was the minister at the same time that Mr Duncan Fischer joined Tattersall's from the smoking ruin of the collapse of the Estate Mortgage Group, of which I will have more to say later. This is the man, David White, who at least had the grace — and I give him this — to admit in evidence that without a Labor government he would be out of a job. That is because nobody else would deal with him except a Labor Party government. He is a man who shredded, or claimed to have shredded, every single note he ever made of his dealings with Tattersall's. What sort of person has business meetings and then shreds every single note so that there is never a record in writing of what they have said at the meeting? Is that the action of somebody who runs a clean operation, who has nothing to hide; or is it the action of somebody who does not want his fingerprints left anywhere where they can be found after the crime has been committed?

The report of Mr Merkel says at paragraph 175:

The reason the panel has considered the lobbying issues at some length is that it finds the very notion of lobbying in

respect of a proposed or actual lottery or gaming licence application antithetical to the probity of the licensing process.

So here is Mr Merkel saying that lobbyists just do not mix with gaming and lottery licensing processes. And yet this government has let lobbyists operate. We are about to see the new licensing coming up for the new gaming machines and for the new wagering licences and keno machines, and yet this government has done nothing to get lobbyists out of the process.

Mr White and his firm were on a monthly retainer by Tattersall's, where they were engaged as lobbyists. You would think that should be enough for them. But, after the rules of the lottery licensing process kicked in to prohibit any lobbying activities, Mr White sought from Duncan Fischer of Tattersall's and received an agreement to pay a success fee of \$350 000 if Tattersall's received an exclusive lottery licence. So David White was in line for \$350 000 if he could succeed in knocking out Intralot and Tatt's got the sole licence.

Why would a lobbyist seek a fee for not lobbying? Why would a managing director of Tattersall's agree to pay a success fee to a lobbyist for not lobbying? There are only two possible explanations: either David White was seeking this money for lobbying, which was a breach of the rules and a corruption of the process, or David White was saying, 'Give me \$350 000 and I promise I will not lobby'. Which one do you think sounds like a more likely scenario, Acting Speaker? Why else would a lobbyist seek this money other than to lobby? David White has been criticised by these reports. His evidence has been rejected. He is not somebody who has any credibility in these matters as a result of these inquiries. The sooner the government takes action to take lobbyists of the ilk of Mr White out of this game, the better off Victoria will be.

I now turn to the former Premier, Mr Steve Bracks. Mr Bracks stated in Parliament on 27 February 2007:

The government, I as Premier or any other minister do not discuss gaming licences when there is a tender process on, nor have we discussed those matters prior to that.

That evidence was flatly contradicted by a number of witnesses, notably Raymond Hornsby and Peter Kerr. These two gentlemen were Tattersall's trustees. They both gave evidence under oath, and they were both in attendance at a meeting of the Tatt's board that was attended by the Premier on 19 February 2003. They told the inquiry that gaming and lotteries licences were discussed. So, faced with this direct challenge to his evidence or his claim, what did the former Premier do? He was invited to appear, and Steve Bracks was the

only witness invited to appear before the inquiry, who said no — the only witness invited to appear who said no. So as a community we have a choice. Do we believe two witnesses, Peter Kerr and Raymond Hornsby, who gave evidence under oath; or do we believe a man who will not even appear, will not give evidence and will not tell it under oath?

The upper house inquiry concluded that it was probable that the meeting did discuss the lotteries licence and gaming review processes. I think any fair-minded person faced with that conflicting evidence — between two people giving evidence under oath and a man who refuses to appear — should know which way the verdict should fall.

I now turn to Mr Tony Sheehan, director of Intralot and Euro-Pacific Strategies Pty Ltd, a former Labor Treasurer and another Labor mate. Before the inquiry, when Mr Sheehan thought the smear tactics of his opponent, David White, were gaining traction, he was out loud and proud in his complaints about the rotting of the process. He was very concerned that the dirt campaign which he was convinced had been run against his client was actually gaining traction and it could affect his client's ability to win a licence, and he was complaining. He complained to a number of different people, including the gambling licences review and the probity auditor.

But at the inquiry when he was giving evidence and was asked about these complaints he had made, he went from raging bull to dead parrot: he had difficulty recalling if he had raised complaints about the process; he had difficulty recalling what these complaints were or whom he had complained to. Later on we found the gaming minister had authorised departmental officials to commence negotiations with Intralot on obtaining a lottery licence just days before Mr Sheehan gave evidence.

In Monday's *Herald Sun*, in another exclusive by Michael Warner, we see the headline, '\$1 mil mate', and it all becomes clear: we have another Labor Party mate with a million reasons to pull the reins on his evidence, a million reasons to soft pedal on his concerns about the corruption of the process, because so long as Intralot got its licence, Mr Sheehan gets his success fee. It seems the easiest way to become a millionaire in Premier Brumby's Victoria is not by winning the lotto but by being a Labor mate and lobbying for a lottery licence.

I turn to Mr Duncan Fischer, the former managing director of Tattersall's. Mr Fischer was a partner with Priestley and Morris, which was the audit firm with

responsibility for the Estate Mortgage Group. The Estate Mortgage Group collapsed with debts of over \$800 million while Mr Fischer, as auditor, was on watch. This was the same person who lost his ticket to practise as an auditor for 10 years under a deed of settlement with the corporate regulator as a result of his involvement in the Estate Mortgage collapse. Evidence was given by trustees Mr Hornsby and Mr Kerr that Mr Fischer had not disclosed this chequered past to Tattersall's trustees before he was appointed and that he never disclosed to them that he had been required to surrender his auditing certificate under a deed of settlement with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission.

It further appears that the most generous thing you could say is that Mr Fischer misled the inquiry; at worst you could say that he lied under oath about how and when he obtained probity clearance, as was reported in the *Herald Sun* on 20 December 2007. In that article the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation (VCGR) chief executive officer is quoted as saying:

I cannot explain why Mr Fischer recently advised the Legislative Council Select Committee on Gaming Licensing that he was approved ... in 1992, other than to suggest that he may have had an honest belief that this was the case.

You would think that a person might know when they go through the probity approval process, and you would think that when you are giving evidence under oath before an inquiry of one of the parliamentary chambers you might get your facts right. What has happened is that Mr Fischer has gone in there and given — as I said, this is the most generous thing you could say — incorrect, untrue evidence. This has been demonstrated by the VCGR, and it tells us quite a lot about Mr Fischer.

This is the man who signed the dodgy deal with David White to give him a success fee worth \$350 000 if they could knock out Intralot, a deal that David White and Duncan Fischer would have you believe would pay a lobbyist for not lobbying. Duncan Fischer is a man whose involvement with the collapse of the Estate Mortgage Group has made him unfit to run a chook raffle, let alone Victoria's lottery operator. His exit from Tattersall's will not be mourned by Victorians who believe that only the highest standards of probity and competence should apply to those operating gaming and lottery companies in this state.

In relation to Mr Geoff Walsh of Pitcher Partners, what can one say about a probity auditor overseeing the awarding of a lottery licence who shared ownership of a racehorse with the minister in charge of the process and did not think that this required public disclosure? As I

previously exposed in this house, Mr Geoff Walsh, the lottery licence probity auditor, was also co-owner with the Minister for Gaming of an expensive thoroughbred mare named Puzzles. With that sort of blind spot for a conflict of interest it is no wonder the activities of Mr Walsh were criticised by Mr Merkel's report and compared very unfavourably with those of the subsequent probity auditor Deloitte. Pitcher Partners' performance was condemned by Mr Merkel as being reactive and inadequate. Mr Merkel may have been feeling generous. Geoff Walsh gave evidence that he completely failed to investigate complaints made about outside influence on the bid even though any such influence is strictly prohibited under the very rules the probity auditor is required to uphold.

What has this lottery licensing process actually delivered? It has not delivered competition; all it has done is replace one monopoly with two monopolies, one in scratchies and one in lotto games. It has not delivered certainty. Five weeks out from the commencement of Intralot's licence, lottery agents and their customers are in the dark about what is happening, what products will be available, where they will be sold and what financial arrangements will operate. There has been no training on systems and no promotion. Existing supplies of scratchies are running out. The minister is still dithering on Wednesday night lotto. The process has not delivered fairness for lottery agents.

In November 2007 the Minister for Gaming said:

I actually think that will be good for agencies across the state.

Intralot is demanding that the lottery agents hand over an up-front licence fee of up to \$10 000 with a \$5000 bank guarantee plus training fees, and this is for the privilege of selling Intralot's product — a product which is riding on the back of the hard work done by lottery agents in promoting scratchies over many years. That is not good for agencies. I defy the minister to find one single lottery agent who believes the minister has kept his word — just one! The minister will not. How can the minister defend a system he created when large metropolitan agencies are asked to pay the same high up-front fees as tiny agencies in rural communities.

One thing this process has delivered is a huge tax windfall for the Brumby government. The budget papers tell the story: \$355 million in lottery taxes, an increase of \$32 million. While agents are being told to pay \$15 000 to be allowed to sell scratchies, the Premier is raking in nearly \$1 million each and every day from the work through which the lottery agent is being punished. Through this botched licensing process the Brumby government has effectively held lottery

agents to ransom and is making them pay for its greedy tax grab. The Liberal-Nationals coalition believes this is unacceptable.

The Brumby government must now keep its commitment that these new arrangements will be good for lottery agencies across Victoria. As a starting point I call on the minister to immediately sit down with Intralot and negotiate the removal of these outrageous up-front licensing fees for lottery agents. The government's enormous windfall out of the lottery licensing process gives it the capacity both legal and financial to fix this mess of its own creation. It has the moral obligation to fix this mess, to keep faith with its promise to lottery agents across Victoria, and it must do it now.

Electricity: Latrobe Valley

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Energy and Resources) — I grieve about the lack of understanding of how important the generation of electricity is to the Latrobe Valley. Indeed the generation of electricity is the lifeblood of the valley and essential to its economic future. An amazing amount of activity occurs in order to ensure that when you flick on the light switch the light actually comes on and stays on. To assist this house in the understanding of this apparently simple but complex process, I seek leave to incorporate a document into *Hansard*. I have checked with the Speaker, *Hansard* and the opposition, and I understand there are no objections to this process.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! Is leave granted?

Ms Asher — Leave is granted on the basis that I am told it is true.

Leave granted; see diagram page 2005.

Mr BATCHELOR — The member is incorrigible. As this diagram shows, the electricity supply system consists of a generating plant at one end and consumers at the other. These two components are connected by hundreds of kilometres of powerlines, transmission and distribution networks, through which the electricity flows to Victorian households.

In explaining this in more detail I think it is appropriate to commence at the beginning — that is, where this form of electricity is first generated. In Victoria the brown coal generators in the Latrobe Valley supply about 90 per cent of Victoria's electricity requirements. Victoria's main coal-fired generators are the Hazelwood, Yallourn, Loy Yang A and Loy Yang B power stations. We also get some electricity from

gas-fired generators, some of which are in the Latrobe Valley and others are at Newport and Laverton North.

Renewable sources have an increasingly large part to play in generation capacity. Examples include the new hydro-electric station being built by AGL at Bogong; also the Portland wind energy project being constructed by Pacific Hydro. There is also wave power, biomass and so on.

In simple terms these generators use some form of energy, be it in the form of burning coal or gas or from the power of wind, to spin a turbine that rotates a magnet around a length of wire. Amazingly this creates a magnetic field that electrifies the wire.

Victorian generators compete to sell the electricity they produce in the national electricity market, otherwise known as the NEM. That covers not only Victoria but also New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, Tasmania and South Australia. I will talk more about the NEM in a minute, but I first want to outline how the electricity produced by these generators is then transported to Victorian households.

Located close to these generators are switchyards, which contain all sorts of equipment to enable the connection of the generators to the outside world via transmission lines. Victoria's transmission system is the backbone of our electricity supply network. It is owned and maintained by SP AusNet, and its planning is undertaken by the Victorian Energy Networks Corporation, otherwise known as VENCORP. The transmission network consists of huge steel towers and wires that run from the Latrobe Valley right to the Mallee. There are also interstate links connecting into South Australia and New South Wales, and even, via an undersea cable, into Tasmania.

The transmission network's function is to transfer large blocks of energy at high voltage from the power stations to major load centres in places like South Morang, Rowville and Geelong. Transmitting electricity at high voltage means more power can flow through the wires, and it also keeps the load losses to a minimum. This is very important in terms of energy efficiency. At over 30 terminal stations around the state large transformers reduce the voltage so power can be transmitted via low-voltage distribution networks into our homes and businesses.

Our distribution network accepts power from the terminal stations and distributes it to the final consumers. These are the overhead powerlines running down the streets in many of our city and country locations, but they can also go underground, as they do

in places like the central business district and even in country centres like Bendigo. The distribution companies own and manage the poles and wires in the street to deliver electricity to our homes. They replace the old poles, extend the network for new residential and business developments, and they own and read the meters in people's homes.

Both distribution and transmission are monopoly activities. Effectively they charge a rent for the use of their networks and their prices are regulated, with the key regulator in Victoria being the Essential Services Commission. There are five licensed electricity distributors, each responsible for a specific geographic region of Victoria. These distributors are Alinta, CitiPower, Powercor, SP AusNet and United Energy. At the end of the distribution system are the service cables that deliver the electricity into our homes, enabling us to switch the lights on and off and watch our televisions. The average consumer does not have a lot to do with the distributors, the transmission company or the generators. Consumers deal almost solely with their retailers, which leads me to the final part of the electricity system.

Retailers buy the electricity in bulk from generators and sell it to customers. There are more than 12 energy retailers operating in Victoria, the biggest being AGL, Origin and TRUenergy. It is the retailers that have a direct and daily relationship with domestic and business consumers. Retailers make offers to their customers, they sign them up, they send them bills, they take billing inquiries, and they process payments from their customers. Unlike the distribution companies, which are solely responsible for their own set geographical areas, many retailers usually compete for customer services across all distribution areas.

Indeed the third edition of the World Energy Retail Market Ranking, which was released late last year by the First Data Corporation, showed that Victoria had the hottest, or the most competitive, energy market of anywhere in the world. This ranking reports on the rates of customer switching between retailers in more than 30 competitive energy markets worldwide, and it ranked Victoria as no. 1 — the most competitive market in the world. Most of the offers from retailers to customers are reasonably straightforward. There is a fixed or standing charge, then a usage charge per kilowatt hour, sometimes with different peak and off-peak rates.

But behind this the retailers' costs are much more complex. Firstly, they have to cover their own expenditure. Secondly, the retailers pay distribution and transmission charges to the network operators —

households do not pay for these separately. Thirdly, there is the electricity itself, which retailers buy from the generators. This is highly complex and can be under set contracts or obtained from the wholesale spot market.

Wholesale trading in electricity is conducted as a spot market where supply and demand are instantaneously matched in real time through a centrally coordinated dispatch process. Generators bid into the market with offers to supply the market with specific amounts of electricity at particular prices. These prices are submitted every 5 minutes of every day of the year. The market is run by NEMMCO (National Electricity Market Management Company). NEMMCO monitors exactly how much demand there is for electricity and accepts bids to meet that demand in the most cost-efficient way. NEMMCO then dispatches these generators into production and a different dispatch price is determined every 5 minutes. This price can vary significantly because NEMMCO needs to make sure there is just enough supply to meet demand at all times — to make sure that the lights do not go out, and to make sure that the energy infrastructure is not damaged by imbalance.

The average dispatch price in this wholesale market is currently around \$50 per megawatt hour. But the 5 minute price can, and usually does, vary. Sometimes, for very short periods on very hot days, it can go as high as \$10 000 per megawatt hour. Most retailers sell electricity to customers at flat unit rates which do not change even if the dispatch price, as I indicated before, gets very high. You can see that retailers need to manage their supply and hedging contracts carefully, and that they provide a risk-management service that protects Victorian families from these extreme prices whilst ensuring that there is security of supply, ensuring that the lights do in fact stay on.

The various parts of the electricity supply industry are subject to the relevant regulatory oversight. National energy market reforms mean that many of these regulators are becoming national bodies, reflecting what has become an integrated national market. The Australian Energy Regulator is becoming the key regulator for the transmission and distribution parts of the industry. Operation of the gas and electricity trading markets, as well as system planning, will come under a single body: the Australian Energy Market Operator.

Finally, Energy Safe Victoria is a statutory body tasked with ensuring that energy supplies are delivered safely to all Victorians. As can be seen, Victoria has a complex but integrated electricity system; by and large

it works very well to ensure that when you flick on the switch, the light comes on and stays on.

Central to all this, as I said at the commencement of my contribution, is the role played by the Latrobe Valley in generating the overwhelming bulk of electricity in Victoria from brown coal. The real task for us as a community, for us as a state, and for us as part of the national electricity market is to ensure that in the emergence of an emissions trading scheme we are able to use our brown coal resource in a much more environmentally friendly and sustainable way in the future. Doing this will make sure that the economic viability and future of the Latrobe Valley can be ensured into the decades and years ahead. Without that security of supply and without that understanding of the importance of the Latrobe Valley, many issues will emerge in terms of obtaining security and certainty for the people of the Latrobe Valley.

Question agreed to.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: strengthening government and parliamentary accountability in Victoria

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I wish to address the house on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report entitled *Strengthening Government and Parliamentary Accountability in Victoria* as presented in April this year. I particularly refer to chapter 6, under ‘modernisation of Parliament including the permanent abolition of wigs and other archaic practices’.

I am happy to leave the wigs to one side, which I think is the general understanding of what this Parliament will do, but I refer to chapter 6.5, dealing with the webcasting of Parliament, where the recommendation is:

Funding should be provided in the near future for the video webcasting of all sessions of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly.

I note with pleasure that we have had a very immediate response to this recommendation insofar as the budget is concerned with the forward estimates providing funding for the Parliament to provide not just in the near future but I think in August for the audio webcasting and subsequently, in the years ahead, funding is being provided for the video webcasting of the sessions of the Council and the Assembly, and we welcome that.

I note also among the other recommendations there is the McIntosh recommendation and there is an acceptance by the committee that the manager of opposition business in the Legislative Assembly receive an emolument for the very hard work that is undertaken by that person. The suggestion is that the person involved be provided with some kind of emolument or additional salary of about 11 per cent.

Mr Foley interjected.

Mr STENSCHOLT — It is an agreed report by all sides of the Parliament obviously trying to be fair and balanced. The committee made a recommendation that consideration be given to appropriate resourcing of other parties, and presumably that would include the Greens.

More significant recommendations related to modernising the opening of Parliament. It has been suggested that the opening of Parliament should be modernised to bring it into line with practices elsewhere as well as having our own unique mark. The committee agreed that the opening should be simplified. The clerks provided some ideas for this. They suggested there is no need to go to the Council and come back again for the commission to be read out but that each house could meet separately for the reading of the commission, the swearing in of members and the election of the Presiding Officers.

It is suggested that when that process has been completed, the houses could adjourn without further formality to a joint sitting of the houses in Queen's Hall. The joint sitting should commence with a welcome from the traditional owners, followed by a multifaith ceremony incorporated into the day, culminating with the main event, the presentation of the Governor's speech.

The committee believes this program will prove superior to current procedures as it provides a more practical venue for members and also reflects equality between the houses while acknowledging that Parliament represents a diverse constituency — namely, the citizens of Victoria.

There is a further recommendation regarding the oath that members take. The member for Albert Park put in a submission on this issue, and we thank members for their submissions to the committee's inquiries. We also had a submission from the Republican movement. The committee recommends:

The Victorian government introduce legislation to amend the second schedule of the Constitution Act ... to include an oath

or affirmation of choice and incorporate the following wording ...

Then, depending on whether it is an oath or affirmation:

I swear by Almighty God ...

Or:

I do solemnly and sincerely affirm ...

The oath of affirmation continues:

that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Australia and the people of Victoria according to the law.

In other words, there would be a choice as to which one could be used. We as a committee, and I hope the whole Parliament, is looking forward to the government's response to this and the implementation of the many other recommendations that are contained in the report, including in this particular chapter the modernisation of the way bills are handled in the house. There is a suggestion that we could streamline the procedure for dealing with how laws are made in terms of how bills are processed. Archaic language could be removed and the bills streamlined so that the ordinary citizens of Victoria can understand what is to happen.

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

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: financial and performance outcomes 2006–07

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I wish to make a couple of observations on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2006–07 financial and performance outcomes dated May 2008. This is a substantial report. I am sure I will speak on it on multiple occasions, but I wish in my first go at having a little crack at this report to refer to chapter 5, 'Regulation reduction — Cutting "red tape"'.
I have had a very keen interest in this area for a long time. I am particularly interested in tracking the government's commitment, which was introduced in the 2006–07 budget, that the government would reduce the administrative burden of regulation by 15 per cent over three years and 25 per cent over the next five years. As we are all aware, the government is constantly introducing new regulations, be they legislative or via regulation, and it is obviously going to be quite difficult to track this amount of very substantial reduction that the government claims it will actually achieve.

The government's promise on this is based on a Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission report which refers to 1.9 million licences and over 32 000 pages of acts and regulations that apply to Victorians in this state and the fact that, as an example, in 2005–06 new regulations were expected to cost \$280 million over their 10-year lives. Clearly to business — and to individuals — regulations are very costly and every government needs to weigh up very carefully whether the cost is justified. But in terms of tracking, I wish to refer to page 148 of the report and section 5.4 entitled 'Report card quantifying expected (or actual) reductions in administrative burden to be achieved from regulatory reform activity'. I see in this section that the committee shares many of my reservations about the capacity of the government to meet this target.

The committee found the commitment to reduce regulation by the amounts that I have just specified was 'on track' to save business \$154 million per year by 2009 and \$256 million per year by July 2011. The committee said it was 'on track'. Whilst I appreciate the meaning of the words 'on track', the committee goes on to actually explain some of its reservations. The committee said that the government was 'on track' to meet this target of deduction of regulations by 15 per cent over three years and 25 per cent over five years, but if you actually look further down at page 148, the committee expresses some reservation about these long-term targets.

The committee received provisional estimates by the Department of Treasury and Finance indicating a net reduction of \$29.64 million per annum from September 2008. Evidence was given to the committee of, for example, reductions that were estimated to come from the implementation of payroll tax e-business of \$10 million per annum and from the Motor Car Traders (Amendment) Regulations of \$7.5 million per annum. But the committee went on to say, and I quote:

Given that some departments advised the committee that it was too early to demonstrate quantifiable benefits from their initiatives and, in the opinion of the committee, there is a quantum leap to be achieved during 2008–09 in terms of moving from the expectation of saving businesses up to \$30 million in 2007–08 from regulatory reform to \$154 million per year by July 2009, the committee is of the view that the Department of Treasury and Finance will need to monitor very closely how agencies are progressing with achieving expected reductions in the regulatory burden.

I support the committee's recommendations 15 and 16, which require monitoring and, more importantly, reporting. But I hope that that reporting is not just to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, but that reporting is to the Parliament itself. It is a very big

promise from this government. Reservations have been expressed already and we need accurate reporting.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: financial and performance outcomes 2006–07

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park) — I rise to also make some comments on the report tabled in May 2008 by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on the 2006–07 financial and performance outcomes. This wide-ranging report by PAEC is a very worthy document which I commend to the Parliament. I congratulate PAEC and particularly its chair, the member for Burwood, for its efforts in this regard.

I wish to restrict my comments to section B of the report entitled 'Economic reform', and in particular chapter 3, which details progress in the implementation of the national reform agenda. This is a very important issue for all Victorians. What it details is not only the issues associated with the important national reform agenda but the issues associated with ongoing state-federal relations. It perhaps more importantly also points to how we see the federation working and the role of government across the Australian community, because as this report shows, there is a divide in politics in this country as to fundamentally what the role of government should be about.

On one side of that divide are those who have a view that good government is about building a better society through a modern and active role for government in building programs that build capacity in the economy and that detail how people and communities can come together to enhance their lives and to facilitate how the fruits of sound economic management can build social capital for our society through enhancing our education system, our training system and our early childhood development systems, and through tackling the challenges of an ageing workforce, the changing patterns of life that we see as more of us live longer but perversely also develop new lifestyle diseases such as diabetes type 2.

The report also looks at how our natural and community institutions will be delivered as an inheritance from now on to future generations, and at how government can play a positive and indeed ennobling role in protecting and restoring our natural and institutional inheritance. I commend this report to those who see that communities have the right to act collectively.

Sadly, there are those who see the role of government as fundamentally being an evil which is to be removed from the impediments of those who chase their own

self-interest in this world. They feel that the role of government is essentially to make sure there is no impediment to this somehow noble pursuit of enlightened self-interest. Such a view is riddled with contradictions and pitfalls. The PAEC report is one mechanism which highlights this.

The national reform agenda that the committee deals with is in large part driven by the agenda of this state government. It homes in on the big and important questions. The national reform agenda points to three big areas that are the role of government and to what a government can do to improve social good. The first area involves improvements to human capital, particularly in the areas of health, education, training, work incentives and participation rates in our community. The second area is the progress of regulatory reform, which was dealt with by the member for Brighton in her contribution, including how the best practice regulatory reform model can be introduced to reduce the regulatory burden in hot spots, particularly in areas of crossover regulation between the state and federal governments. The third area concerns the issues around driving the next stage of productivity reform in the Australian economy, particularly in the areas of energy, transport, infrastructure, planning and climate change.

Together these are the big challenges and the big issues that face economic management, social progress and sustainability for our community. What did the committee find in this regard? Good news is at hand for all Victorians. Victoria has not only led the way in developing the national reform agenda and has adopted it at the Council of Australian Governments, but it continues to meet all of its commitments in this regard. The committee found:

Victoria has met its responsibilities in line with the decisions reached by COAG.

Perhaps more importantly, the committee then highlights how the whole of COAG and the national reform agenda received a further substantial kick along in March of this year from the contribution by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, led, particularly, by the new Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. In health there has been the immediate allocation of \$1 billion to reduce waiting lists; in water there has been the groundbreaking memorandum of understanding regarding the Murray–Darling Basin reform; and there has been the notable commitment of \$1 billion to phase 2 of the northern irrigation project. There has been regulatory reform — 27 areas have been identified in regard to regulatory reform — to enhance productivity and workforce mobility by

reducing the cost of regulation. There will be a focus on this at the next COAG meeting.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: financial and performance outcomes 2006–07

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — I too rise to speak on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2006–07 financial and performance outcomes. I will refer to chapter 10 of the report which is about drought relief. I fully concur with the finding of chapter 10.6 of the committee's report, which says:

However, the committee would like to see clearer, centralised monitoring and reporting of the impacts of achieving savings, the achievement of milestones and targets. Further, the committee believes that departmental accountability could be improved if departments were required to assess and publicly report the impact of achieving savings on program and service delivery.

This report clearly states that there was a levy put on the departments to achieve \$50 million of savings to help fund the drought response. The departments were sent off to achieve these savings. While the government made out it was doing a great thing for rural and regional Victoria by supporting the drought, at the same time it cut regional and rural health and aged-care services by \$1.2 million. The government cut disability services by \$560 000. The government cut the Office for Children by \$80 000. The children are our future and they should be the priority of our state!

The Brumby government prides itself on having a Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, but in this report there is a cut to new manufacturing. You would have thought the creation of new jobs in regional Victoria would have been good in a drought, but no, there is a cut to new manufacturing by \$484 000. The Regional Infrastructure Development Fund was cut by a further \$200 000. The Department of Justice was cut by \$5 million. It is no wonder we have long queues at the courts. There are further cuts. The Victoria Police component of that funding was cut by \$1.7 million. It is no wonder we have staffing problems in police stations such as those in Echuca and Heathcote and other towns across regional Victoria.

There are also cuts to the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Department of Premier and Cabinet. But what is worse are the cuts to the Department of Primary Industries. We have been told about climate change and how we need to prepare for it. But what

happened regarding the drought? The Department of Primary Industries was asked to cut its funding. It responded by cutting the strategic and applied science research by \$781 000. How are we going to adjust to farming in the times where we have a different climate if we do not have the research, the new plants and the new technologies to deliver in those times? There was also a cut to sustainable practice change extensions by over \$424 000. We already have technologies, but we need the farmers to adopt them. When we are faced with the challenge of the drought, the Department of Primary Industries is cutting its resources for sustainable practice change extensions. This is what this means. We are cutting the resources that help farmers adopt current technologies to deliver in this drought time. These cuts are an inappropriate response.

From the report we can see that the government used its money to finance the likes of the Melbourne City Council. Melbourne City Council got \$90 000 from the drought relief for community sport and recreation program while the Campaspe Shire Council got \$50 000. I think this program was more about votes than where the pain really was.

It is also interesting that, as we look to the future, we are spending \$2 million a year to promote the north-south pipeline or the northern interconnector. That is the government's drought response — \$2 million a year to promote a pipeline!

Sitting suspended 12.58 p.m. until 2.03 p.m.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Public transport: SmartBus program

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I refer the minister to a leaked cabinet-in-confidence document of the then Department of Infrastructure, which reveals that the SmartBus project should have been completed by 2007.

Mr Eren interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Lara will not interject in that manner.

Mr BAILLIEU — It should have been completed by 2007 and I ask: what does the minister say to those people waiting for the bus when the bus will not be arriving for five years?

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will be given an opportunity to answer the question.

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Public Transport) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question and indeed for his interest in the SmartBus program, which is a fantastic program. The full SmartBus orbital network is on track to be in service by 2012, and it will form a 900-kilometre cross-town network right around the metropolitan area. We have committed \$660 million to this plan as part of Meeting Our Transport Challenges.

As the new infrastructure is rolled out — and that includes bus priority lanes, priority traffic signals and real-time information bus stops — new sections of the orbital network will be in service. We currently have five SmartBus services in place, and we have seen patronage increases of more than 60 per cent on most routes.

The document that the Leader of the Opposition is referring to is a business case from 2003. Meeting Our Transport Challenges made it very clear what our commitment was to not only identifying when SmartBus would be rolled out but in fact identifying the funding that would be provided for that.

It is not only this side of the house that actually believes that SmartBus is a fantastic program; in fact I am very pleased that the members for Ferntree Gully and Scoresby are very much fans of the SmartBus. They are so delighted in fact that they have had happy pics taken, which were published in the *Knox Leader* of 11 September 2007. They are very good photos. Underneath it says:

MPs Nick Wakeling and Kim Wells are delighted there is a SmartBus stop operating on the corner of Wellington and Stud roads.

I would welcome the Leader of the Opposition joining with some of his colleagues, getting on and supporting SmartBus as we roll it out across the metropolitan area.

Water: Wimmera-Mallee pipeline

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier update the house on the progress of the Wimmera-Mallee pipeline and other water-saving projects across the state?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I want to thank the honourable member for Ballarat West for her question. I am in fact very pleased to update the house on the progress of some great Labor water initiatives. The

Auditor-General's report on the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline has been delivered today, and I am happy to receive that report. The opening paragraph — page 1 — of the Auditor-General's report *Piping the System* says:

The Wimmera–Mallee pipeline ... is Australia's largest water saving project.

It is, Speaker, and we are proud of it. It is a project which originated under our government, not under former Liberal governments, not under former Nationals governments. It originated under our government in Victoria to provide water security for the people of north-west Victoria. When completed in 2009–10, four years ahead of schedule, it will save — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — Sorry, I apologise to the house: it is six years ahead of schedule, which, you would have thought, would have been welcomed by the members of the Liberal Party and The Nationals — those that have not lost their way. This project will save 103 000 megalitres of water that is currently lost from the existing system. It will replace 17 500 kilometres of open urban channels with 8800 kilometres of piped water. We will have seven discreet supply systems that will cover some 2.3 million hectares, and it will provide water to about 2500 rural customers and 35 000 customers across 36 towns.

Dr Napthine interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — This is a great project for our state, one of a number of great water projects. The member for South-West Coast said, 'What about the costs?'.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier will ignore interjections, and I ask the member for South-West Coast not to interject.

Mr BRUMBY — It is worth pointing out that this project is about pipes, and the bulk of the pipes are made of petroleum product. When this project was announced, the international price of oil was \$25 a barrel — but it's a bit higher than that now!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — If the opposition wants to say that somehow the state of Victoria is responsible for Venezuelan oil pricing or Middle Eastern oil pricing policy, it can go ahead!

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Premier to confine his remarks to answering the question.

Mr BRUMBY — The Auditor-General writes, 'Construction of the project has been well managed'.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for South-West Coast is warned.

Mr BRUMBY — I was asked about a range of projects. On 19 May I was joined by the water minister, the member for Ballarat West and the member for Ballarat East for the turning on of the new 87-kilometre Ballarat leg of the goldfields super-pipe. It was one of those fantastic days in public life, where you see the results of a project which our government put into action. We were at the White Swan Reservoir. For those members who think this is funny, the reservoir is nearly empty. The pipe was turned on, and to see the water from the super-pipe coming down and filling that reservoir and providing water security to Ballarat was a great thing and a vindication of the decision we as a government took to build that pipeline.

The Ballarat leg of the project has the capacity to transfer 18 gigalitres of water a year to Ballarat. It was fast tracked; it took 10 months to complete, 2 years ahead of schedule; and it drought proofs Ballarat. Members of the Liberal Party and The Nationals might not be too keen about this project, but here is what the people of Ballarat think about it.

Here is the wraparound from the *Courier*. It reads, 'Water at last' and says, 'Water starts to flow through super-pipe'. That is what the people of Ballarat think about it. I know why the opposition parties are a bit restless about this. This pipe is now delivering water to Ballarat; this pipe is now delivering water — —

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier should not debate the question.

Mr BRUMBY — Speaker, I am not. I was asked about this project. This project is delivering water to Ballarat. It is water which is needed in Ballarat after 10 years of consecutive dry periods. We have delivered this pipeline despite the consistent and emphatic opposition of the Liberal Party and The Nationals. I say shame on the Liberal Party, shame on The Nationals — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the Premier that question time is not an occasion to attack the

opposition. I ask the Premier to confine his remarks to government business.

Mr BRUMBY — It's all right; we will leave the criticism to the internet, I think.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier will confine his remarks to government business.

Mr BRUMBY — I turn to some of the comments made about this pipeline when we announced it. One comment was:

... to take water from the irrigators of the Goulburn Valley and then pump it to Bendigo and Ballarat is nothing less than a disgrace.

That was what the Leader of The Nationals said. I must say the Leader of The Nationals has now changed his view. Of course the Liberal Party emphatically opposed this project.

The reality is that we have gone through a prolonged period across Australia and in Victoria of dry climatic conditions. All of the evidence on climate change suggests that those circumstances may well continue into the future. In these circumstances the appropriate thing for the state to do is to invest in water-saving infrastructure, which is exactly what we are doing with the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline. We are saving 103 000 megalitres of water by piping water across the state, by ensuring we have got a grid, by ensuring we can share water and by investing in projects like the food bowl project, which will save more than 400 billion litres of water. We stand by these projects. They are positive projects for our state, and they have been very well received in the communities concerned.

Public transport: ticketing system

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. I refer the minister to the Premier's confirmation yesterday that the total cost of the myki ticketing fiasco had blown out by another \$350 million to \$1.35 billion over the original estimate of \$494 million, and I ask: does this latest government estimate of \$1.35 billion include the \$216 million Metcard contract extension from 1 March 2007 to 1 March 2012?

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Public Transport) — I thank the member for his question. As was made clear the other day, the contract with Metlink, which was a five-year contract, is a rollover of what was previously the case under the Kennett government — the option of that. So the five-year period to 2012 includes the

termination option that we can provide with six-months notice. We can do that. It is what was in place under the Kennett government, and it is what is in place now. The amount that was announced the other day as the extra cost of myki includes all the additional costs.

EastLink: economic benefits

Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) — My question is to the Minister for Roads and Ports. Can the minister advise the house how the opening of EastLink on 29 June will benefit Victoria's economy and make our suburbs the best place to live, work and raise a family?

Mr PALLAS (Minister for Roads and Ports) — I thank the member for Frankston for his question and for his continuing support for this important project for Victoria. This project has been four decades on the plans, it has been three years in construction, and within one month it will be open. I might say that is almost six months ahead of schedule. I was pleased to be with the Premier just recently — —

Mr Brumby — Another Labor project!

Mr PALLAS — It is another Labor project, as the Premier so rightly identified. The Premier announced recently that EastLink will open on — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the members for Nepean and Bass to show some cooperation during question time. I probably need to see the member for Nepean after question time in my office.

Mr PALLAS — The Premier announced that EastLink would open on 29 June, with a four-week toll-free period ending on 26 July. The major asphaltting work is rapidly nearing completion, with line marking and signage also well advanced. The independent reviewer has indicated that his assessment on both the complex safety and the road management systems are well advanced and the opening date is assured.

EastLink will bring many benefits to the eastern and southern suburbs of Melbourne and of course ultimately to the state. Those benefits include \$2.5 billion of the investment which has been realised by ConnectEast, operating under the name of EastLink. That has created more than 7500 jobs in the construction industry. But those benefits are ongoing. So, as the member for Scoresby would no doubt be aware, there has been strong growth in housing prices right throughout Melbourne. The average growth for metropolitan Melbourne has been 31.1 per cent since late 2004, but we know that in Scoresby that growth

has been 56.7 per cent over the same period. EastLink is likely to inject \$15 billion into Victoria's gross state product, according to an analysis by the Allen Consulting Group. When it opens it will create 6500 jobs, most of which are in the corridor directly identified.

The new investments it will spawn include things like \$73 million for a development on the south-western corner of Thomas and Walker streets in Dandenong. And of course the business community has rallied around EastLink as having great potential for the freight and logistics sector. Anybody who has been down that corridor will have seen the sort of growth that is occurring, spawning around the soon-to-be-open road.

A recent survey of 600 motorists, which was undertaken by UMR Research for ConnectEast in March 2008, found the following things: 95 per cent of motorists surveyed think EastLink will benefit business, 97 per cent believe EastLink will save them time and 78 per cent believe EastLink will benefit their local communities. It is good for communities, good for business and good in terms of the rational use of your time. It is a resounding endorsement of this government's strategies in respect of support for EastLink. It would have been more fortunate to have seen a greater level of support from those opposite.

But of course people do not need to use EastLink, because we will also see substantial benefits in travel times along Stud Road, Springvale Road and Blackburn Road as a consequence of the opening up of new opportunities. In the long term EastLink will create a big opportunity for the development of the outer east and the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

I am not the only one who has identified these great benefits. Mr Terry Ryder, who is identified as a Queensland-based real estate expert, is quoted in the *Australian* newspaper of 17 February 2007 as making the following observations:

Victoria is perennially underrated as an economy and a property market, but it has many of the essential qualities that NSW lacks: a solid economy, a stable government, major spending on new infrastructure and a property market that has avoided major fallout from the end of the boom.

Not only is Mr Ryder considered to be such an expert that the *Australian* picked him up, but another paper of note, the *Bairnsdale Advertiser* of 9 March 2007, also uses his observations. Mr Ryder went on to say:

While other states are grappling with infrastructure and transport problems, Victoria is busy building new roads, revitalising suburban areas and facilitating major new infrastructure and industrial projects.

The observation that I would make is: why is it that Mr Terry Ryder, a real estate property expert from Queensland, can see what is going on in this state while those opposite cannot even see from across this chamber?

EastLink is part of an infrastructure investment strategy, which includes major projects like the Geelong ring-road, the Pakenham bypass, the Deer Park bypass and the M1 upgrade. I extend congratulations to ConnectEast, Theiss John Holland, Southern and Eastern Integrated Transport Authority and all of those people who have contributed to building this wonderful project. EastLink is an essential part of this government's strategy, which allows us to grow Melbourne's economy and make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Hospitals: government performance

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Given the Auditor-General has today reported that patients face a 1-in-10 chance of suffering harm in Victorian public hospitals, will the Premier guarantee that this already unacceptably high risk will not be made worse by the increased patient load resulting from the federal government's decision to force Victorians out of private health cover?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — In relation to federal government policy, which the Leader of the Opposition has asked about, I should make one key point — that is, that out of the last two COAG (Council of Australian Governments) meetings, for the first time in a decade, Victoria got increased hospital funding from the federal government.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — The Leader of the Opposition shakes his head. The fact is that out of the first COAG meeting held here in Melbourne —

Mr Baillieu interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — You have asked a question about hospital waiting lists and federal funding. Out of the first COAG meeting here in Melbourne we got an additional \$35 million for elective surgery waiting lists, which we put \$25 million into. It is a \$60 million package, which is the biggest ever elective surgery package in this state, and will treat up to 10 000 more patients. It is a good thing to treat more patients in our hospitals. Secondly, out of the COAG meeting in Adelaide, in addition to indexed funding going forward, the Rudd government provided an extra \$500 million in additional funding to the states for public hospitals, of

which Victoria's share was \$121 million. All of that translates to a better deal in public hospitals than we have had in this state in the last decade. It is the first time we have recovered our share of funding.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — Let me come to the question of safety in hospitals.

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr Stensholt interjected.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Burwood. Question time is not an opportunity for the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition to debate across the table.

Mr BRUMBY — In relation to the Auditor-General's report which was tabled today, let me make it very clear that we take the issue of patient safety very, very seriously indeed. We welcome the Auditor-General's report, and his recommendations will be implemented.

I want to make it clear that there have been significant improvements in a whole range of areas in patient safety in our hospitals. For example, in ulcer prevalence, which is a significant issue with long-stay patients, there has been a 33 per cent reduction in pressure ulcer prevalence over three years. That is a result of the programs that have been put in place in hospitals. We all know what a huge issue super-bugs are in Victoria and everywhere around the developed world. Under measures that we put in place a number of years ago — the sanitation, the hand washing required of everybody who works in a public hospital — those super-bug rates continue to decrease. At the Austin the rates fell by 57 per cent after the hygiene program was introduced. Also, since 2001, the in-hospital death rate of major trauma patients has fallen from 15 per cent to 12 per cent, with a 37 per cent reduction in the likelihood of death from a major trauma.

In all those areas very positive and significant improvements have taken place in our hospital system. Our hospital system is performing immeasurably better than it was in the 1990s, but as with any area of state government policy, we can continue to improve our performance. With the increased support that we are getting from the federal government I am confident that our performance in hospitals will continue to improve.

Schools: vocational education and training

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — My question is to the Minister for Education. Can the minister advise the house how the Brumby government is taking action in vocational education and training to expand the choices available in our schools?

Ms PIKE (Minister for Education) — I thank the member for Eltham for his question. The Brumby government is continuing to invest in improving the skills of our students and giving them more flexibility and options to genuinely explore different pathways. This is particularly true in the case of vocational education and training (VET).

One of the great news stories from the budget this year is that the funding for vocational education and training in schools has more than doubled. We have provided a \$7.3 million budget boost to encourage more Victorian students to take up vocational education and training programs to help them to become job ready while they are still at school. The government's funding for the VET in Schools program has grown from \$2 million in 1999 to more than \$14 million in 2008, and this year's budget boost considerably improves that funding. These funds in particular will focus on areas of skill shortages, such as building construction and automotive studies. These students are part of our future workforce, and we want to ensure they stay at school for as long as they possibly can, not only so they will be given the opportunity to develop these vocational skills but also so they can continue with the other aspects of their schooling and get a broad, well-rounded educational experience.

The VET in Schools program has really grown in popularity, with more than 330 Victorian government secondary schools currently offering around 30 VET subjects, including business administration and engineering studies. All of these can contribute to a student's tertiary entrance score. The number of certificate enrolments in the VET in Schools program in government schools has more than tripled, from more than 10 000 in 1999 to nearly 32 000 young people undertaking vocational programs in 2007. It is a really big growth area, and our funding has helped to promote that growth and give students this greater level of opportunity. It is great for the students, but it is great for our economy as well, because we are taking very positive steps in doing something about meeting the skill shortage areas. I think it is a wonderful example of the way the government is using innovative programs to develop opportunities and choices for young people within our education system.

Maffra Secondary School: funding

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Education. In the 2007–08 budget it was announced that a Gippsland school would receive funding which was not expected, was not part of the Building Futures process and was not contained in the budget. The Drouin school subsequently received funding in that financial year. As a precedent has been set in the Drouin case, I ask: will the government now fund the Maffra Secondary College upgrade in this financial year, as was announced in a budget-day press release from the Treasurer?

Ms PIKE (Minister for Education) — I do thank the member for his question. I was very pleased to have the opportunity, with the member for Gippsland East, to meet representatives of the Maffra community, who have joined us in the house today, to talk about educational opportunities and initiatives in the growing community of Maffra. I was also pleased to hear from the principal and others about the excellent quality of education that is being delivered in the public system in the Maffra community and about the number of young people in that community who are benefiting enormously from those programs. I was also pleased to hear of the great community support there is for education in Maffra. Of course I have been very aware that the community is very passionate about and committed to educational opportunities for all of its young people in Maffra.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms PIKE — As a government we made a commitment that we would rebuild, renovate or extend every single public school in this state. In this term of government we have allocated \$1.9 billion, which is an extraordinary amount of money and is millions of dollars above any amounts of money that have been previously allocated. With that \$1.9 billion we are rebuilding, renovating or extending some 500 schools as part of our overall commitment.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms PIKE — What we made very clear in our election — —

Mr Ingram — On a point of order, Speaker, this is an important issue for my electorate. I am having trouble hearing the minister because of constant interjections. Can you please bring the house to order?

The SPEAKER — Order!

Ms PIKE — The member is right: education is this government’s no. 1 priority and is a matter that we take very seriously.

We are progressing well with the program for the 500 schools in this term in office. We made a commitment to those schools that were identified prior to the last election that they would receive funding for their upgrade and renovation during this term of government.

In this most recent budget we made a commitment to upgrade Maffra Primary School, and that community received \$4 million of funding for that school. I have indicated to the community of Maffra and representatives of Maffra Secondary College that the government will fulfil its commitment to fund Maffra Secondary College’s renovation during this term of government.

Budget: disability services

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — My question is to the Minister for Community Services. Can the minister outline to the house how the Brumby Labor government is taking action to deliver services for Victorians with disabilities?

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Community Services) — I thank the member for Burwood for his question and for his ongoing interest in ensuring that people with a disability get the best possible chance in terms of life outcomes.

I say at the outset that this year’s budget is historic, because it contains the biggest ever investment in Victoria’s history for people with disabilities. The budget invests a record amount of \$233 million, which means that we have increased funding for disability services by 105 per cent since coming to government.

The community has indicated strong support for this increased funding. VCOSS (Victorian Council of Social Service), for example, welcomed it saying that this is significant support for Victorians with a disability. National Disability Services Victoria said, ‘The state government has made a significant commitment to improving disability supports for Victorians’. The Health and Community Services Union welcomed the funding improvements for disability services and said it was pleased to see commitments to community awareness campaigns and moves to get young people out of nursing homes.

This package delivers new, much-needed accommodation for people with disabilities through both our \$50 million commitment to supported

accommodation through Housing Choices Australia and our \$10 million commitment to get young people out of nursing homes. The My Future My Choice initiative tackles the important issue of young people who are currently living in a nursing home and provides new community-based accommodation for 46 young people. This is on top of our \$60 million joint commitment with the commonwealth government.

We are also pleased that Victoria will get a share of the \$100 million of funding for disability that the commonwealth government has announced, and that will see accommodation options for Victorians with disabilities boosted even further.

Of course many Victorians with disabilities do not want to live in shared supported accommodation. Like all of us, they may want to live at home or to live independently in the community. That is why our budget invests \$70 million to provide an extra 340 individual support packages, which are all about helping people with a disability to live as independently as possible. This is on top of the extra 350 people who will receive support as we deliver on our election commitments.

These packages provide people with disabilities with real choice: choice to move from shared supported accommodation, choice to live independently in the community and choice to live at home with their families. To help further this choice the budget delivers an extra \$12 million to provide an extra 330 episodes of respite care based on the needs of families which are crucial in assisting carers, who often need a break. We are backing that up with \$1 million to set up a new respite information service to enable carers to get advice and access to respite services when and where they need it. Importantly, we are delivering on our election promise to establish a carer's reward card.

Because we want people with disabilities to live as independently as possible, we are investing an extra \$5 million in the aids and equipment program, which means more wheelchairs, more mobility aids and more home modifications to make life easier for people with disabilities. Independence for people with disabilities also means providing job opportunities. The budget invests \$10 million to support young people to develop job skills and achieve long-term employment opportunities.

There is a whole other range of initiatives in this budget: initiatives to support people with an acquired brain injury, more funding for community organisations and initiatives to improve community awareness and community participation for people with a disability. It

is the biggest ever investment in Victoria's history, and we know that those opposite are on the record as saying that money is not important and that in fact it is not about the money. But we know that it is about the money. It is that money that can deliver the extra accommodation places, the extra support packages, the extra respite care and the extra aids and equipment. The extra funding counts, and it is in stark contrast to what was done by those opposite, who cut disability services across the board when they were in government.

Water: irrigators

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Minister for Water. I refer the minister to the existing 4 per cent per annum cap on the level of permanent trading out of all water irrigation areas in the southern Murray–Darling Basin, and I ask: does the minister support the retention of this cap until its scheduled review in 2009?

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Water) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. The government takes the view that the water market that has been created is a very valuable mechanism for enabling water to be traded, both out of districts and between different entitlement holders, to enable water to be managed during a period when the resource is particularly scarce — at the moment during the drought, and also looking to the future when the certainty that existed around water allocations in the past will not be there with climate change coming at us. We think the water market serves a very useful purpose in enabling water to reach its highest and most valuable use.

At the same time we recognise that there is a need to put in place mechanisms which enable adjustment to occur in a way which preserves the integrity of communities that have depended on this resource for a long time. We support mechanisms which enable that adjustment to be handled in a sensitive and appropriate way. At the same time we recognise that constraints on trade in relation to water have a distortional impact on the operation of the market. Therefore it is very important that those constraints are reasonable and proportionate and that they are reviewed from time to time.

It is for that reason that the Council of Australian Governments now has in place a mechanism for reviewing the 4 per cent water trading arrangement. The Victorian government will be inputting into that COAG working party. In fact, we are represented on the COAG working group so that the views of the Victorian government and the perspectives of

stakeholders affected by this can be input into that review. We think that is appropriate, we think that is effective. We will be doing what those opposite have not done — that is, we will stand up for the interests of Victorians who depend on having access to this resource and it being managed in an effective way.

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the question, and I ask you to have him respond to whether 2009 is the proper review date.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr HOLDING — The COAG working group is already reviewing these arrangements. The Victorian government is inputting into that review. We are making sure that the interests of Victorian irrigators and Victorian communities who are affected by this set of arrangements are being represented and reflected. We will continue to do that. We will be standing up for these irrigators the way we always have.

Housing: high-rise improvements

Mr LANGUILLER (Derrimut) — My question is to the Minister for Housing. Can the minister outline to the house how the Brumby Labor government is taking action to improve housing for low-income Victorians?

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Housing) — Access to affordable public and social housing is a core value and key commitment of the Brumby Labor government. There is no better example of this than our high-rise public housing estates. As the house would know, they constitute about 9 per cent of our total public housing stock. They are very much in the public eye as the face of public housing.

However, as the house would know, these estates have played an important and historic role in helping successive waves of migrants to establish themselves in this country and then to move on to other housing options. I should acknowledge today the member for Derrimut, who is a former resident of the high-rise public housing estate in Flemington. He has been honoured by the Victorian Public Tenants Association with a new role as an ambassador on behalf of public housing.

When we came to government in 1999 these high-rise towers were dilapidated, unsafe and substandard. Frankly the previous government had left us with a smouldering wreck. In eight years of government we have spent nearly \$2.1 billion on physical improvements and redevelopment — nearly double the commitment of the previous government. By the end of

the next financial year we will have spent \$500 million on the high-rise estates alone.

As members of the house are driving home tonight past any of the high-rise towers, they should look up — —

Ms Asher interjected.

Mr WYNNE — None in Brighton? Never mind, there will be some on the way home.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Minister for Housing knows — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Albert Park is warned.

Mr WYNNE — As members of the house are driving home tonight, I invite them to look up at the towers. They will see floor by floor that the windows in those towers are all changing. That is a signal that another floor has been renovated by this government.

To date over 200 floors of our high-rises have been renovated. This includes upgrades to all of the units — new kitchens, new insulation, new bathrooms, carpets, ovens, lighting. It is a complete upgrade, floor by floor, of in excess of 200 floors in areas such as Williamstown, Collingwood, South Melbourne, Flemington, Northcote, Brunswick, Prahran, St Kilda, North Melbourne, Carlton, Footscray, Kensington — and on and on it goes.

We have done this because this side of the house stands for high-quality, affordable public housing for the long term. We have no plan to abolish public housing. We do not regard public housing tenants as lazy layabouts who do not work and are a drain on the rest of us.

Mr Hulls — Who said that?

Mr WYNNE — It is a distasteful slight on decent people, trying to have a go in this community and trying to make a better life for their families. As we know, this was certainly the view of some in the Liberal Party.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr WYNNE — It may be one, but it is the view of some in the Liberal Party. I call upon the Leader of the Opposition to repudiate such views.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS

Statements resumed.

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee:
strengthening government and parliamentary
accountability in Victoria**

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I wish to make some comments on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on strengthening government and parliamentary accountability in Victoria, particularly relating to petitions. For some reason petitions have been a vexed problem in the state Parliament in terms of assessing how we can give them far greater weight than the parliamentary processes in Victoria have allowed before.

I am pleased to support the recommendations made by the committee in relation to petitions. Under the current guidelines where someone presents a petition to the Parliament there is no requirement for any action to be taken in relation to it. I know that excellent Labor ministers normally respond to people who present petitions, but there is no laid-down formula for petitions to be examined. If you think of the great effort that some people put into presenting petitions to Parliament and the great effort in collecting sometimes a great many signatures, they do deserve a great deal more attention than has been provided to them in the past by this Parliament.

The report lists some other ways that other parliaments respond to petitions. I particularly like the Western Australian model where petitions are sent to a committee where they are considered and a response is made. I would like the Parliament to have the opportunity to debate petitions. In some way they are the most direct form of democracy in that people's views are presented directly to the house through the petition process. It would be good for those people who were involved in organising petitions to have the right to have their petition debated in some way.

I notice that a number of other parliaments put responses from ministers on websites and there are other ways of dealing with petitions, but if we are talking about access, democracy and transparency in democracy the best way would be to have a provision in Parliament whereby petitions can be debated and the community can get to see a real response from members of Parliament to the matters raised in the petitions presented to them. I commend the report from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and I look forward to a positive response from the

government in its reaction to the committee recommendations which we will see later this year.

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee:
financial and performance outcomes 2006–07**

Dr NAPTHINE (South-West Coast) — I wish to refer to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report on the 2006–07 financial and performance outcomes. I particularly refer to page 397 which states under the heading 'Rail gauge standardisation':

Funding of \$96 million was approved for rail gauge standardisations in the 2001–02 state budget.

Further it says on the same page:

The rail gauge standardisation project was on hold during 2006–07 ...

It further states:

... it was determined that the Mildura rail line be first restored to a suitable standard for freight operations prior to undertaking further work on the passenger service.

That final quote is extremely misleading. The so-called Mildura line upgrade, outlined in page 397, is the upgrade of a broad gauge rail system; it is not standard gauge. It does not fit under the category of rail gauge standardisation. This is despite the fact that all councils in western Victoria want standardisation. In 2001 the government said it was committed to rail freight standardisation, and there is strong support for standardisation from the Mildura Rural City Council and the broader community. The facts on this matter are as follows: in 2001 the then Minister for State and Regional Development, now the Premier, told the house:

... a key initiative in the budget brought down in this house two weeks ago was the provision of \$96 million over the next few years for the regional freight links program to provide standardisation of the rail freight gauge right across Victoria, but particularly linking Mildura with Portland.

That is what was said after the budget in 2001. On 18 June 2002, the then Minister for Transport, now the Minister for Community Development, issued a press release entitled 'Progress on rail gauge standardisation'. It states:

More than 300 tonnes of steel rail have already been delivered ... a further 2000 tonnes are on the way ...

In addition to the \$3 million order of steel rail ... the government has also awarded 12 contracts ...

It says further:

... the first stage of track conversion on the Mildura line will occur early next year.

The final quote is:

Gauge conversion of the rail network is a key component of the government's regional freight links program, designed to provide seamless and efficient freight systems throughout Victoria ...

The fact is, despite all that rhetoric, despite the funding allocation, not 1 centimetre of the Mildura to Portland line has been converted to standard gauge by either the Bracks government or the Brumby government. They have not lived up to that promise, they have not lived up to that commitment, and there is not 1 centimetre of track converted.

The question remains: where has the \$96 million gone? I go back to page 397 of the committee report which says that with the standardisation of regional freight lines there is a total estimated investment of \$67.5 million and expenditure of \$13.1 million. What has it been spent on? How is it accounted? It says that \$15 million of the rail gauge standardisation money was spent on the Cliff Street overpass, a road project. That road project is welcome, but it should not come out of rail gauge standardisation money.

We have a situation where the government has misled the people of western Victoria. The government must come clean and admit it has abandoned the rail gauge standardisation project; it has broken its promise and deserted western Victoria and put more trucks on the road in western Victoria.

We now have the situation where rail freight to the port of Portland is in a state of complete collapse. There has been the sacking of staff, the relocating of rolling stock and the deterioration of tracks. Cr Vernon Knight, a Mildura rural city councillor and president of the Alliance of Councils for Rail Freight Development, said:

At the current rate of destruction, we will reach a point where there is no turning back ... The situation is calamitous.

That is what the situation is. I call on the government to admit that it lied and misled the people of western Victoria and that it broke its promise on rail gauge standardisation. All is not lost. The government should recognise and understand the vital role of rail freight, especially to the port of Portland for grain, mineral sands and woodchips, and it should recommit, here and now, to the rail gauge standardisation project and particularly to the Portland to Mildura line as the first rail standardisation project that it finishes.

APPROPRIATION (2008/2009) BILL

Second reading

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

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — I rise to make a contribution in the debate on the Appropriation Bill. Can I say at the commencement of my contribution what a very sad month it has been and what a very poor budget it has been for public transport and roads in the state of Victoria. The fact of the matter is that the Brumby government has been caught asleep at the wheel while Melbourne grinds to a halt.

There is no doubt that demand on the public transport system and demand for road capacity in Victoria have caught up to and passed the government of the day in both its thinking and its planning. This is a bad budget. It does nothing whatsoever to assist people who use our public transport network or those who go to work of a morning in their cars and find themselves hopelessly jammed up in traffic. We have a government which has simply failed to act in the best interests of this state at a time when we have had record revenue flowing into the state, because absolutely nothing has been done to improve public transport or roads.

When you look at the government's major documents in relation to public transport and in relation to roads — *Meeting Our Transport Challenges* and the Eddington report — you see that they are all about what the authors believe the government should do in the future. The really tough major projects are not being delivered by this government and are not going to be delivered in this term of government. They are all about what should be done by some other government at some time in the future.

When you look at the Eddington report — the report that this government claimed was going to fix Melbourne's public transport and road needs, particularly in the west — you only have to look at the staged delivery time line for east-west projects to see that is the case: the rail tunnel west is to start in 2011 and be completed perhaps by 2016, but given this government's record on these types of projects you would not want to hold your breath; the inner west to the port project is to commence in 2012 and be completed in 2016; and the Eastern Freeway project to CityLink and port is to commence in 2014 and be completed in 2019. That is how long it is going to take to get any sort of relief for the people who live in the western suburbs, the people who are putting up with those clogged roads at the end of the Eastern Freeway

and those who are trying to get in and out of the western suburbs to work, to doctor appointments or to go about their day-to-day lives. Even the rail tunnel east is to commence in 2015 and be completed in 2019.

We have a situation where the channel-deepening project is also supposed to be completed in 2010, and what the government, the Port of Melbourne Corporation and the transport and logistics operators are saying is that there are going to be a hell of a lot more trucks on the road come the completion of that project. If you look at that period from 2010 right through to, in some cases, 2019 for some of these projects to come into being, if indeed they do, you will realise that we will have a period of about eight or nine years of complete, total and utter chaos. The government of the day has let the public down, and it has let the transport industry down. The government does not even have in place a freight and logistics strategy to provide to Sir Rod Eddington and to give some future direction on what we are going to do with the truck volumes on the roads.

I was amazed that Sir Rod Eddington pointed out that he believed the Port of Melbourne Corporation should be the planning authority in determining where the intermodal hubs should go in the outer suburban areas and should also determine the truck routes — not the planning minister, not the Minister for Roads and Ports and not the Minister for Public Transport but the Port of Melbourne Corporation. I find that quite extraordinary.

As I said, it has been a terrible month for public transport and road projects. Let us look at the two ministers who are involved in those portfolio areas — the Minister for Public Transport, who as we all know and as members on the other side know, did not want the job, and the Minister for Roads and Ports, who as we all know, especially Labor backbenchers, did not earn his position on the front bench of this government. He was gifted his position, and his inability to control projects stands out. That is why the former Department of Infrastructure was moved away from the Minister for Public Transport and the Minister for Roads and Ports. Those ministers have nothing to do with major projects involving rail and/or road.

Is it any wonder that is the case when you look at this month's announcements: the M1 project has a \$363 million blow-out, and the myki project, which is under the control of the Minister for Public Transport, has a \$350 million blow-out, but I will talk about that a little bit more as I go on because I have a lot more to say in relation to myki. However, as to some of these issues in relation to myki, I know that originally the government spoke about \$189 million in contingencies,

operating costs for the Transport Ticketing Authority (TTA) of \$139 million, a risk allowance of \$140 million, a ticketing solution at a cost of \$211 million, operating costs of \$454 million — a grand total of about \$1.13 billion, which was in a draft document of the Auditor-General's office. Added to that are this week's announcement of a further \$350 million, and the cost of the extension to the Metcard contract of \$216 million, which we found out about today from the Minister for Public Transport. These will go on top of the \$1.135 billion that the government has already allocated for myki.

On my calculations, the best case scenario we can possibly look at it is somewhere of the order of \$1.566 billion and going up. At this point in time we have not even got to the operational stage of myki. It has not passed the technical barriers. As we understand it, there are still some significant software problems with myki. We do not know at this point in time who is advising the government on the solutions and outcomes, because when you look at the executive management team that was put together — and we were told there was a worldwide search put on to bring together the best minds to deliver the myki project — there is only a single manager remaining. The rest of the executive management team have either jumped ship or been sacked. The question I particularly ask is: if this is the case and we only have one person remaining, who is providing the technical expertise and technical advice to the Transport Ticketing Authority to get over these hurdles regarding the plastic ticket, as we know them to exist today?

We do not have enough trains. The government of the day has placed an order for about 18 trains since it came to office. The former government, when it set up the franchise arrangements, had 95 new trams, 65 new metropolitan trains and 29 new trains for regional Victoria. As I said, this government, since coming to power, has ordered 18 trains to be spread across 15 electrified lines. That is nowhere near enough to do the job, yet we have reports such as the one in the *Age* today entitled 'Drivers ditch cars amid bowser blues'.

Metlink has been advertising heavily for people to climb on board public transport. The community has responded to those calls by climbing out of their cars, but they turn up at railway stations across the state only to find the trains are either late or cancelled. That is what they get for supporting public transport in Victoria. It is an absolute disgrace.

The work has not been done; the effort has not been put in. As I said earlier, the Minister for Public Transport is in charge of all of these public transport projects and is

supposedly delivering trains, trams and new rail projects and dealing with issues such as the franchising of contracts which are to be finalised in November, yet this is the best effort we get from her. An article from a north-eastern Victorian newspaper says:

V/Line's early-morning train service from Albury to Melbourne was forced to make toilet stops yesterday.

Passengers had to wait in line at Benalla, Euroa and Seymour after the train's toilets overflowed and the only working loo ran out of paper.

The Minister for Public Transport is the minister charged with running public transport in Victoria. That incident is an example of about the best we can possibly get from the minister.

As I also said, the myki system, which the Minister for Public Transport is in charge of delivering for Victoria, is an absolute mess. About the only place, at this point in time, that you can find where this particular project is working is down at Southern Cross station. There is a booth at the station — that is, Southern Cross Station Pty Ltd, as a superannuation fund runs that station — which the Transport Ticketing Authority, or should I say the Victorian taxpayer, is paying \$100 000 a year to rent. The booth is the only place you will find myki working in any way, shape or form.

The myki system has been trialled in Geelong. The Liberal Party has copies of documents, obtained under freedom of information, about trials that were carried out in November last year. They show that the system is an absolute and utter shambles. It failed tests; the readers were not working; the information given on the driver's console differed from information which was handed out elsewhere; data was lost; and it was taking between 8 and 10 seconds to record a swipe on and a swipe off. That is as far as we got by November 2007, when the system was supposed to be operational in Melbourne. The analysis of the tests carried out by the TTA showed that it does not work.

I would like to know from the Premier and the Minister for Public Transport what inspired them to throw an additional \$350 million of taxpayers money at something that does not work. How could the minister stand up in this Parliament yesterday and claim we are going to get a world-best system when the system has not been proven and does not even work? If the government is to go down this path, why did the government not do what it should have done in the first place and buy an off-the-shelf system from overseas? It could have bought one that works and which would have tied up issues regarding further add-ons to the system through contract arrangements, rather than

starting from scratch and trying to build its own system in Melbourne. There are systems around the world that would cost a fraction of the myki system — and they work! They should have been used in Victoria.

There are many issues about the shortage of trains in Melbourne. As many members know, passengers on the Geelong and Ballarat lines have been troubled by many disgraceful situations, including some people turning up to stations with their own deckchairs because they cannot get a seat on the trains. How are we to run a public transport system when people cannot even get a seat on a train for a trip from as far away as Geelong or Ballarat to Melbourne?

There seems to be a deliberate attempt by the Minister for Public Transport to totally and utterly discriminate against people from rural and regional Victoria. Earlier this year there was a sneaky announcement — certainly not with fanfare and certainly not with ribbons being cut — that pets were banned on country and regional trains, but they would still be allowed on metropolitan trains. If you wanted to, you could take a pit bulldog with you on a metropolitan train but country Victorians were not allowed to take a kitten in a cage.

The same rules apply to the carriage of bikes. You can take your bike on a metropolitan train, but if you want to take it on a country train, you are supposed to put it in a cardboard box. That is absolute and utter discrimination against country Victorians.

I will touch on a number of other issues because I do not have a great deal of time to talk about issues relevant to my shadow portfolio. I would like to talk about the taxi industry. We now have what is called 'doing the Kosky' in Victoria. That means that if you do not get your way with the government, you will not be able to get an appointment with the minister. If you want to get your way, you walk down to Flinders Street, take off your shirt and sit down in the middle of an intersection. That is how you can get this government to act.

The pensioners did it; now the traders on Bridge Road are doing it; and the people in Chapel Street are doing it in regard to the clearway issue. That is the way you get this government to respond. Mark my words: the taxidivers said, 'We will be back if we do not get what we want', and that is exactly what is going to happen. Each and every group in this state that has a gripe with this government is going to arrive in Melbourne, sit down in the middle of the city and stop the traffic. The government will deserve that because of the way the Minister for Roads and Ports is treating traders with his

clearway bans that are to be applied to streets 10 kilometres from the city.

There was no consultation and nor was there any discussion with traders, with the business community or with councillors. There was nothing but a clear extension of the clearway on roads 10 kilometres from the city. That goes against even the government's plans for what it should be doing. Codes of practice had to be implemented and were devised as part of the Road Management Act. As I understand it, the government intends to retrospectively amend that legislation.

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) — I have great pleasure in rising in support of the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill. I am particularly pleased that it continues the support the government has given to Melbourne 2030, to transit cities and to activity centres, and its real commitment to a more compact and sustainable city. That is something that we on this side of the house certainly share. We share the idea that the city of Melbourne has to become more compact and more sustainable and that we have to improve transport through the city. I must say that our announcements around activity centres in particular made following the budget have been greeted poorly by Mr Guy, the shadow Minister for Planning and a member for Northern Metropolitan Region in the other place, because the opposition does not believe in a more compact city.

Mr Guy's suggestion was that one of the problems with the proposal was that it would result in more development in activity centres. That is exactly what we want — more development in activity centres. Of course we want more activities and more density; we want to develop those activity centres. One activity centre that is particularly important to me and to the member for Pascoe Vale is the Coburg activity centre, which was identified by the Minister for Planning in the other place as one of the principal activity centres that would be overseen by a special planning panel. A Development Assessment Committee (DAC) would be part of a whole-of-government approach to that principal activity centre. We would see an infrastructure plan by which we would look at resolving local issues in a partnership between local government and the state government, particularly some of the more difficult transport issues around that activity centre but also other areas where investment is needed to really get that principal activity centre happening.

We are talking about a major development. We are talking about 3000 extra housing units, we are talking about 4000 extra people, we are talking about more office space and we are talking about more commercial development. It is a very important component of

Melbourne 2030, of which Coburg 2020 is an integral part. This government is getting on with the job, and certainly as far as Coburg is concerned it is providing a very good partnership. The council response was very positive. It put out a press release in which it said the state government plan had merit.

Mr Wynne — Is this Moreland?

Mr CARLI — Moreland City Council said that it had merit and that, if done correctly, it would be very welcome. We are all committed to making sure it is done correctly. Unfortunately the councillor for city development, Jo Connellan, a member of the Greens party, decided to criticise it. She said it would disengage residents. She began to make accusations, saying that people would not be involved. But the community has been involved in the structure plan, and the council will determine the function and zoning of that activity centre. So the only thing that the DAC will do is facilitate the applications for development, and that is critical in this project.

That facilitation will probably be more critical in Coburg 2020 than in any other principal activity centre in the city of Melbourne. The reason is that most of the land that is available for development belongs to the council, and it is not possible to be both the planner and the proponent. Council tends to be the developer. In fact it is seeking a private development partner to develop a massive area of council land into this principal activity centre, and there is a clear conflict of interest if council intends to be the sole arbiter, the sole statutory planner for this development. The council officers I have spoken to understand that. We have been talking about this very problem for a long time: how does the planning process ensure there is arms-length decision making between proponent and planner?

The Development Assessment Committee will have two representatives from council, two representatives from the state government and an independent chair. That will remove conflicts of interest and give residents much more confidence in the process. It will ensure that developments in the Coburg activity centre are developments with which people in that community feel comfortable. The community will be involved in the structure planning, in the process of rezoning and in setting the performance criteria for a particular activity centre, but we will have a planning authority, a DAC, which will be able to make a decision and which will be at arms length from the proponent and at arms length from the developer. I think everyone in the council understands that, bar the Greens party.

The Greens have decided they want to fight this on an issue of principle, but what they are creating is an enormous conflict of interest. They want the council to be the principal developer in that area. They want council to plan and decide where investment ought to go, but at the same time they want council to be the sole arbiter as the planning authority. That is an enormous conflict of interest. It is impossible, in my view, to be both planner and proponent. We have a very good proposal. It will work wonderfully in the Coburg activity centre. The only people creating a fuss are members of the Greens party, who are trying to seize a political opportunity rather than getting on with the job of developing Coburg 2020.

I would like to go a little into what Coburg 2020 means. It is important that members of this house understand the importance of this development in the northern suburbs and how it will revitalise the environment. At the moment Coburg has an ageing housing and shopping infrastructure. It is a product of the 1970s, when houses were knocked down and supermarkets were built. There is a massive amount of car parking space and a massive amount of open space but very little else bar the supermarkets and a few shops. The intention is to revitalise that environment through a modern form of urban revitalisation, one that incorporates modern design, energy-efficient architecture and engineering solutions to lay strong foundations for the future of Coburg and the northern suburbs.

That is a vision that we have worked on collectively at local government, state government and community level, and I must say that up to this point the Greens have agreed with our vision. They said, 'Yes, we want a more compact city, and we want to revitalise Coburg'. But what happens when we get to the point of saying, 'How do we actually manage this development' is that the Greens want to cut the project adrift. They do not want a partnership with state government. They do not want us to have an infrastructure plan that we can share or to understand how state government decisions fit in with the development of that centre. They seem to want to go it alone. They want council to go it alone, to be the developer and the planning authority. That is a recipe for failure.

It should be very clear that we have a shared vision for Coburg 2020, or the Coburg initiative, as it is often called. It will generate thousands of jobs, it will produce future social and economic activity and it will provide a lot of housing. We estimate that close to \$1 billion will be involved in the revitalisation of Coburg. We believe that an extra 3000 dwellings will fit into that area. We believe it will revitalise shopping along Sydney Road,

Coburg. We believe it will provide great public spaces and areas of great opportunity and improved pedestrian linkages. We are interested in ensuring that there will be a level of affordable housing there. We want to work with the Minister for Housing, who is in the house at the moment, we want to work with the Minister for Public Transport and we want to work with the Minister for Roads and Ports. We want to ensure that there is a whole-of-government approach to this incredibly important area of urban renewal.

As I said, this is a shared vision of mine, as the local member for Brunswick, and of the member for Pascoe Vale. This is a vision that will have an influence on both our electorates. We understand the importance of Melbourne 2030. We understand the importance of having a more sustainable city. We want to get on with the job. We think we have been given the tools to get on with the job. We are very keen to work with Moreland council, and I think the majority of Moreland councillors are keen to work with the state government and its local MPs. But, as I said, there are members of the Greens party in Moreland who would rather play politics with these important projects. They are trying to turn an important project of urban renewal into a subject of political conflict to be able to attack the Victorian government and their state representatives.

Certainly I want to ensure my commitment is to the realisation of the Coburg initiative — the realisation of a vision that we have been working towards for many years now. It is a vision that we believe fits with Melbourne 2030 and that will produce an enormous improvement to the area. We have already seen a lot of redevelopment in that area. Lots of housing has been established on the site that was Pentridge Prison. We are now looking at commercial and office developments within that precinct. Council has made a fabulous amount of investment in its own infrastructure.

We are looking at new sporting and library facilities. We are looking at a lot of public investment, but more importantly we are looking at private investment of a lot of money in an area which is close to the city. I think it is only about 8 kilometres from the central business district. It is also close to Melbourne Airport. The area is served by regular train and tram services and a new SmartBus service. Important road links are scattered through the area, which really is a transport hub with an enormous amount of promise.

I suspect very few parts of Melbourne have the opportunities that Coburg presents. We are particularly keen to get housing into the area. As I said, in the 1970s houses were bulldozed and a massive amount of car

parking was built. We want to see some of that housing re-established through denser housing centred around an important transport hub and an important area of economic activity which has offices as well as retail precincts, and which is really buzzing.

The area still maintains the multicultural feel that is so characteristic of Coburg and extends also to Moreland and Sydney Road. I should say that apart from Coburg being a principal activity centre, Sydney Road, Brunswick, constitutes part of a major activity centre in the city of Moreland. That too is an area where we envisage more economic and retail activity and more housing.

We subscribe to the idea that we should have a more compact and sustainable city in Melbourne, one that we can share a vision of. To do that we need tools and mechanisms. We need to ensure there is a planning process that people have confidence in. The Development Advisory Committee will provide local confidence. It will certainly ensure that council as a developer is also accountable and, as I said before, that it does not try to be both planner and proponent. I think it is possibly the best model and to a certain extent it has got the council off the hook. Members of the council were looking at what mechanism would be appropriate, given the situation where so much of the land that is available now for development actually belongs to the council.

The Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill is a further commitment to Melbourne 2030. A number of projects, particularly transit cities, are funded in the budget. I certainly look forward to seeing projects that arise out of the Coburg activity centre being funded in future budgets to ensure that Coburg 2020 is truly realised.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — The people of Lowan are not inspired by this year's state budget. In fact they are extremely disappointed that after nine years they still have a budget that carries Labor's stamp of increasing taxes and decreasing services.

This budget leaves rural and regional Victoria out in the cold and favours spending in Melbourne. It again shows this city-centric Labor government cannot manage money. Last year's budget will be overspent by \$1.85 billion, and since 1999 this Labor government has overspent its budgets by approximately \$12 billion.

While claiming to give tax cuts, the reality is that Labor is planning to increase its tax take on payroll tax, stamp duty and land tax by a staggering \$1.5 billion. To highlight that, Victorians now pay the highest level of property stamp duty of any state, land tax has increased

by over 160 per cent to almost \$1 billion since 1999, payroll tax will have increased by nearly 70 per cent, insurance taxes will have risen by 106 per cent, and they are going even higher, and police fines have more than quadrupled since 1999 to over \$400 million per annum. Getting back to insurance taxes, again we hear that the fire services levy will increase in the very near future. This government is swimming in money.

Western Victoria, as we all know, had a good start in May, the budget month, not because of the budget but because of good rainfall. The rainfall has boosted the confidence of not only the farmers but also the community in general. It has lifted the water in our reservoirs from 3.3 per cent to 3.4 per cent. Last year at this time it was at 4.1 per cent. So it was with extreme disappointment and anger we read that this budget paper says the drought is over. The government is cutting regional development funds by 40 per cent. For dryland farmers the drought, or the money drought as we know it, will not be over until farmers' returns improve, hopefully after the harvest at the end of this year.

So many families are struggling not only with the combined effects of the drought but also with the rising costs of fuel and groceries and with increasing red tape. It is extremely disappointing that people in my part of the world see the Prime Minister who has been in the job six months throw his hands in the air and say he gives up and cannot do any more for families in relation to fuel prices.

We all know that it was a Labor government that brought in the fuel excise, that it was a Labor government that increased it according to the consumer price index (CPI) every six months and that it was a coalition government that stopped that back in 2002. In my understanding, petrol and diesel prices would be another 15 or 16 cents a litre higher if the coalition government had not stopped those CPI increases. Again, we are very disappointed that after six months the Prime Minister has given up on trying to do something for working families. With the state receiving record incomes, this budget has missed many opportunities in health services, aged care, education, agricultural research and, importantly, job creation.

I want to take a couple of minutes to deal with the Lowan electorate, which I have great pride in representing. We are extremely disappointed that a second ambulance paramedic unit has not been allocated to the Wimmera area. We have one paramedic unit working after hours in the area between Ballarat and the border with South Australia, a distance of about 400 kilometres or more.

Ms Beattie interjected.

Mr DELAHUNTY — If a patient goes into the Horsham or Nhill hospitals and has to be transferred to Ballarat or anywhere else, they have to wait until the next shift comes on the next morning. Some people have had to wait 16¹/₂ hours for the transfer. It is intolerable, and it cannot be allowed to continue. We are looking for the state government to support a second ambulance paramedic unit at Horsham.

Health services, and particularly aged-care services, have been overlooked. Coleraine and Merino need upgrades and the Edenhope hospital needs redevelopment. It was highlighted in the *Hamilton Spectator* yesterday that the Coleraine aged-care facilities are some of the worst in the state. There is surprise that the Coleraine facilities passed the 2008 accreditation. Importantly, for the sake of those seniors in our community who need these facilities as well as the staff and the families who visit residents, urgent funding is needed to improve the facilities.

I turn to talk about the emergency services helicopter; I heard the member for Yuroke refer to it. We welcome that service to western Victoria. We are very pleased that someone overruled the Premier, who said we were too far away for it. That is a great announcement for western Victoria, and we welcome the start of that service, which we hope will be early next year.

In education — —

Mr Herbert — It's fantastic, isn't it?

Mr DELAHUNTY — There was a little bit in there! There was a little bit of money for the Haven campus of the Horsham West-Haven Primary School to redevelop or replace its relocatable classrooms. There was a small amount of money. I have 56 schools in my electorate, and I can say that Baimbridge College in Hamilton — the P-12 school there, which is a great school — badly needs redevelopment. Horsham Secondary College and, importantly, what I think is the only memorial college in Victoria, Dimboola Memorial Secondary College, are badly in need of redevelopment. We have had a visit from the Deputy Prime Minister to that great school, but we cannot get any money from the state government to redevelop it.

We have no money for roads and bridge infrastructure. That has been overlooked by this government. The roads minister is at the table, and I say to him that the amount of money being spent — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DELAHUNTY — I've caught him on the radar! Given the concern about rail and such things, the amount of money in this budget being spent on road and bridge infrastructure for country Victoria, is a drop in the bucket. If we are going to move products like blue gum timber and mineral sands, we need more funding to improve bridge infrastructure and, importantly, road infrastructure. The reality is that funding for that in my area is one of the lowest in the state.

In relation to public housing, we welcome some of the announcements that have been made. There is good support for public housing, particularly in Horsham, but more needs to be done in some of the outlying areas.

Agricultural research has been overlooked. At the Grain Innovation Park in Horsham and the Hamilton Research Institute we are seeing a decrease in staff, a decrease in investment and a decrease in support from this city-centric Labor government. Agriculture has a big impact on the employment and economic fortunes of western Victorians. We need the support of the state government in leading the charge in trying to improve our agricultural research, and more importantly in providing the opportunity for farmers to make a dollar or save a dollar. Under this government they are losing dollars hand over fist.

One of the key things we were looking for was a water tank subsidy, and the absence of that from the budget was very disappointing. As you know, Acting Speaker, people in the metropolitan area or those who are on reticulated systems can apply for a water tank subsidy of a couple of hundred dollars, but that does not apply to people outside the system. Seventy per cent of the tourism operators in the Lowan electorate — around the Grampians, near Mount Arapiles or in the Little Desert National Park — are not on reticulated water. They miss out on the subsidy, farmers miss out on it and people who live outside towns miss out on it. It is an injustice that must be overcome, and we are disappointed that there is nothing in the budget for that subsidy.

I spoke earlier about the fire services levy, which is increasing at a rapid rate under this government. Today if you pay \$1000 in fire insurance you then pay on top of that the fire services levy, a terrorism levy, GST and stamp duty. It is getting towards a 90 per cent increase on the original \$1000.

Mr Weller — How much?

Mr DELAHUNTY — Nearly 90 per cent. People are not insuring or are self-insuring. Many properties

around the Grampians at the time of the 2006 fire were not insured. As you know, Acting Speaker, people who do not insure can get a bill from the Country Fire Authority if the CFA puts out a fire out on their property, but how could the CFA send a bill to a farmer or land-holder when the fire started in a national park? We need a more equitable system for funding the CFA and our other emergency services. Users of the multipurpose taxi program, which was cut by this Labor government, are very disappointed that there is not more support in that area.

In the last few minutes I want to cover some of the areas that come under my shadow portfolio responsibility. This is a very low-scoring sport and recreation budget. It has been put to me in my new role as shadow minister for sport and recreation that one of the main concerns for Victorians is over the lack of access to and the increasing costs associated with the maintenance of sporting facilities, funding events and the general overheads that go with those things, and the access costs of being involved. Struggling sporting clubs, which are staffed mostly by volunteers, would like a small percentage of the money that is being spent on the big-ticket items across Melbourne. Again, the grassroots clubs are crying out for some support.

Football and netball grants have been halved under the Brumby government's budget this year. They have dropped from 77 grants in 2006–07 to 25 to 35 in this year's budget. Local sporting clubs provide local communities with important health and social benefits, and this government needs to explain to them why it has not made greater provision to support our local sporting groups and why it has scaled back the support to these type of programs.

Another thing has been missing. Back in 2002 the government made a pre-election promise that it would fund the building of an international skating facility. What has happened to it? It has disappeared into thin air. We have never seen it. It has probably melted in the snow!

Mr Kotsiras — It is a broken promise.

Mr DELAHUNTY — It is another broken promise. After the government promised that in 2002, the 2004–05 budget earmarked \$9.6 million over three years for the development of that facility. The then Treasurer, now the Premier, said:

The government is committing a further \$9.6 million to a new ice sports facility, in addition to the \$400 000 already allocated, to further cement Victoria's reputation as the sporting capital of Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

What has happened to it? It has gone into thin air.

Mr Kotsiras — Who got the money?

Mr DELAHUNTY — We are not sure what happened to the money — it has all gone on consultants. In October 2006 a media release was put out by the then Minister for Sport and Recreation. He stated then:

Winter sports enthusiasts could soon be indulging their passion closer to home with the release today of designs of a proposed national ice sports centre in Melbourne Docklands.

Mr Kotsiras interjected.

Mr DELAHUNTY — Where is it? It is in brown paper bags, as the member for Bulleen said. The government has never given a time line for the completion of this facility. The current Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs has never mentioned the skate sporting centre in Parliament, nor has there been any media release, and he has never mentioned the supposed new ice-skating centre that was promised back in 2002.

Mr Kotsiras — He is embarrassed.

Mr DELAHUNTY — He should be embarrassed, because nothing has happened.

For youth affairs, this is a very lacklustre budget. It has scaled down the important youth affairs programs that foster volunteerism among our young Victorians, who are our future. We must work with them, assist them and give them the opportunity to grow within Victoria, not only to help their families and friends but also to help Victoria grow and prosper. But this government has scaled down those important youth affairs programs. Up to 1500 young people have been slashed from the advanced youth development program, down from nearly 11 500 in 2006–07 to between 10 000 and 10 250 with this budget. So there is an enormous wind back in relation to that.

Mr Kotsiras — It should be going up.

Mr DELAHUNTY — It should be going up, you are right — but in fact the number has gone down in this budget. This program is important because it gives Victorian schoolchildren the opportunity to work in partnership with various community organisations, giving them stronger links with their communities and fostering the voluntary spirit.

As you know, Acting Speaker, country Victoria relies on volunteers. Now that we work seven days a week and shops are open seven days a week, we are not

seeing the volunteers come through like we used to in years gone by. The loss of this program does an enormous injustice to our youth, but, importantly, it does an injustice to Victorians generally. There is very little in relation to youth affairs delivered in this budget. General services are much needed for our young people.

Apart from the youth mentoring project, which, as I said, has been overlooked, it is a very lacklustre budget. There is a small amount of money for veterans affairs, but on the whole this budget is very uninspiring. When you think of the money that is pouring into this government's coffers, with nearly 30 per cent of this budget coming from GST payments and over 40-odd per cent coming from commonwealth government grants, you realise this government is swimming in money. This is an uninspiring budget, and my constituents are very disappointed with it — in fact, they are angry. From the point of view of the portfolios that I represent as a shadow minister, we see no vision and no future. We also see no future for this Labor government. It is time it was tipped out and a coalition government replaced it.

Ms BEATTIE (Yuroke) — I am very pleased to rise in support of the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill, otherwise known as the budget. Members know that this is the first budget brought down by John Lenders, the Treasurer in the other place. What a welcome sight it was to see him walk through the door of this chamber to read the budget! I would like to congratulate him on the excellent work he has done. It is a great Labor budget because it delivers for working families, and it continues in the great tradition of this government over the previous eight years.

The budget is good for all Victorians, but it is really great for my electorate. That is what I want to talk about today; I want to talk firstly about the initiatives which will be of benefit to all of Victoria, including those specifically for my electorate. With Victoria in 2007 recording the highest number of births since 1971, this budget's commitment of over \$179 million for maternal and child health will ensure that families across the state will have the services they need for their children.

The 1.3 million Victorians who are admitted each year into the state's public hospitals will benefit greatly from the massive \$1.81 billion boost to health. Unlike the Liberals, who closed hospitals, closed schools, slashed funding and sacked thousands of nurses across the state, this government in this budget has delivered more funding for elective surgery, outpatients appointments and emergency departments and has provided the single

biggest investment in ambulance services in the state's history.

Unlike the Liberals, who slashed police numbers and sat idle while crime rates soared across this state, this government has delivered a record \$1.75 billion Victoria Police budget and an additional \$657 million community protection package. The budget also delivers 350 additional police, which builds on the 1400 extra police that this government has added since 1999. My congratulations go to Chief Commissioner Christine Nixon for the way in which she has managed the force. It is a commitment that will ensure Victoria has more police on the streets than ever before, and it will ensure that Victoria remains the safest place to live, work and raise a family.

There is also no doubt that the \$1.43 billion in tax cuts and reduced business costs, including cuts to stamp duty, land tax, payroll tax and WorkCover premiums, and the \$94 million to improve workforce skills will benefit a great number of people across the state. Why are we able to cut those WorkCover premiums? Because we run the WorkCover scheme so well. I well remember members opposite saying that spending on advertising workplace safety was a waste of money. I do not think ensuring workers' safety is a waste of money at all; I think it is money well spent, and that now employers are seeing the benefit of that.

As Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs I am also very pleased that this budget allocates a \$19.7 million package to ensure that refugees settling in Victoria will have better access to health, justice, education and improved interpreting and translation services. During the past 10 years more than 32 000 people who have been granted visas through the commonwealth's humanitarian program have settled here in Victoria. This funding will provide these refugees and multicultural groups with the support and services that they need to settle into life in Victoria.

The budget will also provide welcome relief to first home buyers, reducing stamp duty through the adjustment of all thresholds as well as enabling first home buyers to receive both the first home owner bonus and the principal place of residence stamp duty concession. As my electorate includes the growing suburbs of Craigieburn and Roxburgh Park, this relief will be welcomed by the many first home buyers in my area.

I am also pleased that many other initiatives in this budget will directly affect my electorate of Yuroke and continue the excellent work that the Bracks government started and which has been continued under the

Brumby government in that area. One area where this government's ongoing investment is greatly welcomed in my electorate is education. I am pleased to see the Parliamentary Secretary for Education here listening to my contribution. Unlike the Liberals, who closed 370 schools across the state and sacked over 8000 teachers, this government has continued to show that education is its no. 1 priority. This budget reaffirms the commitment, with over \$592 million for new schools and modernised school facilities across the state. This allocation represents the second phase of the Victorian schools plan to rebuild, renovate or extend every government school in every community in Victoria.

In my electorate we have already seen some of those great improvements at schools such as Willmott Park Primary School and Gladstone Park Secondary College. I often visit these schools — as a matter of fact I was at Gladstone Park Secondary College just last week — and it is terrific to see the improvements that have been made under this government and to know that these upgrades will enable these schools to continue to provide high-quality education to many young people for many, many years.

The funding in this budget will extend that great work by delivering a new primary school in Craigieburn West, due to open in the 2011 school year, as well as providing \$7 million for stage 2 of the Craigieburn North P-12 school. Stage 1 of this school will open in 2009, and both of these schools will provide students with access to high-quality modern facilities that will enhance teaching and learning.

Another area where this government's ongoing investment is greatly welcomed in my electorate is public transport. For many residents in my electorate public transport options have been greatly increased under this government — and I say 'greatly' without fear of contradiction. Residents have warmly welcomed the additional rail options, with the \$115 million Craigieburn rail extension providing more than 50 extra scheduled services to and from the city each day the new train stations at Craigieburn and Roxburgh Park.

Residents have also welcomed the additional bus options, with additional services making general travel and connections with local train stations even easier. As a result of the Hume-Moreland bus review more improvements were delivered, which, as of 19 May, provided two brand-new bus routes for the Craigieburn area and a massive 880 — that is right, member for Hastings, 880 — new weekly services.

Mr Burgess — I didn't say anything!

Ms BEATTIE — This government has made sure that residents are provided with better public transport coverage and connection. I have received many, many phone calls, personal visits and emails and letters from residents who are very thankful for this investment.

This budget now provides even more public transport benefits for residents in my electorate and across this state, with a record \$1.8 billion investment, delivering extra morning peak services, station upgrades, significant road projects and new transport services in the regions. I am very pleased to say that includes \$30.2 million for an extra track at the Craigieburn station. That will run two more morning services, but it will also reduce the bottleneck that occurs when the V/Line trains are travelling via the station to the city or to regional centres, because that line is the main Melbourne to Sydney freight line. So this additional investment in the Craigieburn train station will add capacity in the short term, allowing extra peak-hour services and reducing overcrowding. These works will also help accommodate future growth in passenger numbers by allowing more services to be added in the future. That is another terrific public transport initiative that will be greatly welcomed to my electorate.

There is another great initiative in this budget which will be particularly welcomed in my electorate — that is, the \$10 million boost to local Victorian Football League (VFL) grounds across the state. Since 1999 this government has provided extensive funding for sport and recreation initiatives and it continues to do so in this budget. I understand the member for Williamstown's electorate was also a recipient of some of that funding, as was the electorate of the member for Tarneit, so they both know firsthand how welcome these initiatives are. All of us here in Victoria know that Australian Rules football is not just a game; it is a way of life for some people. So funding for VFL grounds will help support the VFL competition for the future and reaffirm Victoria's reputation as the premier football competition state.

I am very pleased to announce that in that package \$2.5 million was allocated for a new VFL quality football facility at Craigieburn. This is a fantastic initiative which involves the cooperation of the state government — it involves great partnerships, which again are a hallmark of this government — the Hume City Council, the developer Stockland, the VFL, the Australian Football League (AFL), the Richmond Football Club and the VFL Coburg Tigers. This facility will provide great benefits to the electorate of Yuroke, which has developed quite a reputation for producing great sportsmen and sportswomen. Importantly, this facility will further enhance the development of sport

across the north. On Tuesday, 13 May, I had the pleasure of attending the Highland greenfield site in Craigieburn with the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs for the announcement of this facility. And how excited everybody was! The facility will become a focal point for football in the area, which will no doubt be a hub of AFL development, with pathways to elite levels and community football, right through from juniors to seniors.

I am very pleased to inform the house that the first kick on the new VFL site was taken by 21-year-old Richmond Tigers Football Club half-forward, Matt White, who is a resident of Hume. Matt was accompanied by Jarrod Oakley-Nicholls, another future champion for the Tigers. I offered Matt a chance to kick the first goal through two little wooden posts in the ground. He took up that challenge and, like a true northern suburbs recruit, he delivered the ball right through the middle. I am sure Terry Wallace will be pleased to hear this! The Craigieburn football facility is a significant boost to the northern suburbs sporting community and will bring VFL and perhaps even AFL football to the area, with the Coburg Tigers slated to play and train there.

This is a terrific budget. I am proud to be part of a Labor government that has developed this great budget to the people of Victoria. It is good for families, good for business, good for schools, good for our health services and good for the disadvantaged. The budget plans to maximise opportunities and to address the challenges of a growing population.

Once again I congratulate the Treasurer on his first budget. As I said in my opening remarks, it was good to see him come through the Assembly door as the Treasurer, because he had previously been a member of this house. I am sure that is not the last time we will see him coming through the door. He will come through that door next year and the year after that for many more years to come with great budgets that will again deliver for Victoria's families. He will never lose sight of the fact that Labor in Victoria governs for the people. It does not govern for its mates; there is no knocking on the door for priorities for its mates: Labor governs for all Victorians. I commend the appropriation bill to the house.

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — Can I just say from the outset that I do not know which budget the member for Yuroke was reading, but it was not the 2008–09 budget, because this budget is about Labor mates and nothing about Victorians.

This budget has failed the Bulleen electorate, failed multicultural Victoria and failed to deliver a prosperous future for Victoria. The budget indeed discriminates according to postcodes. This budget discriminates against you depending on where you live. We in Bulleen have experienced nine dark years of Labor government — nine dark years of a government that has ignored the residents of Bulleen. When I look at the budget for allocations to do with my electorate, I find there is absolutely not a cent for Bulleen. Bulleen has been abandoned. Schools are collapsing, students are wet and cold, and roads are crumbling. It is great to see the Minister for Roads and Ports in the chamber. This Labor government refuses to provide any assistance to the people of Bulleen.

I turn to look at a few examples in my area. Templestowe College is a great school with great staff and a great principal, but until recently the walls of its buildings were falling down and students were at risk of being hurt, so the school put up a fence. After the fence had been up for a few months the school begged the government to assist in securing the wall to make sure it would not come crumbling down on students. The cost of the maintenance was over \$100 000, of which the government provided two-thirds and the school at the request of the government provided the other third. The school had no option but to rectify the problem, because the lives of students were in danger.

But I ask the government: why not put up the full amount to ensure the safety of all students? The wall is now secured and is not in danger of collapsing, but the school is out of pocket to the tune of around \$30 000. Why does the government not do the right thing and provide the extra \$30 000 that Templestowe College needs to go towards other things, such as books, teachers and equipment, rather than towards maintaining the school building, which is the responsibility of the government?

The second example is Bulleen Heights School. Would members believe that this special school is a school without a library? A school without a library is like a pub without beer. The kids at this school have special needs, yet they have to travel three or four blocks to the public library in order to get a book to read. Every morning I see them travelling in pairs down to the public library. Even in rainy, cold and windy conditions these young kids have to travel to the public library because there is not a library at their school. You would think that in 2008 every school would have a library. Unfortunately this school does not have one.

The school council and the principal are still upset that the government is not providing any money. The

principal is reported in the local newspaper as saying that the school put in a submission but that for some reason the state government has ignored the submission and provided no explanation whatsoever for doing so. When the newspaper requested an interview with the education minister, she denied the request. A newspaper article states:

A two-line response from the education department said it 'constantly monitors school provision needs' and that 'school management teams are best placed to make decisions regarding how school spaces are utilised'.

Could someone please tell me what that means? We have young children who are forced to walk to the public library because they do not have a library at their own school and the minister refuses to come out of her heated, carpeted room to see the poor conditions at this school and provide extra funds. She has put out a two-line statement that no-one understands. I call on the government to provide the funds for this school to build its own library.

As I said, it is good to see the Minister for Roads and Ports at the table. Again I remind the minister of Templestowe Road and King Street. How many times have I mentioned these two roads to the minister? Every time I mention them, the minister ignores them.

Mr Pallas interjected.

Mr KOTSIRAS — You ignore them! Will it take someone to be hurt or killed before the minister takes some action? I have asked the minister many times to come out and have a look at these two roads, but he has ignored my requests.

Two other intersections are very dangerous. At the intersection of Fitzsimmons Lane and Porter Street there is a roundabout, and it is very difficult to cross there. I know that the member for Eltham drives past the roundabout and crosses the intersection, and I know how difficult he finds that. He tells me that as he approaches the intersection he prays to make sure he gets over to the other side in one piece. I ask the minister to provide some money to install traffic lights at the intersection. The T-intersection at the corner of Bulleen Road and Golden Way is also dangerous. It is difficult to make right-hand turns during peak hour. Does someone have to be hurt before money is made available to install traffic lights at the intersection? I urge the minister to do something about that as well.

Victoria is lagging behind the other states in innovation. While other states like Queensland have moved forward, here in Victoria we have a minister who is out of his depth and who has no vision, no plan and no

understanding. He thinks that if he signs a few memorandums of understanding he will be at the forefront of innovation. How can someone be proactive and run such an important portfolio when he cannot manage even his own department? I had a quick look at the department's web page. It praises the Innovation Economy Advisory Board and lists its members. Do members know who two of the board's members are shown as? The web page states:

The Hon. John Brumby, MP, Minister for Innovation ...

The Hon. Lynne Kosky, MP, Minister for Education and Training.

Dr Edward de Bono appears as one of the international members of the board. Those details on the department's web page have not been changed since 2001. How can a minister look after the important area of innovation if he cannot manage even his own department?

In 2005 the former Treasurer, who was also the Minister for Innovation and is now the Premier, said that Victoria would one day be among the top five biotechnology locations in the world. Unfortunately when the federal government brought down its budget, it had cut funding, but the state government refused to criticise the federal government. It is disappointing. I am sure that if the Howard government had done that, this government would have been the first to criticise, but because the current federal government is its mate, the state government has refused to criticise Kim Carr, the federal Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research. I understand the member for Eltham is a close friend of Kim Carr's, and I did not hear one criticism from him.

I turn quickly to address the area of multicultural affairs. It is disappointing that there is not one new initiative in this budget to try to make the most of our cultural diversity. There is an urgent need for a comprehensive policy that includes a vision for the future. Providing assistance is good — the funds are good — but the government needs to do more. It needs to think about the future and how to use the assets that we have here in Victoria to ensure that we have a good future for our children.

For almost nine years now Labor has shown neither the vision nor the commitment to implement programs that draw on the success that lies within Victoria's multicultural fibre. As I said, it needs a strong plan. It needs to assist people from linguistically diverse backgrounds to find employment. It needs to work towards a nationally recognised interpreter card. Currently we have a Victorian interpreter card, but once

you cross the border into New South Wales you cannot use it. I have called upon the Minister for Multicultural Affairs many times to take this to a ministerial conference and try to get all the other ministers on board so they can all agree and people can use an interpreter card in New South Wales, in Queensland and at all levels of government. At present it stops once you cross the border.

The other thing this government has failed to do is ensure that we make the most of the fact that we have people here who speak many languages. As the Acting Speaker would know, at the last election our policy was to make languages compulsory from prep to year 10, because we see it as very important. Unfortunately this government has cut funding for languages in schools, and schools have been forced to cut programs because they do not have the funds. Languages have become a luxury extra rather than something that schools should be teaching. Every child should be learning a second language, and preferably a third and fourth language. If we are to think about our future, our children must be able to speak more than one language.

International students are vital to the economy of Victoria. The sector itself is worth over a billion dollars a year, but recent events in Victoria have put that at risk. We have seen students from India being attacked, and yet this government has not done anything to convey to students that this is a safe place, that they are welcome to come to Victoria because it is safe and secure. I have called upon this government to do something, to be proactive and not to wait until we lose this sector, because they will go to the USA or to Great Britain.

Mr Nardella — Like what? What is your solution?

Mr KOTSIRAS — If the minister, if the government and if the mushrooms on the other side have no idea, perhaps they should not be there. Perhaps they should resign and go and find other jobs. They have so many thousands of public servants and 20 advisers per minister, yet they cannot come up with one single policy on their own. This is very disappointing.

I wish to quote from some discussion boards. They say:

... it's in their blood Aussies, they were, they are and they will be bloody racist ...

This is from an internet bulletin board. It goes on:

... it's so sad an Indian who dreams and comes to Australia thinking this would change his life in a better way ... his life will be ruined ...

Another one says:

... you have to face the fact no matter how smart you are, how intelligent you are, how good you can speak English minus accent and slang, and how normal a human being you are, your skin and language and background will make a difference in Australia ... you start to ask yourself if you made a right decision moving to Australia.

This is the type of feedback we are getting from overseas. I will say it again: this industry is worth over a billion dollars a year, and yet this government is sitting on its hands and doing absolutely nothing to protect it. It is a pity. All the government is good at is media spin. It is fantastic at media spin. It can spend millions on programs, and if they fail, it just buries them and spends millions doing the same thing again, because it likes to stay in power. Its members like the white cars, they like the advisers they have and they like the big offices, but they do not like to serve the people of Victoria.

I have put in a number of FOI applications, as have other members on this side. Six weeks later the departments come back to me and ask me to explain what I mean by the word 'expenses' or 'travel'. They ask me what I mean by the word 'documents'. Once you define 'documents', which is in the act, you then have to wait another six weeks if you are lucky. I put in an FOI application on taxi vouchers because of the amount of money the Victorian Multicultural Commission spends on taxi vouchers. Its staff have used taxi vouchers to go to Christmas parties. They have used publicly funded vouchers to go to their own Christmas parties! This is what they are doing with the money. Rather than putting it back into the community, rather than helping newly arrived migrants, they are using this money to travel to Christmas parties and sporting events, which is a real shame.

Because some people are very slow to understand what they can and cannot do, the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development gives them a play-acting scenario like this:

Penny: Hi, John, could I please get a couple of taxi vouchers? I have to go to a meeting in Docklands.

John: Would you like to take a Met ticket — it would be really easy to take the 86 tram — drops you straight at the door.

Penny: Sure — it would be much better for the environment and cheaper too.

They have to play-act to ensure they do not abuse the system. There has been review after review. The finding of each review has been that they are continuing to abuse the taxi voucher system. Either the ministers

are incompetent or something is wrong in the departments, and we wonder why they are not providing services to Victorians.

This budget is a failure. It fails Bulleen. It fails multicultural Victoria. It does not plan for the future. It is an absolute disgrace, and the mushrooms on the other side should be embarrassed.

Mr NOONAN (Williamstown) — I have listened closely to the member for Bulleen, and the one thing I will agree with him on is that there is no place for racism in this state or this country.

I am very pleased to speak in support of the appropriation bill. At the outset I want to congratulate the Treasurer in another place, John Lenders, on his first budget. I am confident that this budget will be one of many very good budgets to come from him in the future. The budget continues to deliver the prudent financial management of this government, which is more important than ever right now. It reconfirms Victoria's AAA credit rating, and creates a competitive environment for business. It was very pleasing to see the Treasurer off in New South Wales and Queensland selling the merits of this budget and of doing business in Victoria.

The budget provides major new support for families, particularly on the back of the baby boom. I should say that I feel partially responsible for that baby boom as my family delivered one of the 73 000 plus babies born last year. I should also say that the peak of the last boom was in 1971, which was when I was born.

The budget provides record investment in education and lifelong learning. I will touch on some of those outcomes in my electorate. It provides high-quality health services. It pumps \$1.8 billion into Victoria's transport network, improves community safety and access to justice, provides leadership on climate change and water, and places a high priority on regional Victoria. It is a great budget for all Victorians. It is a budget with a view to meeting the present and future challenges facing families and business in Victoria. On the whole it is balanced and fair. It is also my first budget as the member for Williamstown. Pleasingly I can say confidently that this budget will deliver many great projects for my local community, which I will spend most of my time today speaking about.

The member for Yuroke touched on an outcome in her electorate in relation to the development of the Victorian Football League (VFL) ground at Craigieburn. I will start my contribution by talking about the outcome at the Williamstown football ground.

As I said in my inaugural speech to the Parliament last year, the Williamstown Football Club is an institution in my area. The old stand and historic club rooms at the football ground are really in need of urgent restoration. I made it plain in my inaugural speech that I wanted to be there to help the local community and, critically, the users of that ground in upgrading the grandstand. Happily I can say that in this budget we did deliver, and in a very big way. In fact, of the \$10 million package allocated to the VFL grounds, the Williamstown ground was allocated \$3 million, which was the highest allocation from the \$10 million pool.

The ground improvements will be supported by the Hobsons Bay City Council, AFL Victoria and the club itself. It will allow a major redevelopment of the grandstand, which has been planned for the last seven years. I should put on record that the previous member for Williamstown was not able to deliver that in the last seven years, notwithstanding his status in this place.

The redevelopment of the ground will create one of the premier facilities in the west, with plans to incorporate a 300-seat convention centre as part of the package. To put that in context, currently in the inner west we would have to travel some 10–15 kilometres to get that sort of facility. I am pleased that the 300-seat facility will be in the top tier of the grandstand and will incorporate a glass back to provide visitors with one of the most magnificent views across Port Phillip Bay. It will be a very special place, and I want to record my thanks to the club president, Trevor Monti, and his board for having the vision to think that this could be delivered in our community.

I also want to note at this stage that the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs has provided tremendous support for this ground in that he came out and looked at the facilities in the lead-up to the announcement in the budget. In fact, he visited the electorate some three times in the six months leading up to the announcement about funding for the ground. I was also able to get him down there after the budget had been delivered and get him into the Williamstown footy jumper. I know he is a Hawks supporter but he was happy to go along with that, given the crowning moment of the club. That can only be topped by another premiership later this year.

In terms of education, I commend the Premier, the Treasurer and the Minister for Education for continuing to invest heavily in our public education system. Since 1999 the government has transformed public education in my electorate. The schools are currently experiencing capacity enrolments and unprecedented levels of support, which is very pleasing. A total of

\$34 million has been invested in upgrading, rebuilding and renovating primary schools at Altona North, Altona Gate, Kingsville, Seaholme, Spotswood and Wembley. I also have two high schools in my electorate, being Williamstown High School and Bayside Secondary College. I should not forget the funding for the Yarraville Special Development School, which performs a critical role in my electorate. They are all great schools, supported by great administrators and families and students.

As part of this year's budget an additional \$5 million has been allocated as stage 2 funding to complete the P-9 Bayside College project, which will bring Altona Gate Primary School onto the same site. It comes on top of the \$6 million allocated from last year's budget. The result will be an \$11 million school in the Altona North area — an area that is not awash with money and which really relies very heavily on public education.

This will be a state-of-the-art school, to be complemented by the placement of a public library on the grounds, resulting in a \$2 million investment. I recently visited the school and spoke with Mike Kerin, the principal. I was able to see the construction of the stage 1 component of the new college. I have to say that the entire school community is very buoyant about the future of the school, particularly given the placement of the library.

The other area of the budget that received a record boost was ambulance services. I am pleased to say that my electorate has not missed out on that record investment. It received some \$2 million for the provision of new peak period paramedic units to be based in the Yarraville area. This new peak period paramedic unit will be supported by additional ambulance stretcher vehicles to cater for the busy times of the day when loads are particularly high. I understand from the minister that the new service will be based in the Yarraville area, but it broadly covers a fair bit of the Maribyrnong and Hobson Bay areas and is part of a package of 13 new peak period units. It is very important for the constituents in my electorate.

The regional food kitchen is another great project to receive funding in this budget. That kitchen will deliver meals for the Meals on Wheels program. The project was named the Community Chef and was launched on 7 May by the consortium of 14 local councils, together with the patron, celebrity chef Gabrielle Gaté. I was fortunate to be asked to speak at the launch of that Community Chef initiative and to announce that the state government would contribute \$6 million as part of the budget to assist with the construction of the kitchen.

That kitchen will be owned and operated by the 14 councils, which include the two councils in my electorate, Hobsons Bay and Maribyrnong. It is amazing that the kitchen will supply up to 2 million meals for those 14 local councils — which is a lot of meals! I hope that kitchen will be located in Hobsons Bay. I have been pushing for that to happen as it would create jobs in my area and would support the local economy. I commend Minister Neville on supporting this initiative, and, as I said, I remain hopeful that the kitchen will be built in the Hobsons Bay area.

Public transport was boosted for residents in my electorate as part of this budget, particularly for rail and roads, and bus services. In effect, \$92 million has been committed to build a third track and new platform at Laverton railway station. That will remove a number of current bottlenecks and increase capacity on the Werribee line, which runs through my electorate. This will mean a further three trains in the morning peak hour along that line, which is great news for residents who catch the train from Seaholme, Newport, Spotswood and Yarraville stations. For the night owls — I am not one of them — the frequency of the NightRider bus service will increase from hourly to half-hourly. That service travels through areas such as Spotswood, Newport and Altona North. I commend the Minister for Public Transport for her support on these commitments.

I congratulate the Minister for Roads and Ports. He is a hard-working minister who, as part of the budget, has delivered for the constituents in my electorate, in particular with a major funding boost for the duplication of the Kororoit Creek Road, which the minister knows very well. It is not an inexpensive project; it will cost \$48.5 million and will incorporate a grade separation between the road and the existing railway line near the Kororoit Creek area. The road to be duplicated will run from the Millers Road roundabout in Altona up to the West Gate Bridge. It is a hub of business activity and it is also a very critical corridor for residents who use that road in and out of my electorate. This comes on top of the enormous investment in the M1 project which includes various aspects, not least the strengthening of the West Gate Bridge.

Bike paths have not missed out either as part of this package. The bike path that runs along Hyde Street and Whitehall Street in Yarraville is a critical route. I know the minister has actually used his bike to ride on this route on Ride to Work Day. It will receive an upgrade which will improve the safety in that area and create generally safer conditions for all riders in the west. Cycling in the west is growing at a faster rate than any

other areas of Melbourne, and this is a priority which has been supported by Bicycle Victoria. I have spoken to Bicycle Victoria about this and it is very pleased with the investment which will come out of the package of funding for bike paths.

Another great place in my electorate is Scienceworks, part of Museum Victoria, and located in Spotswood. As part of this budget it will also share in some \$8 million to renew its exhibits. Anyone who has been to Scienceworks will appreciate what a great asset it is to Victoria. This is a very worthy contribution. It displays the government's commitment to early childhood development and also to the sciences in this state. My family loves Scienceworks and the museum in Carlton. It is always a terrific experience when you go along to these places, but it is important that renewal occurs in the exhibits. I know that the hardworking people at Scienceworks and the many volunteers are pleased with the announcement that has just come through.

In the short time I have left I want to congratulate the government for investing so heavily in creating A Fairer Victoria as part of this four-year program. The continuing support for this package is to be commended. By providing a further \$1 billion over the budget period to support this worthwhile initiative, the government is demonstrating its ongoing commitment to social justice in the community. By addressing its four priority areas, this initiative will make a major impact on the struggle to remedy social inequality in our society.

A Fairer Victoria aims to give all Victorian children the best start in life by providing more maternal and child health support for parents of young children, including me with two kids under three. It will expand home learning, the critical role playgroups play in our community and three-year-old kinder which my eldest son is in and help vulnerable children. It will improve education for all Victorians and help them into work, which critically is the pathway they should pursue. It commits more money to people with disabilities — in question time the minister talked about the record spend in this area — and importantly provides support for their families. It will also expand support for schools with higher numbers of disadvantaged students and create learning opportunities for indigenous students.

It will improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities by placing emphasis on preventive health. A very sound initiative to come out of this budget was the work health initiative which will see workers have health screening checks in their workplaces. I can certainly vouch for that as an initiative in terms of my

own background, particularly with men in the 40-plus age group.

Finally, it will strengthen our social infrastructure in building both livable neighbourhoods and local communities. I think this is a holistic and realistic approach to bring about real change in our society. Before I entered Parliament Joan Kirner said to me, 'Good governments are about being both socially inclusive and economically progressive'. I certainly think this budget strikes that balance and I commend it to the house.

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — Usually when I make a budget response I talk about the policy issues relating to my portfolio responsibilities, in this case police and emergency services and prior to that the Attorney-General's, and then I go on to deal with some of my constituency matters. I want to deal with my constituency matters first before I deal with my principal concerns in relation to police.

I would just like to mention a couple of matters in relation to Kew courthouse. It was a matter of profound benefit that the people of Victoria have been given the sum of \$250 000 by the state government to assist with the renovations of the Kew courthouse. It is something that was very welcome to the people of Victoria. Kew courthouse is a building that is over 120 years old; it is a heritage-listed building and any redevelopment, improvements or renovations have to be done strictly within the confines of its heritage listing. The local council purchased the Kew courthouse from the government for a substantially reduced sum, but in doing so the government effectively obviated its responsibility to conduct that renovation. The Victorian government is bound by the Heritage Act so essentially it got rid of that problem at a substantially reduced price. I was very pleased to hear that the Victorian government has committed \$250 000 to that renovation.

Regrettably the federal government, which had promised \$350 000 to assist in the renovation of that building, pulled out following the election of the Rudd government, and that is a matter of profound regret. It will have a severe impact on the ability of the council and other interest groups to conduct that renovation in a timely manner. It is very disappointing that it seems to be directed by a federal government that says it governs for all Australians but the opposite is the case when it pulls funds whenever it feels it is appropriate, particularly in a Liberal-held seat. It seems to be a punishment to the local community, notwithstanding the federal government's heritage listing of the building.

Kew Cottages are still of significant concern to the local community, and in this budget there is absolutely nothing that takes the position any further. There is no dedicated money for any infrastructure upgrades. I have spoken in this house on a number of occasions about the lack of infrastructure around the Kew Cottages redevelopment. The houses are now being built, and no doubt families will be starting to move in. There is a problem with traffic flows in and around the Eastern Freeway that I can see only getting worse with the opening of EastLink. No doubt the people of Kew will be paying the penalty for that by the lack of any improvement in the road infrastructure.

There is also the issue of Kew Primary School. The Kew Cottages redevelopment is slap bang in the middle of the school. There are 100 primary school students well and truly over the school's long-term enrolments given by the department and which provide for the long-term commitment to resources at that school. In many respects the department is ignoring the long-term development of that school.

In my view there is perhaps the potential for a new school given the fact that Kew primary and Kew East primary are both overcrowded. Given that there will be at least 520 new homes coming on board at the Kew Cottages site, a number of school-age children will need to be attended to. The two most proximate schools are clearly overcrowded and well beyond their long-term enrolment rates. Perhaps thought needs to be given to having a new primary school built in that area.

I also want to mention the amount of graffiti evident in my electorate. It is a matter of profound concern to most of my constituents. I note that one of my constituents has been recently dealt with by the courts for graffitiing, but the vast majority of people in my community are outraged by graffiti; I am sure that all Victorians are also appalled. It is a matter of graffiti prevention programs. The government talks about it, and there is a simple initiative it could have adopted, which has been taken up by Casey City Council. I hope it will be in the vanguard of policy development and that all Victorians can adopt it.

A local council takes a very proactive response of not just providing paint for people to paint over graffiti on their own properties — the Boroondara City Council has been doing that, and I am very grateful for its proactivity in that regard — but as Casey City Council has done, it pays for two or three people who have tendered for the work to proactively clean up the graffiti. They have a turnaround time of some 24 hours. Notwithstanding the fact that the city of Casey now has almost twice as many people as the city of Boroondara,

cleaning its amount of graffiti has been maintained on a budget of \$300 000 a year. The Casey City Council is to be commended. I thank it for its time recently when it raised that issue with me. All members should look at that as a policy development position for the future.

This budget has been disappointing for the people of Victoria in relation to policing. We were promised a lot of action by the Premier when he took over after years of neglect — unfortunately police action has not been a result of this budget. We have got little in that regard from the budget.

We still have growing waiting hospital lists and slower trains and trams; SmartBuses have yet to be rolled out; the myki ticket fiasco is running overtime and over budget; and importantly, there are no new police. The only new police are those who were promised back in 2006 according to a promulgated plan. Notwithstanding the fact that the government is now finally coming out and saying, 'We have a problem with violent crime in this state', we do not have a new plan. All we get is a new problem, which the government has admitted to, but we do not get any new plan. People can be disappointed because of that.

There is nothing new in relation to policing in this budget. The budget is not about good governance as far as policing is concerned. This is a budget which provides a little bit of nothing for just about everybody. Most importantly, the budget objective was to enforce in the minds of all Victorians that the failure to provide any form of proper service delivery, including police, was apparently all about our growing population and the inability of this government to cope with population growth.

I note that the Australian Bureau of Statistics as far back as 2002 predicted this population growth. Since 2004 the government has been celebrating this population increase, but now it uses it as an excuse to deliver less in this budget for police and emergency services, and general services. This suggests that Labor's vision regarding police in this state is devoid of anything approaching a new idea. As I said, its plan is an old one. Notwithstanding the need for substantial changes have been accepted by this government, the problem for Labor is that it has not provided any further service delivery in relation to police.

We have a problem in Victoria. Many young people are growing up in a culture which, I am afraid to say, is becoming embedded in the notion that violence is acceptable. While we may not accept it in this place, that notion seems to be growing as a method to resolve some forms of disputes, whether they take place in the

city at 3 o'clock in the morning, at the football or otherwise. I am terribly concerned that our children are growing up in this violent culture.

Most importantly, there is little in this budget to address this particular cultural change. As I said, there is a complete lack of any form of service delivery. The reason why we, the opposition, talk about service delivery is primarily because that is what a state government does or should do — it is there to deliver services on the ground. The failure to deliver services creates the space for violence in a wide variety of ways. It means that in time we will see violence involving families, young people and gangs, and random violence, all escalating out of control in this state.

The simple truth is that most policing is done by informal sanctions regarding inappropriate behaviour. We have probably all experienced that as we grew up and in the way our families brought us up. Once those informal sanctions about inappropriate behaviour are broken down, then you are really left with a substantial problem. It requires a long-term solution to address all of the inabilities to impose those informal sanctions about inappropriate behaviour. I regret that the only policy initiative you can adopt to address the current problem is better policing.

In this budget we have got no form of vision and no new policing ideas, which is regrettable. That means we are going to have a lack of respect, a lack of responsibility and a lack of civility in this community as a consequence of this government's lack of vision. Some of the biggest increases in the level of violence are in our growth areas, which were predicted to grow rapidly. I have noticed that the cities of Melton, Wyndham, Whittlesea, Cardinia and Casey are in the top seven metropolitan areas to have experienced increases in the incidence of assault since 2000. Those five municipalities grew by an average of 28 per cent between 2001 and 2006, yet they had an average increase in violent assaults of over 120 per cent between 2001 and 2007. Without that population increase, the violence may not have increased as much, but violence is increasing at a far greater rate than the population increase in those five municipalities.

It seems to be a general trend around Victoria that violence is increasing at a far greater rate than our population levels, so an increase in population cannot be the only explanation for the increase in violence. As I said, I think violence is probably a learnt behaviour, and a long-term solution is required. The only thing we can do to deal with this problem at the moment is to improve policing.

Notwithstanding all of this, our immediate issue in relation to dealing with violent crime is to provide more police. But what do we get? We get the same old rhetoric from this government about the level of policing, yet amongst young people violence seems to be escalating at an even greater rate than in the adult population. The number of assaults committed by people under 18 has doubled in the seven years of this government; from the year 2000 to this year they have doubled. That is reflected in other forms of crime.

The number of juveniles aged under 18 committing rape has grown by 108 per cent, and the number of juveniles participating in robbery has increased by 105 per cent in that time. It is a significant problem that we need to address. But what does this government do to address that problem?

Mr Nardella — Puts on more police.

Mr McINTOSH — It does not put on more police. There is a chronic problem. You only have to go to a number of police stations around the state to realise that police who are part of the authorised strength of a police station are unavailable due to secondments, unfilled vacancies — and there are as many as 1000 in the state as I speak — maternity leave, long service leave and WorkCover return-to-work programs. No-one is saying they are other than appropriate, but the fact is that there is little or no backfilling for these long-term absences in many of our police stations.

That means the level of manning at any police station is dangerously low, and what you get is watch-house keepers. Rather than having two police, you now get one. You get a sergeant having to go out to attend to an emergency because there is no back-up. Indeed in some cases — and we have seen it in Hastings and elsewhere — 24-hour police stations have had to close because they do not have the appropriate number of police.

There were a record number of 42 000 assaults in Victoria last year, growing complaints by police officers about mountainous paperwork and a greater burden placed on Victoria Police in a variety of ways when dealing with those violent assaults and mountains of paperwork. All these things are mounting up. As we know, the levels of stress amongst Victoria Police are shown in the 16 500 days lost to stress alone — that comes from WorkCover and does not take into account that fewer than 10 days absence is not covered by WorkCover, so is unaccounted for and unexplained. All these things mean that this government should be providing a proper policy solution to rising levels of violence in this state and a lack of police numbers. It is

disappointing that this budget does nothing but implement a plan from 2006.

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — It is a pleasure to speak on the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill because the Brumby government has once again delivered for the whole state of Victoria and for the electorate of Seymour. Firstly, I would like to speak about some of the budget achievements for my area, because I have to say this is the best budget that the Seymour electorate has seen since my election to this place.

While there is always much more to do, this year's budget certainly has seen the delivery of election promises, and as local members we are always very nervous about that happening as soon as possible. I very much thank the Treasurer, the Premier and the ministers who have made sure that the Seymour electorate has this time got what it deserved, as has the whole state.

The Premier's and the Treasurer's major message this year is that this is a budget that meets the challenges of the future for Victoria, and that is why we have done what we have done with programs right across the different areas of state government responsibility. A few announcements were made about the health portfolio. At the 2006 election we promised a \$15 million upgrade of Alexandra District Hospital, which was a very significant announcement for the town. It is not quite ready to go at Alexandra, but they have some very exciting plans — much more exciting than we promised or they envisaged at the time of the announcement, which is great. There was \$1 million in the budget this time for planning the hospital's redevelopment, and I am really looking forward to seeing what transpires at Alexandra in the next six or so months as they move towards planning the upgrade of the hospital.

An issue that I certainly copped a bit of flak over in recent years is the Alexandra District Ambulance Service. As members would know, in Victoria we had three services: Rural Ambulance Victoria, Metropolitan Ambulance Service and Alexandra District Ambulance Service, which was a volunteer service that had a chief executive officer running it. The Alexandra service had been going through some change over the last six months and came to the realisation that it could not continue, because it did not have the volunteers available to provide what it had done in the past.

It agreed to go to Rural Ambulance Victoria, with which it worked very hard, and now it has gone to the new Ambulance Victoria. The government has given \$1.25 million for paramedics to service that area and

work with the ambulance community officers to ensure that the area from Marysville to Buxton and right through to Alexandra and Eildon will be serviced by paramedics into the future. The great volunteers they have there will be working alongside that service.

In Kilmore we had already provided a new ambulance station and upgraded to two-officer crewing in the past. Now it will have a night crew as well in a \$2.74 million upgrade to that ambulance service. It services the very busy Northern Highway and Hume Highway. The closest stations are Craigieburn and Seymour, and a new one is going to be built at Whittlesea in the near future. A large area with a fast-growing population has to be covered. In the last census period Kilmore grew by 42 per cent and Wallan, down south, grew by about 49 per cent in that period. They are very rapidly growing communities, and they need that service, so this budget initiative is fantastic.

An election commitment made in 2006 was to build the Yarra Glen bypass. The local community has worked very hard, together with the three levels of government, on this project. There was \$500 000 from the shire, about \$5 million from the federal government and \$9 million delivered in this budget, as promised in 2006, to build this truck bypass, which will go around the outskirts of the town. I am very pleased with the way the communities worked with VicRoads and will continue to do so in the future to make sure that the planning and construction of a piece of infrastructure such as this, which can be very controversial, goes smoothly, as seems to be the case at the moment. I hope VicRoads will continue to listen very carefully to the community of Yarra Glen during the building of this truck bypass.

Another commitment that goes back to the last term of the government is stage 3 of Wallan Secondary College. Stages 1 and 2, up to year 9, have been delivered, and we need the facilities to cater for years 10, 11 and 12, so there is \$8 million in the budget for the construction of stage 3. That is timely funding in the budget. Probably it would have been in the community's best interests to have had it last year. They would have really loved it then so that the buildings would have been all ready to go, but we have delivered it this year. I am very pleased that the local community is developing a marvellous secondary college there.

Another election promise that was delivered under the Small Schools program we announced at the last election was that Upper Plenty Primary School will receive up to \$2 million to have more permanent buildings. Upper Plenty is a very small community but

it is growing rapidly. The school has 100-odd children now but when I was teaching in the district I think it was below 20, so it is really growing.

The budget delivers in the areas of education and health, and there is funding for roads. Public transport is always difficult in rural areas. One part of the Seymour electorate is serviced by a commuter rail service that operates to Seymour on the north-east line. We have done some great work in improving the regularity of train services. We have taken the Craigieburn people off the V/Line service as well as putting on extra services. The building of a station at Craigieburn has meant there is a bottleneck as Connex and V/Line trains try to get around each other. Craigieburn is not in my electorate, but there is funding in the budget of \$30 million to build a crossover at Craigieburn to make the system run a lot more smoothly for country passengers travelling right up to the north-east and metropolitan passengers travelling to Craigieburn. That is fantastic. There is \$254.5 million in the budget for country passenger rail. The maintenance program will include all regional rail lines across the state. That is fantastic, and any improvements there will be greatly appreciated by the people of the Seymour electorate.

Public transport across the state has been getting a bit of a boost through the NightRider bus service. I notice from the budget that the service that currently goes to Lilydale will be extended to go to Healesville. That will be a welcome announcement for younger people, especially those in Healesville, and anybody from the town who would like to go into Melbourne to enjoy sports and other events. People in the shire of Mitchell and on the Seymour side of the electorate can get home at night with the fantastic V/Line service. In future there will be a better bus service that will allow Healesville residents to participate in life interests without having to drive everywhere, which is obviously getting very expensive.

The budget looks at a number of other areas. In Victoria one of our strengths has been that we have been very conscious as a government — and it probably actually follows on from the previous government — of attracting investment into the state. In every single election and budget — at least it seems like that — we have been reducing the tax burden on business. In this budget we have done that again. We have cut payroll tax and there will be about \$170 million from cuts in stamp duty on land transfers. There is a \$420 million tax relief there. I think this is going to be very important. I think there is a saving of about \$2760 on the cost of a median-priced first home. When you look at the price of a house I suppose that does not sound a lot, but if you are paying a minimum payment, it takes a

lot to pay that off in the first few years, and it is really welcome. That is in addition to the \$3000 that will benefit first-home builders in the regional parts of the Seymour electorate such as Wallan and Kilmore. That is fantastic.

There is a cut to WorkCover premiums, which will cost another \$350 million. That 5 per cent cut along with the cut in payroll tax will make it cheaper to employ people in Victoria and will therefore encourage investment in jobs. I believe the government has been very balanced in trying to meet needs right across the state. Many of us in the Labor Party are very keen to see that we have a fairer Victoria. That is why we have our A Fairer Victoria policy and that is why there are a number of measures in this budget to improve the lives of people who have been suffering some kind of disadvantage. There is \$111 million extra for mental health. There is \$233 million for disability, as was spoken about earlier today so eloquently by the Minister for Community Services. There is \$82 million for concessions and other assistance for people.

I noticed in an article I read recently about how difficult it is for pensioners, especially single pensioners, to survive on their weekly income, one pensioner said one of the best kinds of assistance would be better concessions on gas and electricity because that is not income and does not put the price up for them if they are in public housing. That is another really good thing that will make Victoria a better place for people to live.

There is \$75 million in the budget for senior citizens facilities. I am pleased to see that because I know seniors feel they also should be looked after. There is \$41 million for improving indigenous services, which has obviously been a very topical issue across Australia. The more we can do in that area to improve indigenous services will make Victoria a fairer place and a place of better opportunities for all.

We have a lot of challenges going into the future. We have had a baby boom in Victoria, with 73 700 births recorded last year in Victoria — the highest number of babies born since 1971, which was a time of great growth when larger families were more important. There are challenges too with volatile share markets. We have resources in Victoria but by comparison with other states, we are a non-resource state, and we do not get that extra boost they get. This means we have to work harder to attract investment and to create jobs — we have to work smarter and be more innovative. I think this government has been doing that with our investments across the board, and I wish this bill a speedy passage.

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — This is the first budget for the new Treasurer, John Lenders, and I have to say that while others might laud what he has done and the fact that there is a surplus, people in country Victoria certainly should be very disappointed with this budget. Country Victoria has missed out. I would also like to touch on my shadow portfolios of local government and Aboriginal affairs before I talk about my electorate.

Local government certainly did not get a fair deal in the budget, and it is not just the opposition saying that. The president of the Municipal Association of Victoria, Cr Dick Gross, also believes that. I refer to a preamble to a *Weekly Times* article by Cr Gross on 12 March:

'End the blame game and fix the financial crisis facing local government', says Dick Gross.

In the article Cr Gross writes:

Local government's financial challenges have been largely ignored for over a decade.

...

It is a serious oversight that chronic underfunding of local government has not yet been elevated as a top priority when a growing body of evidence confirms current arrangements are deficient.

He goes on to write:

Victorian councils face a \$280 million annual shortfall to maintain, upgrade and renew \$40 billion worth of ageing infrastructure.

The article goes on and on about the lack of support from the government, but I do not have time to read it all.

It is not just the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) saying that local government has been underfunded by this government; it is also in a report of the Auditor-General. He recently stated that there were three Victorian councils at high risk of being unsustainable and 18 at moderate risk of not being sustainable in the medium to long term. That is a huge indictment on this government in terms of its support for local government.

We have been talking about cost shifting from state government to local government for many years. We could cite a number of programs this government has asked local government to perform or fulfil, yet the government continues to decrease funding. Again I will refer to Cr Gross's article, which talked about the concerns the MAV has, and which referred to the issue of weeds. The opposition has raised the issue of roadside weeds in this house a number of times. The

government has allocated \$20 million over four years, which is nowhere near enough, especially since it is to be shared between the Department of Primary Industries and local government.

Further, the funding is not just for roadside weeds. Local government has been conned into thinking it was going to get this funding for it to manage roadside weeds, but the funding is also for pest animal reduction and fox programs. When we look at that funding, we see it is nowhere near enough. I know of councils who are going to say, 'We are not taking the funding, because we will not do the management'. It will then be up to the state government, whose responsibility it should be, to make sure that roadside weeds are eradicated or at least managed, because weeds are costing our farmers many millions of dollars in production costs as well as in wasted time.

The MAV recently conducted a study that found many local government programs are underfunded. I turn to maternal and child health, where there is supposed to be a fifty-fifty cost-sharing arrangement between local government and the state government. Instead the state government has now reduced its shared funding to 45 per cent, which obviously means the communities have to pick up the tab of 55 per cent. Given this government's reputation, it will probably continue to decrease that funding.

In terms of local libraries, there have been staff increases, book cost increases and technology cost increases, yet the state government continues to decrease funding to a stage where now the government subsidy provides under 20 per cent. Local councils and the local communities are having to pick up 80 per cent of the funding of local libraries, which are really needed, particularly in country Victoria.

I turn to discuss Meals on Wheels. This program is vitally needed by many aged people in communities throughout rural Victoria. In 1980 a meal provided by Meals on Wheels cost \$3.59, but today it would cost \$9.95. We question whether this government has actually understood the extent of increases in this area and whether it has contributed the appropriate amounts, given that the government subsidy has risen from \$1 per meal to \$1.32 per meal. That means local governments and the communities are picking up the slack.

The situation would be much worse if there were not so many volunteer groups driving around to deliver and serve Meals on Wheels. My husband and I deliver Meals on Wheels for the Shepparton Central Rotary Club about three times a year, and many service clubs

provide those services through volunteers. This program is desperately needed, but we find that local councils are having to increase their funding, resulting in increases in rates or the loss of services. That is what a reduction in government funding for Meals on Wheels means.

I refer to Home and Community Care (HACC) funding for home and handyman help. There is not enough funding in the budget for these services, so now people are on waiting lists.

The Nationals policy at the last election was to provide local government with ongoing access to a share of the GST revenue received by the state government. The share would be 1 per cent, which would provide local governments with an extra \$100 million per year. The government says it supports local government, yet it continues to reduce its funding and to erode its powers. Recently the Brumby government made the appalling announcement about the government's removal of planning powers from 26 councils.

One of my other shadow portfolios is Aboriginal affairs. The budget papers talk about the importance of reducing family violence, but there is not enough related funding in this budget. This government has been in office for nine years. The Victorian government's indigenous affairs report of 2006–07 says:

Family violence is present in 64 per cent of notified cases of indigenous child abuse. Indigenous children are around 10 times more likely to be victims of abuse — usually emotional abuse or neglect.

We need to make sure there is more funding for those programs that work and that we stop funding those programs that do not work. It is really important that we put money into making sure that the children are the ones who are protected.

We have some funding in the budget for the implementation of the Aboriginal Heritage Act, which was rushed through Parliament in 2006 with no consultation or minimal consultation with councils, landowners, communities and Aboriginal groups. In my area there are two groups: the Bangerang and the Yorta Yorta. They both applied to be a registered Aboriginal party (RAP). We were told by the former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs that if there were two groups in an area, they could both be registered Aboriginal parties.

Instead this government has rejected the Bangerang application to be a RAP, which has caused huge angst and concern and has divided the community because

both of those clans speak for the country. It is appalling that this government has chosen one above the other.

There is \$600 million in the budget for the food bowl modernisation project. We applaud the fact that the government is going to upgrade this system. It is 100 years old, and irrigators have been paying the levies for upgrades for many years. Over \$1 billion in levies has been raised to fund this, but instead we now have \$600 million.

We had a group of businesspeople from the Shepparton area go to the government. They call themselves the Food Bowl Alliance. Originally they said there would be 900 billion litres of water lost in the system, and for that they would get \$2.3 billion. They have been duded. The first 75 gegalitres, or 75 billion litres, of water goes to Melbourne, and they get only \$600 million from this government to modernise the system. What we say is: go ahead with the modernisation but stop that pipeline.

When we look at some of the other cost blow-outs, we see in the *Country News* that there has been a steep rise in the irrigation modernisation project for orchardists in Shepparton East, and that the project is now in jeopardy. They are saying the low-pressure pipeline has gone from \$37.4 million to require a customer contribution of \$9.9 million, and the high-pressure pipeline costs have escalated to \$41.8 million, with a \$14 million shortfall, which will have to be made up by irrigators. The state government has to step in and pay for that shortfall.

The Auditor-General's report has been very critical of the saving that this government says is going to be found through the food bowl modernisation. It says the government must release a detailed analysis of the actual water savings and costings calculated for the project. Every megalitre of water taken away from the food bowl of Australia or from agriculture means that we are going to have less food and higher food prices for all Victorians right across the state. We support the upgrade for the ageing infrastructure, but we do not support the pipeline. We were supported by the Municipal Association of Victoria at its state council, with 54 of the 79 councils opposing the pipeline.

The Victorian Farmers Federation continues to oppose the pipeline. The Country Women's Association at its annual conference is today debating a motion to oppose the pipeline. There are 800 or 900 women there, so I am hoping they will all oppose the pipeline. The Murray-Darling Association, made up of all the local government councils in the Murray-Darling Basin, also opposes the pipeline. The CSIRO report says that if the

current weather patterns continue, there will be a 41 per cent reduction in in-flows into the Goulburn–Broken catchment. That means we would have less, not more, water in that catchment. The government should be looking at keeping the water that will be saved, if any, in that system.

The government's own sustainable water strategies say climate change scenarios on the Goulburn River show that with a low probability of climate change there will be a reduction of 7 per cent in inflows, that with a medium probability there will be a reduction of 25 per cent in inflows, and with a high probability there will be a reduction of 38 per cent in inflows. There will be a rally at Parliament House on Tuesday, 3 June, at 12.30 p.m., and I urge everyone who wants to make sure the food bowl stays viable to come along to that rally.

I want to talk about my local area. I welcome the funding to the University of Melbourne's School of Rural Health in Shepparton for a centre of excellence in the treatment of sexually transmitted infection, which was allocated \$780 000. Goulburn Valley Health has missed out; there are no funds for the hospital upgrade. Goulburn Valley Health provides a huge range of services. It is a major referral hospital. It services a catchment population of 160 000 people. Over the past 10 years inpatients have doubled and birth numbers have increased by 10 per cent per year. Five years ago there was a master plan prepared to cope with the demand, which required about \$200 million in funding.

The government has only funded stage 1, which is about \$13 million. We are hoping that stage 2 will be funded, which will allow \$60 million of urgently needed upgrades. This hospital is bursting at the seams. It is doing a brilliant job and is working with its community. It is making sure it delivers the services that are needed by its diverse community. What we need to do now is make sure the government provides the funding for at least stage 2, which would total \$60 million.

I refer to the Benalla Road upgrade. The Midland Highway is a busy highway. The City of Greater Shepparton has put in place plans to upgrade this highway, from Florence Street to Doyles Road. It is a single-lane highway going into a single-lane roundabout and is a very dangerous stretch of road. The council wants to upgrade that road because there have been huge developments, with Bunnings, Spotlight and three or four major car yards being established in the vicinity. The single-lane roundabout is very dangerous. It is a 70-kilometre-an-hour road, and it has become

very dangerous with people slowing down to find their way into the entrances of those businesses.

On the drought, we still need subsidies for council rates. I commend Fruit Growers Victoria for supporting their fruit growers, but this government has to remember the drought has not finished; it must continue to make sure that we have funding.

I refer to public and emergency houses. The 2006 statistics show that the Hume region has the highest number of homeless people in regional Victoria. In Shepparton the public housing waiting list has 290 applicants on it — that is, 290 families looking for a home. About 90 people are on the transfer list, which means 90 people are waiting for appropriate housing. A family of four children may be housed in a one-bedroom or two-bedroom house or in a caravan park. We need to make sure that our most vulnerable people are housed in accommodation that suits their needs.

We cannot even get emergency housing. If people are in crisis or if there is a family violence situation, the welfare organisations or the crisis organisations have to put those people in hotels. It is totally inappropriate, and we are calling on the government to put more funding in for emergency housing.

The Tatura police house is one of those houses that was earmarked by this government to be on a list for sale, but the sergeant in charge is still living in that house. He was told he was to go to that house and to sell his own house. He is living there, and he now does not have a house.

Dr Sykes interjected.

Mrs POWELL — The member for Benalla has reminded me of the Mooropna police station, which needs a major upgrade. There is no funding for that. We are being told it will get a paint job, but funding is needed to bring it into the 21st century. With a huge surplus, the government has disappointed country Victorians with this budget.

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — I am very pleased and very proud to be speaking in support of the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill. Again the budget has highlighted the now Brumby government's commitment to not only my electorate but also the wider Geelong region and of course to Victoria as a state.

In speaking in support of this budget, I firstly take this opportunity to congratulate the new Treasurer in the other place, John Lenders, on his efforts in delivering

his first budget. The Treasurer has done an excellent job in delivering a budget for all Victorians, including of course regional and rural Victoria, which as we know was neglected by the Kennett government. This first budget has ensured that the government continues its focus on priority spending in the important areas of education, health, community safety and importantly the environment, including ensuring that all Victorians have access to a quality and reliable water supply. Only this last week we saw the Premier, the Minister for Water and the local members of Parliament in Ballarat turning on the water for Ballarat.

From a Geelong perspective I can assure the house that the 2008–09 budget was well received, as the member for Bellarine and Minister for Mental Health, who is at the table, is also well aware. The community of Geelong received the budget with open arms, and this included community organisations, business organisations and also individual local residents.

As usual, the now Premier, who in previous years was the Treasurer, came to Geelong in the week following the budget where he had lunch with nearly 100 people from a cross-section of the Geelong community, including business people, trade unionists and representatives of community organisations. I think it would be accurate to say that the message from the luncheon was that the budget for 2008–09 was good for Geelong, and I can assure the house it is good for Geelong.

As I said, the 2008–09 budget has health care as one of its priorities. In Geelong this priority was highlighted by the new mobile intensive care ambulance (MICA) unit that will be introduced for the city and surrounds. This unit was part of one of the biggest ambulance investments in Victoria's history. The MICA unit, as I understand it, will be a fully equipped MICA vehicle, manned by a paramedic, and designed to get to an emergency scene as soon or as quickly as possible, because as we all understand time is of the essence when an ambulance is rushing to the scene of an accident or medical emergency. This is part of the employment of about 30 new MICA paramedics across the state, including 9 in Geelong, 5 in the city of Colac and 7 in the south-west of the state, including Portland, Warrnambool and the city of Hamilton.

In addition, as we are also well aware, the south-west region will be provided with an air ambulance as a result of the 2008–09 budget. Further funding will also be provided to Barwon Health, which will build on the magnificent building projects that have taken place at Barwon Health since 1999. It would be very accurate to say that Barwon Health has seen a renaissance since

1999 when the previous government, I can say accurately, ran down the state of health in Geelong.

You may well shake your head, Acting Speaker, but I can assure you that the Kennett government sacked nurses, flogged off the then Baxter House, and next in line was the Grace McKellar Centre in 1999. Since 1999 a complete renaissance of Barwon Health has transformed it into a state-of-the-art health organisation. The Andrew Love Cancer Centre has been fully refurbished and expanded at a cost of \$20 million, and that is now providing 21st century state-of-the-art quality oncology care to the people of Geelong, to those in my electorate and to the wider south-west region. Grace McKellar Centre has been turned into an absolutely world-class aged rehabilitation centre, at a cost of nearly \$100 million, and the soon-to-be-opened Geelong Hospital accident and emergency unit is being fully refurbished and expanded by the government to the tune of something like \$26 million. That accident and emergency unit will service the people of Geelong and the wider region for decades to come. I look forward to the minister coming to Geelong in the coming months to open that important accident and emergency unit.

Transport is another winner out of the appropriation bill or budget for 2008–09. Transport has been a very important issue to the people of Geelong for a number of years. It has taken the Bracks government and now the Brumby government to continue to deliver on transport in Geelong. In previous years we have seen the upgrade of the Melbourne to Geelong railway line — the greatest expenditure in railway history. We saw the upgrade of the Melbourne road from 1999 to 2002, and this budget provides \$65 million for the final section of the Geelong ring-road. As you understand, Acting Speaker, after decades of procrastination of conservative governments, going all the way back to the Henry Bolte government, it took this government to finally build the Geelong ring-road. I can assure you, Acting Speaker, that there was procrastination over many years of conservative governments and it took the Bracks government and now the Brumby government to complete this project.

This house well knows that when this ring-road is completed it will extend 23 kilometres along the Geelong western outskirts from Corio to Waurin Ponds, eliminating something like 27 traffic lights. I know the people of Geelong will welcome the opening of stages 1 and 2 later on this year. They well know that it is this government, the state Labor government, that is delivering on this project. In addition, the duplication of the Waurin Ponds to Winchelsea section will see the efficient and, importantly, safe passage of traffic from

Melbourne, through Geelong, on to Winchelsea and then on to south-western Victoria.

This budget has also provided a major funding boost to the livability of the city of Geelong. The budget has allocated more than \$20 million for the Geelong transit city, for the railway station or western wedge precinct and a new pedestrian link between the station and the currently under-construction new Transport Accident Commission building, which is another initiative of this state government that has been warmly welcomed by the people of Geelong. The TAC building is now well under construction. It is one of a number of building sites in Geelong. I must say it is great to come into Geelong and see the number of cranes on our city skyline. It is a real sign of Geelong's continuing prosperity under this Brumby government.

In addition this budget provides nearly \$8 million over four years to develop the cultural centre of the city under a newly developed master plan. This plan, which includes the Geelong Performing Arts Centre, the library, the historical centre and the Courthouse Youth Arts Centre, is looking to turn the area into a cultural precinct that will be renowned, in the words of the strategic plan itself, 'as a model of artistry, energy, distinction, innovation and sustainability'. Again, that has been warmly welcomed by the people of Geelong.

Another priority of this government, of course, is education. The community of Geelong will share in the \$592 million that has been allocated for the renovation of schools across the state. As I have said on numerous occasions in this house, this government has just about rebuilt every primary school and refurbished nearly every secondary college in my electorate.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr TREZISE — Bar one primary school, every primary school within my electorate has been refurbished. Over the next couple of years Western Heights Secondary College, which has been located on three campuses and was built probably through the 1950s and 1960s, will be transformed into a one-campus, absolutely state-of-the-art, world-class education facility, combined with community facilities. That is just one example, and it is a real boon for people in the northern parts of my electorate of Geelong.

The appropriation bill for 2008–09 highlights this state government's commitment to growing the whole of the state and ensuring this great state of Victoria continues to grow and prosper, because this is an important budget. As I said, I congratulate the Treasurer in the other place, Mr John Lenders, on his first budget. I

know the people of Geelong and the wider Geelong area, including the people of Bellarine, the Surf Coast and the south-west region, know it is a budget that has provided not only for community organisations, business and investment but also for families. I commend the Treasurer and I also commend the 2008–09 appropriation bill to the house.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — Order! The member for Geelong kicked fewer goals than his side did last weekend!

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — I would like to begin my contribution to the debate on the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill with a quote from a debate on 13 September 2006 in which the former Treasurer, now the Premier, said:

We promised to govern for all Victorians, no matter where they lived and no matter what their circumstances.

That is indeed another broken promise from this government, because in this budget not one dollar was spent on school maintenance in the Warrandyte electorate, not one dollar was spent on the redevelopment of Ringwood railway station, not one dollar was spent on police resources, not one dollar was spent on cleaning up the Yarra River and not one dollar was spent on advancing the septic tank replacement program.

What this budget has brought to Warrandyte — indeed to all Victorians — is a promise of ever-increasing debt. Since this budget came out the government has focused on Victoria's direct government debt, which is set to increase from \$1.5 billion in 2005 to \$9.5 billion by 2012. However, the government is desperate to avoid mentioning the actual debt it is responsible for, and that debt is the total public sector net debt, which includes non-financial public corporations. This debt is forecast to rise to \$23 billion by 2012.

An honourable member — How much?

Mr R. SMITH — Twenty-three billion dollars! It is a measure of how uncomfortable the government is in the way that it is almost fanatical about avoiding mentioning this figure; certainly it was not mentioned at all in the Treasurer's speech. We have all seen in this house the Premier avoid this issue during question time. When I attended the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings recently I saw the Premier also squirm away from answering a direct question posed by the member for Scoresby about that debt.

The reason the government is so uncomfortable about this figure is because it knows that the Guilty Party tag

is never far away from the minds of Victorians, and it knows how absolutely shocked Victorians would be to discover that by 2012 it will cost \$1.8 billion per year to service the debt. The reality is that no-one in this state believes that the Labor government will stop borrowing at \$23 billion. It is not as if the government needs to borrow when it is pulling in \$13.4 billion in taxes. That amount includes a land tax grab of \$1 billion; a property stamp duty tax revenue of \$3.7 billion; fines amounting to nearly \$500 million; and gambling taxes that add up to \$1.6 billion, with \$1 billion of that coming from gaming machines — and that figure is forecast to rise 15 per cent by 2012. On top of that the government receives \$10.3 billion in GST.

The budget has grown from \$19 billion to \$37 billion during the term of the government, and no-one in Victoria can find corresponding improvements in services and infrastructure. Hospital waiting lists are growing longer and hospitals are fudging figures to gain incentive payments. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development our educational standards are among the worst in Australia, and parents are pulling their kids out of state schools in droves to put them into independent schools. Public transport is incredibly crowded, violent crime is on the rise, congested roads are the norm, the lack of planning on water over this term of government has meant ill-conceived policy has been made on the run and the delivery of major projects is a joke.

The coalition, the media and the public all know one thing — that is, that Labor cannot manage money. As sure as night follows day Labor will over-borrow and will underspend on infrastructure and service delivery, and the coalition will have to come in and pick up the pieces all over again. We did it with the Cain-Kirner debt of \$32 billion, the federal coalition did it with the Keating debt of \$96 billion, and it is a certainty that it will happen again. The only uncertainty we have is how high the Brumby debt will actually be. Currently it is \$23 billion and counting.

Let me move on to one of the biggest disappointments of this budget in terms of what it did not deliver for the electorate of Warrandyte. It did not deliver the expected \$52 million needed for the redevelopment of Ringwood railway station. This money was expected by council, traders and the developer, QIC, formerly Queensland Investment Corporation. They all expected it, not least because government members, including the Minister for Planning, led them to believe that they were going to get the money. It is a measure of the public expectation that I was able to deliver over 500 signatures to the Premier's office expecting this money to be delivered.

On 13 May the *Maroondah Journal* encapsulated the public's feeling over being snubbed by the Premier with the headline 'Thanks, John!'. The article begins:

In fact, we mean no thanks, John.

It goes on to say:

Millions of dollars have been spent completing designs which would integrate the station with the proposed town square and development on the northern side of Maroondah Highway.

But again they will remain just plans, with no explanation from the government why Ringwood was missed.

Is it a coincidence that three strong Labor areas — Broadmeadows, Dandenong and Geelong — shared in more than \$51 million for transit cities programs? And is it any coincidence that a community —

meaning Maroondah —

which kicked out its Labor state MPs in 2006 is still waiting for its share?

Maybe it's too cynical to think the government is holding out its announcement until closer to the 2010 election.

In a comment that shows just how Melbourne-centric this government is, the article goes on to say:

What the government needs to do is show people in Melbourne's outer east it doesn't think its governing area stops at Hawthorn.

What the government neglected to consider when playing politics with the people of Warrandyte was the reaction of the developer of Eastland, QIC, which had committed up to \$600 million towards the development of the centre and its surrounding areas. It has subsequently been reported that if the government will not commit funds to its own transit city policy, then perhaps neither will QIC. It is expected by many that QIC will wind its development back by up to one-third as a direct result of the government not contributing the money to the Ringwood railway station.

I understand that the realisation that Ringwood could potentially lose millions of dollars worth of investment and certainly many jobs has caused a flurry of activity behind the scenes, and there may yet be a chance that Ringwood station might see some money before the next budget. It certainly is a great example of the government's lack of foresight. In closing on this particular topic it is worth noting the reaction of a Ringwood station lobbyist, Jean Faulds, who reportedly sat down and cried when she heard that the state government had failed to fund the redevelopment of Ringwood railway station. It was further reported that her sense of shock was compounded by what she

viewed as lies told by the state government. You would really think that she would be used to the lies by now.

On the subject of education, it is disappointing that while the government is flagging school rebuilds in a number of Labor seats, my own local school maintenance issues remain unaddressed. I have raised these issues many times in the house. I have talked about the rotten weatherboards, the plumbing issues, the rusting drainpipes, the inadequacy of portables as environments in which to run the programs that the teachers want to run — and the list goes on. I have said many times before that the current arbitrary method of addressing maintenance issues is woefully inadequate, but unfortunately good sense does not seem to have much impact on government members.

A fair bit has also been written about the fines it is forecast the government will receive from drivers on EastLink. The government has pre-empted driver behaviour by forecasting a \$62 million take in speeding fines on that road. The government has often told us that speed cameras are not about revenue raising. It says that cameras are placed in black-spot zones or in areas where there have been safety-related issues, yet here we see them being installed on a road that is not even open. I doubt that there are any safety-related issues — there is certainly no history of them — on EastLink.

We all know that EastLink will be opening in the coming weeks. I am sure the usual suspects will be lining up for their media shots. I am sure the Minister for Roads and Ports will be there, as will the members for Forest Hill and Mitcham. It is a shame they did not stand up when the government broke its promise about tolls. We did not see them condemning the government either in this house or in the media and standing up for their constituencies.

On the subject of police resources, I find it absolutely appalling that this budget allocates nothing towards police resources. The government continues to tell us there is no need for more police in the eastern suburbs. It has even been wheeling out high-ranking police officers to parrot the party line. The *Maroondah Leader* of 11 March 2008, under the heading 'Maroondah police numbers OK', reported that:

Eastern suburbs police stations won't get any more cops in the near future because they don't need them. At least, that's the official word from Victoria Police Assistant Commissioner Bob Hastings.

The article went on to quote Mr Hastings as saying:

We always say there could be more, but we think we've got sufficient numbers ... Everyone would love more police but it's not going to be a reality in the short term.

Anyone in the eastern suburbs will tell you that that is absolutely ridiculous. While the government maintains its blinkered view that more police are not needed, the public and indeed local police are crying out for help. Late last year I received a letter signed by nearly 100 residents of Croydon Hills, telling me that there is a problem with hoon behaviour and vandalism in their area. The principal of Croydon Hills Primary School told me that through closed-circuit television footage he knows anywhere from 30 to 100 kids congregate in his school's grounds on Friday nights and at weekends. They are desperate for this sort of behaviour to be stopped.

I have spoken to local police, and they are certainly very willing to get out there and try to break up this sort of behaviour but they simply do not have the resources to tackle it. At best they have one patrol car, and if that car is off the road looking after other incidents, they just cannot patrol regularly.

The fact is that crime is up. I was interested to see during the recent Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings the Minister for Police and Emergency Services finally admit that the statistics the government has been using are not the official Victoria Police statistics. They are actually from a report called the crime victimisation survey which is put out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The ABS subsequently told the coalition that this report only provides a rough estimate, it does not actually talk about real figures. It also said that the last report was released in 2006 and had 2005 figures in it, and that it has stopped using that report because the methodology is outdated. The fact is that crime is up and people are scared.

I recently attended a forum on crime run by the members for Bayswater and Ferntree Gully. I can tell the house that the attendees unanimously agreed that they are fearful of walking around their neighbourhoods at night and of going down to their local station. These people included three former police officers; they want a higher and more visible police presence. To have Assistant Commissioner Hastings and the government tell them they are not going to get those visible police is just a slap in the face for them. The eastern suburbs need more police, and I urge the government to look at that as soon as it can, and actually act on it.

In September 2007 I put forward a question on notice asking the relevant minister when work would begin on replacing septic tanks in my electorate with a reticulated sewerage system. After waiting six months for an answer I finally got one that basically told me the government does not even intend to look at the issue for another two or three years. The Environment Protection

Authority recommends a safe E. coli level in the Yarra River as being 200 organisms per 100 millilitres of water. The Yarra through Warrandyte has a reading of 680 organisms per 100 millilitres of water, with the EPA reporting that the river has a high level of contamination from human faecal matter.

This government should have been addressing this issue over a long time. It has really done absolutely nothing to look after it. This budget does not even mention the septic tank backlog; it does not mention the program in any way at all. Meanwhile we see the problem getting worse.

The government has used this budget to play politics. It has looked after its own seats. It has more or less completely ignored coalition-held seats. I think it is quite reasonable for members of my community to be very disappointed in this budget. As far as my electorate is concerned, this budget has disregarded the potential loss of commercial investment and new jobs. It has ignored the safety concerns of residents in my area. It has invested nothing in local environment needs, and it comprehensively fails student facilities in my electorate. I believe the people of Warrandyte are very justified in their disappointment with this budget.

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — I am certainly pleased to speak on this appropriation bill for the 2008–09 budget. It provides for people of all ages and sectors in all parts of the state. Across the electorate of Ballarat East a lot has made the residents very happy.

We have identified education as the no. 1 priority. We are in the second year of a 10-year school rebuilding program, and we have listed schools that we expect to work on over the next four years. I was pleased to see, as were the people of Daylesford, that Daylesford Secondary College was successful in gaining \$3 million for stage 1 of its reconstruction. It was hoping for that funding and has been planning for it.

I was very pleased to visit the school before the budget was presented here to look at the plans and talk with the school community about them, and I have been pleased to visit since to confirm that the school will be able to go ahead with works in the next financial year. This is on top of Ballarat Secondary College's east campus gaining funding for stage 1 of its rebuilding in last year's budget. That work is now well under way.

Funding for Trentham District Primary School was announced in the last budget. Its plans are ready to go and work will start there in the latter part of this year. Those schools in particular across my electorate are

very pleased to see that they have been recognised as part of this school rebuilding program.

As I have mentioned Trentham already, I will go on to the health area and note that the people of Trentham were very pleased with this budget. On top of receiving funding for the primary school reconstruction in last year's budget, the Trentham campus of the Hepburn Health Service is to receive \$8 million for the rebuilding of its nursing home component. This reconstruction will also involve moving the community centre component of Hepburn Health Services at Trentham onsite, and providing rooms for doctors onsite. The facility incorporates a hostel of a very good standard. It will now fit in with the new part of the hospital and all be on one level. It will provide a range of services within the one facility.

I visited the campus after that was announced. The Minister for Health and the Premier visited the Trentham campus last week, and the people there were very pleased to show their appreciation of this funding and of the fact that the Premier and the minister came to visit the facility as part of community cabinet last week, to see for themselves the plans and to talk with people about them. There are a lot of delighted people in Trentham as a result of this and last year's budgets.

While I am on health, it was very pleasing to see that Ballarat Health Services gained \$5.5 million in this budget to provide for the upgrade of its mental health facilities. This will mean it can make better use of the former outpatients building on the corner of Sturt and Drummond streets. It is a very prominent building but one that has not lent itself to medical services in recent years because it has become outdated. This funding will enable that building to be used. It will be of great benefit to those in need of mental health support in Ballarat. I am pleased that this government has recognised both of those areas — the aged care area and the mental health area — through this budget. Significant funding has come into my electorate in both of those areas.

Also in the health area, \$560 000 has been allocated under ambulance support services to upgrade the Ballarat ambulance station. It is clearly in need of upgrading, as the member for Ballarat West and I have observed when we visited the station. The paramedics are delighted to see this funding coming forward so that their facilities will be upgraded appropriately. They will also be pleased to know that in this budget we have allowed for a new single mobile intensive care ambulance (MICA) responder unit for Ballarat.

In other parts of my electorate, moving to the Macedon Ranges and Kyneton, I was pleased to see that more funding has been provided so that there will be increased staffing levels in the ambulance services in the Macedon Ranges with a new day crew being allocated in Kyneton. We are boosting health in so many ways through this budget, and I am delighted to see this taking place.

While talking about this I was pleased to join Minister Andrews and Minister Cameron in their roles as Minister for Health and Minister for Police and Emergency Services in turning the first sod of the new Daylesford ambulance station, a joint facility with the State Emergency Service (SES). This was done last week, and was funded out of the last budget. The people of Daylesford are looking forward to the new ambulance station, combined with the new SES facility, being built on a prominent site on the Midland Highway in Daylesford. I was very pleased to join with those two ministers as part of the community cabinet to recognise that development moving along.

The Minister for Roads and Ports was in the house just a moment ago and people in my electorate will be pleased to see the additional \$40 million allocated for the Anthonys Cutting section of the Western Highway. Those who travel regularly to Melbourne, including myself, have seen with enthusiasm the works on the Deer Park bypass getting well under way and knowing that it will be completed by the middle of next year. That will ensure that the Ballarat region link with Melbourne is upgraded and as well will provide convenient travel and opportunities for commuters and business. The upgrade of Anthonys Cutting, which has been a safety hazard along the Western Highway, will be very well received and will ensure that not only will the Ballarat-Ballan area have a great rail link to Melbourne upgraded by this government, but it will have a very good road link to Melbourne.

On a more general basis, other things in the budget that were not specifically related to my electorate include the regional first home bonus. The Minister for Regional and Rural Development, who is in the house, was in Ballarat the day after the budget was announced to remind people that this new initiative of the government, a regional first home bonus, would be available to people building their first homes in regional Victoria, including all of my electorate. This is on top of the \$12 000 they already access. It brings it up to \$15 000 that first home owners can gain access to in regions such as the Ballarat area. That will be great for young home owners, people hoping to own their own homes, and will add to the changes to stamp duty, also announced in this budget, along with a number of other

changes to business taxes and other taxes giving relief to businesses and homeowners. I was pleased to see that.

The only other item I wish to mention, although there are many, is the \$150 million allocated to the anti-cancer action plan. A range of areas have been identified, including early detection of people at risk of cancer, further research in the area and looking at how we address the causes of cancer, such as smoking. It will further ensure that Victorians will be less likely to suffer the consequences of advanced cancer or be affected by cancer at all.

Overall the budget is a great budget for all Victorians — for families, older people, people with disabilities, people with mental health problems — and is also a good budget for people with jobs, business and further economic development in my region. I was reminded how pleased I am to be a member of the Brumby government with the bringing down of this budget. I am delighted that it has been well received by people in all sectors across our community, as they have reflected their views on the budget to me and through the media. I am also pleased this is reflected more generally across the state. It is a very good budget and I am very supportive of the many initiatives and funding actions supported through the budget. I commend the bill to the house.

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill. Health funding and management of the health portfolio is a very delicate balancing act which requires marrying the multiple health needs of a growing Victorian population with a hospital and health system that is supposed to get it right in providing timely treatment, early intervention and establishing a foundation for the future.

This Labor government, since coming to office in 1999, has managed to lurch from one crisis to another in the provision of health care, particularly in our public hospital system. The crisis currently being faced was all too familiar the last time Labor was in power in Victoria when John Cain, the then Premier, failed to keep his promise to halve the waiting list. Currently this is exemplified by the recent *Your Hospitals* report which shows that emergency departments suffer acute bed block because there is simply not enough beds in our hospitals to allow patients to be admitted in a timely manner from emergency.

This leads to patients not being treated in a timely manner for discharge or kept lying on trolleys for hours resulting in suboptimal medical care. It also means hospitals are forced to go on ambulance bypass an

excessive number of times. Finally, because beds are taken up by patients requiring emergency surgery, patients waiting for elective surgery, many of whom are seriously ill and in pain, are forced to wait too long for their procedure or suffer the very great frustration of having their operations cancelled at the last minute and often on numerous occasions, because there are not enough ward beds or intensive care beds available. This is now the hospital treatment merry-go-round created by the Brumby government and the successive ministers for health, Minister Thwaites, Minister Pike and Minister Andrews.

The situation becomes even more poignant and is clearly expressed by the fact that in the last *Your Hospitals* report to the community there was a failure to meet six out of nine targets or benchmarks the government sets itself for timely treatment in our hospital system. If this government cannot pass its own benchmarks, how will it satisfy benchmarks set by the commonwealth under the new health care agreement? The question that will then have to be asked is whether the Brumby government intends to hand over control of our hospitals to the Rudd federal government.

Both published and unpublished hospital waiting lists now show a health system buckling under pressure. Documents released to my office under FOI indicate a never-ending increase in the number of Victorians waiting for elective surgery and treatment in our hospitals and patients being hidden on various lists such as: the not-ready-for-care list; the non-reportable procedures called the non-ESIS list; outpatient waiting lists, which mysteriously go up while elective surgery waiting lists go down; and even non-recorded referrals of patients who have not received an outpatient appointment but who are nevertheless waiting to be seen by a specialist to get on the elective surgery waiting list

The only time publicly reported waiting lists for surgery decline is just prior to elections, and we believe the number of Victorians actually waiting for treatment in our hospitals is a figure perhaps three or more times that which is ever reported. The Victorian government needs to accept that our hospital system is under huge pressure, with hospital admissions having increased by about 30 per cent over the last eight years. That figure is unlikely to decline as the growth in our population continues to surge at the rate of about 1000 people a week.

Our hospitals run at extremely high occupancy rates, often at over 100 per cent instead of the recommended 85 per cent, which not only causes considerable stress to staff but means the system is unable to respond to

any spikes in demand, a factor which this government has totally ignored in its planning for the future. While the Brumby government tries to explain away the need for more beds in the system through an increase in day procedures and shorter lengths of stay, the fact is that at 2.3 beds per 1000-weighted population, Victoria has the lowest number of beds compared to all other states and also spends the least in recurrent public hospital funding compared to all the other states in Australia. A government-commissioned report in 2006 found there was a 550 bed shortfall, while the Australian Medical Association found that only 61 beds had been added to the hospital system from 1999 to 2006 and that there is a need for nearly 750 additional beds.

The other important element in all of this is that while Victoria's doctors and nurses are some of the best performers in the country, our doctors are the worst paid and our nurses had to strike to achieve a pay increase while receiving the lowest levels of pay among nurses across Australia. The ministerial review into Victorian public hospital medical staff not only confirmed that our doctors are the worst paid in the country but also found there is a massive and growing shortage of them in the system. They are quitting working in public hospitals, preferring the private sector, and suffer stress and disillusionment. But still the Brumby government is pushing for productivity cuts in negotiating the new enterprise bargaining agreement with Victorian doctors at a time when the growth in doctor numbers in New South Wales is four times higher than in Victoria.

What are some of the Victorian hospital facts? In 2006–07 the Brumby government failed to provide enough beds to treat 78 000 additional patients. Metropolitan health strategy forecasts reveal that Victorian public hospitals were dealing with enough patients to fill 700 additional beds over and above the number forecast by this government for 2006–07 in yet another balancing act gone wrong. The latest *Your Hospitals* report shows that there were 39 502 patients on the waiting list for elective surgery, an increase of over 2000 since December 2006; hospitals were on ambulance bypass for 3.7 per cent of the time, more than double the previous year; over 40 000 patients in the six months to December 2007 waited more than 8 hours on a trolley for admission, an increase of 9000 patients on the previous year; 85 500 or more patients waited for more than 4 hours for treatment before discharge, an increase of nearly 10 000; there was a failure to meet the benchmarks for patients in categories 2 and 3 being seen in emergency departments; and there was a failure to treat semi-urgent elective surgery patients within 90 days, with waiting times for semi-urgent patients increasing

by 4 days and waiting times for non-urgent patients increasing by 18 days.

Lies and deception are no way to run a health system. As the old idiom goes: the devil is in the detail. The detail in this budget illustrates that this government has failed to meet its own targets for health service delivery despite changing the goalposts. All of this failure has been reiterated in the *Your Hospitals* report published the week following budget day. I assume the minister thought that his failure would be overshadowed by the warm afterglow of the budget. Unfortunately the afterglow went missing and the report felt more like a cold shower, particularly when, to the chagrin of the media, it was delivered on federal budget day. Astoundingly the budget papers also reveal that the expected outcome for the 2007–08 year, which I presume will cover much of the next reporting period for the *Your Hospitals* report, will not be any better than the last, with an expectation that the same five emergency department and elective surgery targets will not be met.

These appalling outcomes occur despite claims through the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine that hospitals in a desperate bid to receive some of the bonus pool money to fund their activities have been changing performance data and amazingly designating emergency department trolleys as inpatient beds to make their performance figures look better. The government has also failed to ensure the safety of Victorians by failing yet again in meeting its code 1 target ambulance response times for the sixth year in a row even after changing that target from 13 minutes in 2002 to 15 minutes in 2007.

Additionally the Brumby government's ambulance strategy has proven to be a sham, with claims that at least 11 out of the 13 'new' 12-hour peak period units are already in operation. Even the Metropolitan Ambulance Service chief executive officer admitted to eight 'new' units having being in operation for several months. Paramedics also claim a downgrading of mobile intensive care ambulance (MICA) units from 16 two-crew responders with an ambulance and stretcher to eight units being converted to single responders without ambulance back-up in outer areas for urgent code 1 cases like cardiac arrests.

Balancing our growing population with adequate maternity beds has led to the need for the maternity funding announcement in this budget.

This announcement bears out the government's failure to recognise and appropriately plan for the birth rate increase, which has been going on for some four years.

It is also recognition of the fact that the Brumby government has closed some 20 maternity units across Victoria. The poor planning of the new women's hospital compounds the problem and illustrates that there has been a failure to provide a single extra bed in that new hospital.

The provision of 2800 additional births per annum and the reliance on the private insurance of the remaining mothers may provide for the current number of births but will not provide for the future if there are any increases in the number of children that Victorian women give birth to. It is a sad day when desperate pregnant women are using fake addresses so they can give birth at Melbourne's leading maternity hospitals. It is also a sad reflection of planning when one hears that women will be discharged from the new Royal Women's Hospital within 48 hours of giving birth because of the pressure on beds. This is hardly a recipe for mother and baby bonding and the establishment of lactation and breastfeeding.

The Brumby government has also failed to strike a balance between its election promises, the needs of the community and this year's budget in relation to capital works. Hospitals which failed to achieve the desired level of funding or none at all are: Ballarat hospital — there is no money for acute beds; Bendigo Hospital — there is no money for its complete redevelopment; Box Hill Hospital, The Angliss Hospital and the Maroondah Hospital, Alexandra District Hospital, the Monash children's wing — which was promised in the 2006 election; The Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital — which only got planning money; the Peter McCallum Cancer Institute — no money was received for the relocation of this hospital to the Parkville precinct; Caulfield General Medical Centre — which still has received no additional money; Warrnambool hospital — which had a shortfall of \$26 million for stage 1 redevelopment; Nhill hospital — there was no money for its final stages; the Wimmera health services, Coleraine hospital, Wonthaggi hospital — despite the closure of Warley Hospital; and Goulburn Valley Health and Numurkah hospital — they all need additional money.

Finally, there was no funding for or the future provision of breast screening digitalisation which was promised in the 2006 election. It is bizarre that this government, in its cancer action plan, aims to increase its survival rates for cancer victims by a further 10 per cent by 2015 but it cannot deliver on a promise to offer breast screening digitalisation. This obviously drip-feed funding policy is reflective of a purely vote-catching exercise; it is not a policy to provide appropriate infrastructure for a proper health care system.

The Auditor-General's reports on government performance and health funding contain scathing observations. The government's obesity and health lifestyle programs and the famed HealthSMART IT program which should have delivered a proper integrated IT solution to our hospitals is now behind time and is grossly over budget. Today's report by the Auditor-General slammed the government in relation to monitoring incidences within our hospitals.

Other concerns that Victorians have relate to the failure of the Brumby government to improve waiting times and dental care with over half of rural dental clinics experiencing worse results and the appalling fact that more than 50 per cent of patients are being treated as emergency cases because they have been forced to wait for too long for dental care.

Finally, while public hospitals desperately seek to increase their revenue by marketing their services to private patients in emergency departments, the newly elected federal Rudd Labor government has just dealt a further blow to the public system by changing the Medicare surcharge levy. These changes will guarantee fewer privately insured patients and a further increase in demand for non-existent beds in the Victorian hospital system. One can only hope that after years of pointing the finger at the Howard government, the Victorian Minister for Health and his Premier will fail to achieve a fifty-fifty funding deal with the commonwealth, which they claim is Victoria's right.

I have dealt with the health portfolio, but I would like to record my very grave disappointment in this government for not having provided funding for even one major project in my electorate of Caulfield. None of my schools got additional funding. Caulfield Junior College, the school opposite my electorate office, which is an old but wonderful school, has been pleading for money from this government for years but has failed, yet again, to receive substantial funding to rebuild and expand its premises.

The Caulfield General Medical Centre has received two small amounts of funding — I think it is about \$45 million out of the \$180 million that the redevelopment is worth. That centre is on the drip feed that this government calls funding for our hospitals. I believe that this government has failed across the board particularly in regard to my electorate. But as I have shown in regard to the health portfolio, this government leaves a great deal to be desired.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation) — Tonight I am proud to rise as the member for Bendigo East to talk about the important

state budget which was handed down just a few weeks ago by the Treasurer, John Lenders, and to highlight to the house in this debate on the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill 2008 just how much good this budget will do for Bendigo.

This budget has delivered on a range of key infrastructure projects that Bendigo needs for it to continue to grow as strongly as it has over the past few years largely as a result of those key infrastructure projects that the Labor government has committed to and then invested in year after year. This budget builds on that strong record and is cementing Bendigo's position as a premier centre in regional Victoria.

I will now go through some of the key initiatives regarding Bendigo in this year's budget. The first is the announcement of \$13.6 million for a brand new 60 bed nursing home. This replaces the nursing home that is known in Bendigo as the Stella Anderson nursing home. This will mean the relocation of that nursing home onto a new site and the construction of 60 new beds; this will mean a state-of-the-art nursing home facility for older residents in and around the Bendigo region.

But this is not the only nursing home project that the Labor government has funded in Bendigo in recent years. We have already funded and completed what is known as the Joan Pinder nursing home, a project which is valued at around \$8 million, which was opened a couple of years ago by the former Premier. The important point about these nursing home projects is that they involve beds which were saved from the privatisation chopping block of the previous Liberal-Nationals coalition government.

Those beds were slated to be privatised. Labor said they were not to be; Labor said no. We promised to fund those beds in a public nursing home. We delivered on that commitment, which is why the 60-bed Joan Pinder nursing home is up and running and soon the Stella Anderson nursing home, which is being funded in this year's state budget, will also be providing top-level care to older residents in and around Bendigo.

The other major health initiative that has been announced in this year's state budget for the Bendigo region, which is a significant announcement indeed, is the \$9.5 million for the construction of a new emergency department at the Bendigo Hospital. This is a significant investment in the future health needs of our community. The emergency department at Bendigo Hospital has experienced unprecedented demand for services over recent years, largely brought about through a lack of GP facilities in the Bendigo region as

a result of the former failed Liberal government's policies on supporting regional medical practices throughout the country.

We have seen the impact of this in our hospital emergency rooms. People in Bendigo could not get in to see a GP and had to come to the emergency department to receive treatment. This \$9.5 million upgrade of the emergency department at Bendigo Hospital puts in place a new emergency department and also complements the commitment that federal Labor made at the federal election last November to construct a GP super-clinic in Bendigo, which is also very welcomed.

I should point out that these two initiatives — the nursing home and the \$9.5 million for the emergency department — meet the priorities that Bendigo Hospital put forward to government. The no. 1 priority for Bendigo Health Care Group was the funding of the emergency department. We have delivered this funding in this year's budget, and of course there is the ongoing work under way on the necessary planning for the future redevelopment of the hospital. We provided \$2 million in last year's budget for this, and this work is under way, but importantly this budget delivered on the no. 1 priority for Bendigo Health — that is, the \$9.5 million for the emergency department.

An editorial in the *Bendigo Advertiser* of 3 May states:

The pre-budget announcement yesterday of just under \$10 million to support a revamp of the accident and emergency department at Bendigo Hospital is good news for Bendigo Health and for the community.

I certainly echo that statement. The other couple of major announcements in Bendigo as part of the budget were in the education and skills area, and I was particularly pleased as local member but also as Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation that this budget provided \$11 million for a new trades skills centre to be constructed at the Charleston Road campus of the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE (BRIT). This is going to be a significant boost for trades training in the Bendigo region. It will involve the construction of new facilities for electrical trades, specialist trades, painting, plumbing and construction. This will bring all the trades under the BRIT operations onto the one site at Charleston Road, which is also administratively significant for the institute.

I was very pleased to read in the *Bendigo Advertiser* of 10 May an article which states:

Bendigo Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Graeme Sloan said the investment in BRIT ticked off another important priority for local industry.

'This investment makes good economic sense', Mr Sloan said.

'It is not only great for the students but it meets the needs of the future and feeds the potential growth of these industries'.

It is absolutely vital that we invest in trades training for the future when you consider that over the last four years the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE has experienced a 25 per cent increase in, mostly young, people wanting to undertake traditional trades training. That is great for the future needs of those industries, but it is also great for the young people in Bendigo, who know they can undertake high-quality training in their local community and go on and get a good job in that area. That is certainly important in retaining those talented young people in our local community.

The other significant education announcement in this year's budget was the \$41 million that the Brumby Labor government has allocated in it for the Bendigo education plan. The Bendigo education plan presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to redesign junior secondary education in the Bendigo region. This is why at the last state election in November 2006, the Labor Party committed \$72 million to rebuild four brand-new 7-10 junior secondary colleges in Bendigo.

This means that by the end of this construction work, every single year 7, year 8, year 9 and year 10 student in the Bendigo community who goes to a government school will be taught in brand new school buildings. That is indeed an historic opportunity. The Bendigo education plan has come about as a result of a great partnership between the school communities, bringing together five school communities, working with those communities, working with teachers, working with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and working with government.

That is why I was a very strong backer for the Labor Party to support the Bendigo education plan at the November 2006 election, and I was absolutely delighted that last year we put a down payment of \$20 million on the Bendigo education plan and that this year's budget delivers a second payment towards the Bendigo education plan of \$41 million.

I would like to make this point, because there has been a bit said by some misinformed members of the opposition about the whereabouts of the remaining \$11 million: as I said, we committed \$72 million to this project, and that is absolutely what we intend to deliver. We absolutely intend to deliver \$72 million to the construction of the four schools under the Bendigo education plan. It is absolute hypocrisy for the Liberal-Nationals coalition to be running around

wondering where this money is, because at the last state election the Liberal Party and The Nationals did not commit 1 cent to build one piece of school infrastructure in the Bendigo community. They promised to build schools in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne, but they could not find it in themselves to promise to build schools in the Bendigo community.

Labor committed \$72 million over its term in government to build these four new schools. In last year's budget we made the first payment of \$20 million, the second payment in this year's budget of \$41 million, and I know on good authority from the education department that this will mean all schools can start to be constructed over the coming eight months and that all four schools will be completed in this term of government. That means we will see the delivery of the funds that are needed to build these schools.

Mr Wells interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! The honourable member for Scoresby should not interject across the table in that manner.

Ms ALLAN — The hypocrisy of the Liberal-Nationals coalition on this issue knows no bounds. As I said, they promised not 1 cent to build new skills in Bendigo. I should also point out, because they have had a bit to say about the Bendigo Hospital as well, that they did not promise one single dollar to invest in Bendigo Hospital at the last state election.

At the last state election Labor took a plan to the Bendigo community. It was for a new nursing home, it was for investment in hospital services and for investment in our schools. I am absolutely proud to stand here today and say this Labor government has delivered on these commitments, but we have gone beyond that. We have committed \$11 million for the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE and also we looked at the other important infrastructure needs of the Bendigo community. I will come to the needs of our regional rail service.

This year's budget commits \$22 million for the purchase of 22 new V/Locity carriages. Our regional rail network is booming. We have seen patronage increase significantly because the Labor government has invested in upgrading our regional services; at the same time we reduced the price of V/Line tickets by 20 per cent. That has led to people voting with their feet and using our regional rail services. We have to remember, though, when we talk about the regional rail program that, once again, it was the Liberals and The Nationals that opposed this investment in regional rail.

Not only in government did they close schools, hospitals and rail lines; we now see in opposition that they oppose or did not commit to these initiatives, particularly for the Bendigo and Central Victorian communities, at subsequent elections. This is where Labor has had a vision to build the infrastructure that supports community growth but also importantly supports economic growth.

That in turn brings me to the other big announcement for regional Victoria in this year's state budget: that is, the regional first home buyers bonus of \$3000. This is a fantastic initiative that will help retain particularly young families in our regions and encourage more young families to move and enjoy the great lifestyle that is on offer in regional and rural Victoria. What does it mean for a young family that purchases a house and land package worth around \$320 000? Out of this budget it will not only get a 17 per cent cut in stamp duty but it will also receive \$15 000 worth of incentives because of the additional \$3000 from the Brumby government for the regional first home owner scheme. A Bendigo real estate agent, Doug Lougoon, said:

It is all positive and it is certainly good news for anybody in the building industry.

That is certainly true and that is why this is a great regional development initiative alongside supporting working families with the purchase of their first home.

What did we get from The Nationals? We have heard criticism of and opposition to yet another good initiative for regional Victoria. This mob knows only how to knock regional Victoria. When The Nationals are in government they shut down services and when they are in opposition they knock every single good initiative introduced by Labor. All they do is criticise or oppose!

That brings me, finally, to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. This fund has been an outstanding success. You, Acting Speaker, have firsthand experience of this from recent funding announcements for \$791 000 at the Mallacoota Airport. To date the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund has delivered over \$400 million to 173 major projects leveraging off a value of over \$1.19 billion. I make this point because once again, year after year, the Leader of The Nationals runs around regional Victoria trying to peddle his mistruths to mislead regional Victorians on the true nature of this fund. He is doing this on a blatant misreading of the budget papers.

The facts are that this Labor government has committed \$585 million over 10 years to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. It was the very first

piece of legislation that we introduced to Parliament back in 1999. The Nationals opposed it then and continue to oppose it and peddle mistruths about it today. I am absolutely proud to be the minister who is responsible for the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and to be a member of Parliament, the member for Bendigo East, in a government that through this appropriation budget bill of 2008–09 has delivered on those key infrastructure projects that regional centres like Bendigo need to continue to grow. In schools, hospitals and rail we have made those significant investments that will ensure we continue to have strong population and jobs growth in regional centres. That is the Labor way, which is in stark contrast to the Liberals-Nationals way which is to shut down regional centres and treat them as the toenails of the state. We will continue to invest.

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I am pleased to rise to speak on the 2008–09 budget bill. I begin by saying that it would have been nice if the \$1.17 billion was being used to benefit more people in rural Victoria and in seats like Evelyn. As we are all too painfully aware, the Brumby Government has benefited from record tax revenue but failed to increase basic services to keep pace with our growing population. Our infrastructure is showing signs of years of neglect.

The government is spending \$35 billion this financial year. However, funding has been largely limited to ALP-held seats; Liberal electorates like Evelyn are considered lucky to have received 90 upgraded railway car park spaces and \$6.3 million for a Mount Evelyn school to upgrade its facilities. This is funding that the government had firmly promised for the 2006–07 financial year. It amazes me that despite the government's record spending, promises from the 2006 election remain unfulfilled in the Yarra Ranges and Evelyn. Lilydale police station, Lilydale super-clinic, pedestrian crossings at the Warburton Rail Trail on Maroondah Highway, the crossing at York Road, Mount Evelyn, traffic lights at Coldstream, technical wings at secondary schools and basic school maintenance all remain unfulfilled. As I just mentioned, Yarra Ranges is going to receive 90 new car park spaces at Lilydale station. This is not 90 new car park spaces — it is just the sealing and line marking of the existing car parking area. Why on earth it is going to take four years to deliver, I cannot understand.

We have real transport needs in the Yarra Ranges and I have used my time in this house to draw Parliament's attention to them on several occasions. As many would have seen on *Today Tonight*, the Lilydale train line topped the list for the largest number of train cancellations last year. I am saddened to report that

nothing has changed in the first half of this year. We recently had a couple of trains cancelled during peak hour. Not only is this a continued source of inconvenience to Yarra Ranges commuters, it is also a contributing factor to overcrowding on subsequent trains which are expected to cope with double the passenger load. This is having an impact on residents' abilities to access employment, education, recreation and essential services. The stress that it causes has been explained to me by one family when their train was cancelled and then they were late when they had to get to a childminding centre to pick up their children. The stress this is causing for families should not be tolerated.

It is irresponsible for the government to neglect calls to a region on obviously political grounds. The people of the Yarra Ranges are suffering as a result. Bus services in Evelyn are not much better. In fact they have become so problematic that the *Lilydale and Yarra Valley Leader* newspaper conducted a ticket-to-ride forum on 7 April to investigate ways of improving bus services. The last upgrade to bus services we received was in May 2007, when Invicta Bus Services was funded to put on more buses to Mount Evelyn including nights and Sundays. However, it is worth highlighting that these buses seldom operate past 10.00 p.m.

For the rural towns of the Yarra Ranges, the sense of dislocation and disconnection has worsened. Just last week I was told by a constituent about a tourist couple who became stranded one weekend while visiting one of our many vineyards. The absence of rail and bus transport on the outskirts of Evelyn caused the couple a great deal of anxiety until they were picked up by a passer-by who escorted them back to their accommodation. Yarra Ranges is a major tourism hub. Tourists will be turned off if Yarra Ranges is perceived to be too difficult to get around.

The pedestrian bridge over Maroondah Highway was to be a completion of the Warburton Rail Trail. It is an excellent tourist attraction and is used by many thousands of people throughout the year. Much work has been done by the voluntary committees and a former member of the other place, the Honourable Graeme Stoney, was very instrumental in the work that was done on this trail, as he was with other trails throughout Victoria. Thousands of people go on this trail, but it is very difficult to access if you travel by train to Lilydale station and want to locate the trail. The pedestrian bridge over Maroondah Highway was a firm promise.

I have been informed by the Shire of Yarra Ranges that VicRoads has asked the Brumby government for

additional funding from the 2008–09 state budget in order for this project to proceed. The original allocated amount of \$1.3 million was clearly insufficient. It is further evidence of the inability of this government to successfully manage even the smallest of projects, which is very worrying. With VicRoads having had no further contact with the government, one is left to assume that we can expect more delays, because the government has not announced additional funding for the project to be completed before 2010.

There was another firm promise for a pedestrian crossing at Wray Crescent and York Road. The Howard government provided \$573 000 towards the duplication and for traffic signals to be installed in Wray Crescent, and this made a separate crossing at the Warburton trail intersection redundant, so the Victorian government suspended its 2006 funding commitment of \$450 000. However, the total cost of the duplication and lights at Wray Crescent was estimated to reach \$900 000.

I wrote to VicRoads in September 2007 requesting that the government reinstate funding to bring the crossing to a first-class standard. Although VicRoads has publicly stated that it will contribute funding towards the crossing, the exact amount has not yet been confirmed by the government. It has also been said that funding left over from the contribution will be used to fund other crossings in the region, but no-one seems to know how much that will be. I am informed the engineers are in the process of drawing up designs for the crossing. As one can assume, they know how much the cost is, but the people of Mount Evelyn do not know. They do not know how much is being contributed, nor whether any money will be left over for a much-needed crossing at Hereford Road.

I refer to the issue of traffic lights at the Maroondah and Melba highways and the issue of Killara Road in Coldstream. In 2006 we were promised \$1.5 million to install traffic lights at the intersection of Maroondah and Melba highways. Funding of \$400 000 was allocated in the 2007–08 budget to enable VicRoads to develop the project. This has ignored calls by local residents for lights to be installed at the Killara Road intersection, not at the Maroondah and Melba highway intersection. The significance of Killara Road is that it is an access road for residents who live in Coldstream and is also a road the Country Fire Authority needs to respond to emergencies. CFA staff find it exceptionally difficult to get out onto Killara Road, particularly at weekends when the tourist traffic is so heavy.

The government has tried to justify its decision on the grounds that the intersection at Maroondah and Melba

highways carries a greater volume of traffic. However, the placement of these traffic lights should be according to the needs of the local constituents, not the whim of the minister of the day who decided that our promised lights at Killara and Maroondah could be surpassed by the promise of lights at Melba and Maroondah.

The saga of the Lilydale superclinic goes on and on. It was promised in 2002; in 2005 the Premier formally allocated funding; works began in 2006; and more works were done in 2007. It is promised to be ready in July, and I suspect the government is sweating on this latest commitment, given we are just one month away from its scheduled opening and Eastern Health is reportedly struggling to find the staff to fill the Lilydale-based medical positions.

Furthermore, we will not be getting all of the services the state government originally promised. Dialysis, radiography and primary injury care services have been scrapped. Oncology is now only going to operate two days per week. Given cancer is one of Australia's biggest killers, this change is likely to be out of step with growing demand and will do little to ease the immense pressure on surrounding hospitals, including Maroondah and William Angliss — and we heard the shadow health minister talking about the figures at those hospitals today.

Mount Evelyn Primary School got the \$6.3 million funding under the government school modernisation project, and I am pleased about that. When the member for Monbulk announced that funding, he failed to mention that the government was a year late, going by the very firm promise made by the previous education minister. Other schools such as Pembroke Secondary College are desperately in need of funding. That school is actually in the electorate of Kilsyth, but it has a middle school in the electorate of Evelyn at Mount Evelyn,— and a lot of students from my electorate attend it. From speaking to the principal, Aidan Ryan, and school parents, I note they are angered by the government's decision to again refuse funding for the master plan, when they have been told this plan was necessary and had received support from the region. Yet again they have been disappointed.

The redevelopment was first announced eight years ago. An entire generation of students has come and gone from the college without a single nail ever being hammered. They have been repeatedly assured they are on the top of the government's funding list. However, somehow the commitment to fund the master plan keeps falling off at the level of Treasury.

It is also distressing for me to be told that five principals from the region are currently on stress leave, unable to cope with the overwhelming demands on staff who are forced by this government to teach in substandard facilities that require urgent repair. Healesville High School in the electorate of Seymour is in an absolutely appalling condition, and I am receiving contact from the staff there who are finding it extremely difficult and dangerous to work in that school. Seville Primary School has leaking toilets. Wandin Yallock school has rotting walls you can put your fist in. On and on the list goes. Basic maintenance has not been provided to any of these schools, and we have not had all the major rebuilds.

The member for Geelong stood here proudly saying that all of his schools had received funding for upgrades or rebuilds, yet the schools in Liberal-held electorates seem to have been victimised by this government.

A feasibility study for an alternate site for the Lilydale and Yarra Valley Netball Association was promised prior to 2006, but we are still waiting for the results of that study. While at it appears that at some stage the netball club will move to Pinks Reserve in Kilsyth from the Lilydale location, the underlying issue is that the government is taking years to complete even the smallest of projects.

Perhaps I should not start talking about the north–south pipeline, Acting Speaker, until after the dinner adjournment.

Sitting suspended 6.29 p.m. until 8.02 p.m.

Mrs FYFFE — Prior to the dinner break I referred to the north–south pipeline — the debacle that is now going to happen because of this Premier's stubbornness. It is a pipeline that is going to steal water from people north of the Great Dividing Range to give to Melburnians. It is ill conceived and ill thought out. In April the Victorian Auditor-General, Des Pearson, tabled in Parliament a damning performance audit into the government's water management. The report confirmed our worst suspicions. The Auditor-General said the accuracy of estimates pertaining to the cost benefits and risks of water projects, including the north–south pipeline, varied considerably, raising doubts about their validity. This suggests the basis upon which the government has developed this water policy is fundamentally flawed.

In the couple of minutes I have left to conclude my contribution I would like to move on to a couple of areas of concern in my electorate. As is the case in many areas, we now have problems with homelessness,

with people who through many circumstances are losing their homes and properties. I would like to actually commend the Minister for Housing for his response to the issues that I have raised with him and for the letter I received today, in which he said the shire of Yarra Ranges would be receiving 80 new units over the next four years, and these new units are going to be for crisis and transitional housing. It is good to hear that, but I ask the minister if we could have those units available more urgently. We have about 24 people sleeping in cars at the moment, and there are more sleeping in their cars at Healesville. Currently I have an 80-year-old lady who is due for eviction next week. There is not any emergency housing for her in the area. She has been a tenant for 12 years — a very good tenant, with good references — but it is virtually impossible to find somewhere where she can go to live within her budget. As I say, the Minister for Housing has responded, and I appreciate that response.

Another issue is the need for flashing lights at Wandin North Primary School. I have raised this matter in the house on several occasions. We have had the farcical happening of VicRoads having the speed limit go from 80 to 70, back up to 80 and down to 40 while it has been doing roadworks et cetera. We now find that the current speed limit of 70 on the Warburton Highway that goes past the school is actually making the school ineligible for funding under the scheme for flashing speed lights that are due to be installed outside all schools in Victoria. The cutbacks to funding for school crossing supervisors is another area I want to highlight. The Shire of Yarra Ranges is having to subsidise more and more the school crossing supervisors. It is more cost shifting by this government to local councils and the abrogation of the responsibilities of this government.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — It gives me great pleasure to rise in support of the 2008–09 appropriation bill, which as we all know provides for the first budget of the Treasurer in the other place, John Lenders.

I want to begin by congratulating the Treasurer on delivering a true Labor budget — a budget that delivers in education, health, transport, social justice, and in my portfolio areas of sport, youth and multicultural affairs, which I will talk about in a moment. It is a budget that delivers for our cities, suburbs and rural and regional areas. It is a budget which touches every Victorian in every part of the state while continuing our proud record of growing the Victorian economy. Can I also thank the Treasurer for taking time to visit many parts of Victoria over the last few weeks to discuss the

budget firsthand with members of the community. He was very well received in the outer east.

I would like to begin my contribution by talking about a few local initiatives in an around my electorate. To begin with I will talk about a \$6.3 million upgrade to the Mount Evelyn Primary School for new classrooms, a new art and craft room, a new canteen and new student toilets. When I went to the school on the Wednesday after the budget I had a look at the design, and it is absolutely sensational. It will be a terrific learning environment for the students at the school. The principal, Phil Comport, said the funding was sensational news. He said, 'This is a fantastic outcome for Mount Evelyn'. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate Phil and the school council. Also, very importantly, I want to acknowledge the terrific work of my former colleague in this place Heather McTaggart, the former member for Evelyn, for her strong work and strong advocacy for this project over the last few years.

In addition to Mount Evelyn there is an upgrade to the Sherbrooke Community School, which is a wonderful school in my electorate. The principal there, Bob Shepherd, is absolutely rapt. This school always looks at innovative programs, and I am quite excited about the upgrade there.

The Monbulk police station will receive an upgrade to deal with some security and occupational health and safety issues. I know Sergeant Alan Fincher of the Monbulk police is very pleased about that upgrade. There is funding for increased mental health services at Maroondah Hospital and Yarra Ranges Health, and for park-and-ride facilities at Lilydale train station, including 90 much-needed additional car parking spaces there.

This budget has also delivered very strongly for sport, youth and multicultural affairs. The budget heralds a new era for sport in our state, particularly for our Olympic sports. At the forefront is a \$50.3 million commitment to a world-class state athletics centre at Albert Park. I am sure every member of the house would agree that young Victorian athletes deserve the best possible chance to represent their state and country. I attended a terrific event this morning, farewelling our Victorian Institute of Sport athletes off on their way to the Beijing Olympic Games. Victoria already has 50 athletes in the national teams for the Olympic and Paralympic games. To achieve this end and reach their goals, they need support. They deserve better training facilities than they currently have. They deserve a facility of international standard which will bring together all the key athletics bodies and which will finally locate our principal Olympic sports in one area.

We will create a state athletics centre at Albert Park which will deliver on all of those fronts. We will have the aquatic Olympic sports based at the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre, including Diving Victoria, Swimming Victoria, water polo and synchronised swimming. In addition to the aquatic sports at the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre, you have already got basketball, badminton, table tennis and squash. All the track and field sports will be located at the new facility at Lakeside Oval. This is a fantastic opportunity for our athletes.

It will also deliver lower costs and greater access for school groups and athletics clubs who host carnivals. One of the issues with Olympic Park has been the access to parking facilities and the cost of using it; it has had a decrease in usage as a consequence. This will deliver for our schools as well as our athletics clubs right across Victoria. It will also deliver the Victorian Institute of Sport its very own purpose-built facility inside the historic Lakeside Oval 1926 grandstand. At the moment it is a derelict facility, but that is going to be completely refurbished and house the Victorian Institute of Sport.

It will deliver more dedicated recreational space and more synthetic pitches and turf fields for all Albert Park users. Importantly for South Melbourne Football Club, it will bring the club together. At the moment its men's teams are based at Lakeside Oval, but the juniors and women's teams are based in other suburbs. The benefit for South Melbourne Football Club is that we are bringing it together, so everyone is going to be a winner out of this program.

Heading into the Beijing Olympics, we have no male qualified for the men's 100 or 200-metre track events. This new facility is all about moving the sport forward. I understand that there are challenges; there is the heritage link that athletics has with Olympic Park, and we are going to honour that heritage link, but this is about the athletes — the stars — of tomorrow as we head towards the 2012 London Olympic Games and beyond.

It is the same story at Olympic Park. The redevelopment will see better facilities, more open space and more community access. The grandstands at Olympic Park will be pulled down, creating another AFL-standard oval for the precinct's tenants. At Melbourne, an Olympic Parks trust will have the Melbourne Football Club, Melbourne Storm Rugby League Club and Melbourne Victory Football Club all based in the new rectangular stadium and Collingwood Football Club based at the Lexus Centre.

All of those teams need access to training facilities, and in terms of the future, Football Federation Australia has already indicated that a second A-league team may be around in 2010. That would be a great thing for Melbourne and for Victoria. Down the track we may also see a super-14s team or super-14 games played out of the rectangular stadium. We have to deliver access to training facilities in that precinct as well.

Mr Jasper — Don't forget country Victoria!

Mr MERLINO — I will not forget country Victoria; I will come to that.

In terms of its impact on those tenants, I will quote from the *Age* of 29 April which reported comments made by Paul Gardner, the president of the Melbourne Football Club. The article states:

Melbourne chairman Paul Gardner declared the government's decision among the most important days in Melbourne's history.

'You cannot underplay the significance this has for the football club', Gardner said.

'We are thrilled to bits ... we will have a home base back in the city at a fantastic new venue and facilities'.

The budget also delivers a \$10 million boost to our Victorian Football League (VFL) grounds. These grounds are vital community hubs. The member for Williamstown is in the house, as is the member for Albert Park. I will use Williamstown as an example.

Williamstown oval will receive a \$3 million boost. Among the beneficiaries of this investment will be the Williamstown Football Club, Williamstown Cricket Club, the Western Jets Football Club, the Western Region Football League, Sydenham Auskick and Melton Auskick. During the 150th birthday of Australian Rules Football in this country, this is about providing an elite hub for those elite footballers in each of those areas where the VFL grounds will be upgraded, and that includes Ballarat and Bendigo.

This budget builds on the Brumby government's unparalleled support for community sport in this state. Over \$170 million has been spent on community sporting facilities — 1860 projects — and \$100 million of that \$170 million has been invested in rural and regional Victoria. There is an absolute focus on rural and regional Victoria.

In my last minutes or so I also refer to the youth affairs portfolio. Some \$3.8 million has been committed to the Brumby government's youth mentoring initiative. This investment will boost mentoring initiatives for our young people right across the state, particularly those

who are disengaged from education, employment and training. The mentoring and capacity-building initiative will continue to be delivered and to build on three key components: building mentoring, tools for better mentoring; and capacity building. The \$3.8 million investment will change lives. Mentoring is one aspect that absolutely delivers results.

One example is the Mildura youth mentoring project that targeted disadvantaged young people from 14 to 18 years of age who were disengaged from education and vocational opportunities, and it culminated in the Kokoda Trail. Of the 15 young people who were mentored, six young indigenous people remained at secondary school when they were at risk of dropping out; three young people have attended alternative education and training; two young people have gained an apprenticeship; two young people with an intellectual disability developed networks which enabled them to gain part-time employment while continuing with their education; and two young people involved in the program successfully made the transition from living in out-of-home-care placement to independent living.

The additional support for mentoring contained in the budget further builds on key achievements the Office for Youth has delivered to our young people, which include: FReeZACentral; Victoria Rocks, which is a great initiative and provides across-the-state access to musical equipment; Youthcentral; the positive body image initiative; the Young People Direct strategy; and regional youth affairs networks.

In terms of multicultural affairs, the budget committed \$2 million towards further improvements to interpreting and translating services. This funding will focus on enhancing the skills of the interpreting workforce particularly in the areas of mental health and court interpreting, as well as improving the technology for interpreting services. The Brumby government has a strong focus on providing our culturally and linguistically diverse population with access to government services.

The budget contains commitments for services in justice, education and health that will also benefit emerging refugee communities. An amount of \$17.7 million will be provided for additional nurses for the refugee health nurse program, liaison officers for refugee communities to navigate the justice system, specialised tutoring and additional support for refugee schoolchildren.

Victoria truly is the best place to live, work and raise a family. Again, I want to commend the Treasurer on a

fantastic budget that delivers for my electorate, delivers for the outer east, and delivers for communities right across Victoria. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I listened with a great deal of interest to the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs. I noted particularly the huge amount of funding being put into major projects in metropolitan Melbourne. The massive amount of money being spent in metropolitan Melbourne disappoints me as a country member in north-eastern Victoria. It reminds me that when I came into Parliament some years ago I did so because country people were disadvantaged compared to those in metropolitan Melbourne. Thirty years down the track, and I am doing the same things.

Mr Merlino interjected.

Mr JASPER — The minister interjects and says there is money for areas such as Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong. It goes further than that when we come to areas such as north-eastern Victoria. I commend the minister for visiting my electorate. He was able to provide funding under the Sport and Recreation Victoria and Australian Football League program to the shires of Moira and Indigo and the Rural City of Wangaratta. He announced \$60 000 for the Tarrawingee Football Netball Club, which will spend \$150 000 to redevelop its facilities. That was great, but when you look at the amount of money spent in other areas, this is extremely disappointing.

I also listened to the member for Northcote when she spoke on the appropriation bill. Quite frankly her contribution reminded me of the speeches made by the member for Bendigo East, now the Minister for Regional and Rural Development, some years ago when she was busily criticising the previous government and indicating that schools, hospitals and police stations were closed right across country Victoria. She talked about the dark years of the coalition government, but what she did not say was that in 1992 the state had a debt of \$32 billion — she did not mention that at all.

I should remind the house that in those days I was not the white-haired boy as far as the coalition and the Premier of the state at the time were concerned. But I understand completely what happened at that time. The budget was turned around and the state was put on its feet again. When we had the change of government in 1999 the new Labor government could not believe that it came in with a huge budget surplus. Of course there is no acknowledgement of that.

When the member for Northcote spoke on the appropriation bill in the last sitting week she said the same things. She said all these hospitals and schools and police stations were closed in country Victoria. I would like the member for Albert Park to listen, because he might not be aware of this. I remind the house again that no hospitals, no police stations and only two schools in my electorate of Murray Valley were closed during the time of the coalition government. Why were those schools closed? Because they had less than 10 students. In fact there were school buses going past that picked those students up.

We need to understand that it was not all bad in country Victoria. There is no doubt that we were doing it tough, but members need to understand what has happened. We look at the budget papers brought before us. I listened to the information provided by the member for Scoresby in replying to the budget for the coalition. He reminded us that the current debt is about \$4 billion and it will go up to nearly \$20 billion by 2011. Here we go again. It took from 1992 to 1999 to turn the budget around. I pay due credit to then Treasurer Alan Stockdale and the Premier of the day for turning the state around. The current government is blaming everything on the previous government, which had a huge debt in 1992 and which brought the budget into the black. Then this government came in and criticised what happened in those years. I want to move on, but we need to put on the record that this was the case. Too often I hear members on the government benches referring to the dark, black years of the coalition government. The member for Bendigo East, who is now a minister, is not quite as harsh in her comments now. I think she realises that money needs to be spent in country Victoria.

I extend an invitation to the member for Northcote to come into the house and talk to me. I will invite the member up to my electorate of Murray Valley. We are going ahead, despite the difficulties in country Victoria. We are doing it hard and tough with drought and dry conditions going on for many years. It is disappointing that we have a government that does not really understand the great difficulties we face. I think we need to understand that right from the outset.

I am sick to death of coming into the house and hearing the Premier of the day selectively quoting from newspapers about what he sees as great positives for the government. There are some positives, but there are a lot of negatives too, and you need to be balanced in all these issues. I have always sought to be balanced in what I say in the house — giving credit where it is due but also saying there are things to be done. I want to get on with that if time allows. However, I will quote one

small section from an article in the *Herald Sun* of Thursday, 8 May 2008. The heading is 'Budget wins faint praise' and the second heading is 'Mixed bag but call for more on infrastructure'. It says:

Peak bodies representing small businesses say the Victorian budget has delivered them a mixed bag.

Cuts in payroll tax, WorkCover premiums and land tax have been applauded.

But the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry said there should have been more money spent on infrastructure.

And the Tourism Alliance Victoria said small and medium tourism businesses hit by the effect of the Port Phillip Bay channel deepening needed financial support.

That is quoting four paragraphs from that particular article. It is not all good news; there are issues that are of great concern.

I want to indicate from the outset that we have had progress in the Murray Valley electorate, mainly because of the work that has been done by me as the local member and others supporting the organisations. I will refer to some of them, because I think it is worthwhile putting this on the record. I was very pleased that \$3.3 million was allocated to Wangaratta West Primary School, and I gave due credit to the government and the minister and those who did work locally to get that money

We are getting development of the Wangaratta Performing Arts Centre, the technical education centre, a child-care centre, redevelopment of Wangaratta High School and completion of the relocation of a 60-bed nursing home to Northeast Health Wangaratta. Then there is the sports centre at Numurkah. It was in real trouble because \$500 000 had been approved under the regional partnerships program but the contracts had not been signed. That is among 28 projects that have been taken forward, and I give due credit again to the government and the representations made to the government by myself and others to try and ensure these projects could go ahead. The information provided to me is that those projects have been approved. There are pluses, and I accept that, but the minuses need to be looked at and that is what I want to concentrate on.

If the government says it is spending money in areas of assistance to us in country Victoria, it needs to put it in balance. That is what we need to do. We should look at passenger rail services in north-eastern Victoria. They are an absolute disgrace. The Minister for Public Transport comes into the house and tells us we are getting increased patronage. Of course we are. People

are using the service despite it being a dreadful service. The high cost of petrol and other things means people are using the service anyway.

The complaints that come into my office and the office of the member for Benalla need to be put on the record, and I have done that on many occasions. It is a drastic situation. What we want from the minister is an indication. I told the minister to give us a program of what the government is going to do to upgrade services into country Victoria. She should tell us what the government is going to do. We need to understand why the government has spent \$1 billion upgrading the Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong lines into Melbourne but we in north-east Victoria have been forgotten. The minister is well aware of this. I have made many comments on this issue. The government needs to understand clearly that this is a dreadful situation that needs to be addressed.

I want to get on to other things and talk about Buffalo. There are two Buffalos, and the member for Benalla knows this very well. We have Mount Buffalo and we have got the Lake Buffalo Dam. As far as I am concerned, the issue relating to Mount Buffalo is a drastic situation. We have a situation where the government is discriminating against us in north-eastern Victoria. It has a disgusting record in relation to the Chalet, which was closed 12 months ago. Cresta Lodge burnt down. The government got over \$400 000 in insurance but it is not spending it. We want a program of what it is going to do. I wrote to the minister and the minister wrote back to me. I thought that was very nice of him. It was a great letter. He said the government was investigating what it is going to do, but it has not made a decision yet. I suggest to the house that we are going into the winter months. Who is going to go up to Mount Buffalo the way it is? Nobody. It is an icon. Members should have a look at the history of it.

Mr Foley interjected.

Mr JASPER — I invite the member for Albert Park to come up to my electorate. He will learn something. Acting Speaker, the member for Albert Park tells me he has relatives in the area; I invite him to come and see his relatives, and I will show him around.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr JASPER — That's all right, we are going well. We can show the member many things. We could go to Lake Buffalo. We have a massive problem with water in north-eastern Victoria. Somebody said to me, 'You are fairly supportive of the coalition now'. I said 'Well,

so far as I am concerned, particularly in the last six months, things have changed. We have a government that is ignoring us in north-eastern Victoria and northern Victoria', but it is not worried. All the dam levels are down. We know that water will be drawn from a system that is now in real trouble, and the government will take some of the water. I heard the member for Melton interjecting, 'We will take it from savings'. You cannot take it from savings if there is nothing there. It is like having a bath with no water in it. Try it, it is pretty difficult — not that I have tried it. The government needs to understand the difficulties.

I wrote to the water minister in South Australia. She happens to be a Nationals member in a Labor government, which is another issue, but that is her prerogative. I wrote to her on the basis that we needed to get her support for building big Buffalo Dam and Lake William Hovell. She wrote back and said that she did not support that because they needed water in South Australia. I wrote back to her straight away and said, 'If there is no water at the other end, you will not get it in South Australia'. That is clear as crystal. I said to her, 'You want to save the Murray system and the water and the irrigators to date'.

Mr Weller interjected.

Mr JASPER — That is exactly right. Dartmouth Dam and the Snowy scheme — if you had gone to the Victorian Farmers Federation conference two years ago you would have seen the pictures on the wall showing people having picnics on the bed of the Murray at Swan Hill and Mildura. Why? Because there is no water in the system. What has saved the system? Dams, having the massive storage of Dartmouth Dam, with 4 million megalitres, but which is now down to about 12 per cent capacity.

Mr Foley interjected.

Mr JASPER — Yes, of course, but it has saved the system.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Campbell) — Order! I remind the member to please address the Chair. It is lovely to have a question and answer session, but the member should go through the Chair.

Mr JASPER — It is my belief that all my comments have been directed through the Chair and to members here. I think they are most interesting. The fact is there are many other issues that should be raised. Before I came here tonight I wrote down 10 issues that I should speak on but I have only got to no. 3. If I could get an extension of time, I could go to the issues that are really critical to the people of north-east Victoria. I

could go on to border anomalies, but the house will just say, 'He is on it again'.

If you live in north-eastern Victoria, on the border between Victoria and New South Wales, you understand the difficulty with border anomalies. Huge issues are involved. We want a government that is responding. I give due credit to the previous Premier of Victoria who acknowledged the fact that we needed that organisation. I worked with people from the Department of Premier and Cabinet to make sure that occurred. We had a meeting in Echuca in 2006 and in Albury in 2007. It is a huge issue.

I have not covered the other important issues. On payroll tax, the exclusion of apprentices under the apprenticeship assistance scheme: if you are a small employer, you have to employ more than three apprentices to access that scheme. That is absolutely ridiculous. Most small employers, if they are lucky, will have one apprentice, but they are excluded from the scheme. I spoke to the member for Burwood who said that you will get it at the finish. But I said to him that you have to employ three apprentices and he did not seem to understand.

If you pay payroll tax, you have to include the apprentices' salaries when paying that tax. In talking about payroll tax, it is great that it has been reduced to 4.95 per cent but what they do not say is that when your total bill is over \$550 000, you start paying payroll tax. It is the lowest in Australia. What is happening is that a small business that employs up to 10 people is paying payroll tax. I know from personal experience. I know businesses that pay payroll tax, and I know those businesses in the electorate of Murray Valley; they are small businesses battling for survival.

I know those in the motor industry, which is a tough and hard industry. The government does not understand that businesses must be profitable. If you do not have profitable businesses, you will not be employing labour. I get government members saying to me, 'We will employ them'. The government cannot employ everyone. We need the state to go forward and have an economy that is moving forward; supporting private enterprise is the only way to go in Victoria.

I finally say that the issues I have not been able to cover are in relation to primary industry and the great difficulty primary producers are facing in Victoria. That goes to the businesses in small country cities and towns that are battling for survival. The government needs to get out into country Victoria and recognise what is happening and where support is needed. I acknowledge the support of the Minister for Health, who is present in

the chamber. We are working on one or two issues on which I want his support. That is the way we go forward — working together to get support into the future.

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Murray Valley in debate. It is good to hear the member show support for the Labor government in some of the policies that have been put forward. The member for Murray Valley is fondly known by his Labor colleagues as ‘Red Kenny’. It is good to hear that Red Kenny has not lost his fire and is still prepared to stand up and support his electorate regardless of who is in government. I commend him for that.

In speaking to the Appropriation Bill I want to congratulate the new Treasurer, John Lenders, on the delivery of his first budget. There is much in it that has been welcomed by most of Victoria, perhaps not by the coalition parties, but most of Victoria is pleased to see the forward policies that are outlined in the 2008–09 budget.

I want to talk particularly about transport, particularly in relation to my electorate, which is an inner urban electorate and is well looked after in terms of public transport. Some of the overcrowding in trains was very obvious on the Broadmeadows and Craigieburn lines about two years ago but the funds that have been made available in this year’s budget and in next year’s budget have really helped to improve travelling times and accommodation for people in my area.

With the extension of the line to Craigieburn there are significant car parks at Craigieburn and Roxburgh Park, and there will be at Coolaroo when that station is built, which means people are getting on the train much earlier and travelling into the city rather than driving through residential areas, including my own, to get on the trains. That has been really quite significant. I have actually caught the train several times recently from Essendon into the city at various times of the day, and from talking to my constituents it is clear they have seen a significant improvement in terms of availability of seats and a decrease in overcrowding. Those changes have been most welcome, and in this budget the extra line at Craigieburn will allow more trains to come down that line as well, so we can look forward to a further service in the future.

The other area in which we have had significant improvement is bus lines. I find it quite humorous that I hear some people speaking strongly about how we should extend public transport, that we should not build any more roads, but buses and taxis are public transport

and without roads they do not operate very well. Some of the changes to bus routes in my area have been welcomed by the community. We have had two stages of the bus review and a third one will be held later this year. The improvement and extension of buses from Moonee Ponds to Williamstown on Sundays and extended services during the day, and likewise the extension of services from Moonee Ponds to Ivanhoe on Sundays and in the evenings as well, have been very warmly welcomed by a number of my residents.

A further change that recently has occurred is a bus from North Melbourne station which takes people directly to the main hospitals — the children’s and Melbourne hospital — as well as Melbourne University. I have had a number of phone calls from residents in my area who are very pleased with that new service, which makes it much easier to access those institutions which they could not easily access before.

My electorate is not that far away from the city, that if you are feeling fit you can use your bicycle to get to work; the extension of bicycle paths in my electorate, and those that are outlined for the future, have also been warmly welcomed.

I also wish to express generally my support for the Eddington report. I think it addresses some issues that have been ignored for many years, particularly the industrial and freight areas of the western suburbs. I have heard some criticism of this and I think some of it — without wishing to be unkind — is really based on a misunderstanding of how traffic is organised. There is not much point extending the train lines further out to Sunbury, Macedon or anywhere else if they cannot get through North Melbourne station or they cannot get through the city loop.

To be realistic, before we can improve services that are further out we actually have to improve those inner city areas, and some of the proposals in the Eddington report, particularly the proposed railway line, would mean a significant improvement to trains on the Craigieburn line and some of the V/Line trains as well, by changing the Sydenham line so that it no longer goes through North Melbourne.

I think some of the projects that are outlined in the Eddington report, and some of the freight lines that would also get some of the freight out of North Melbourne, would be a significant improvement in supporting that industrial and freight area of the western suburbs but also improving commuter traffic on those lines. I was very pleased when I heard the Prime Minister talking about the capital improvement fund that the federal government has established, which will

have significant funding for Victoria. He mentioned the Eddington report and some of the proposals in that as perhaps some of the areas where those funds could be directed.

It is difficult when you look at the amount of funding which is required as it is very high, but there is really little alternative. You could do nothing, in which case the problems will be exacerbated as the population increases, and as everyone knows the most recent census suggested that our population will increase by 1 million people by 2020. It is not really good enough just to sit back and think that it will be okay or say that we cannot afford it. We have to address those issues; and if we can get that inner infrastructure right in relation to rail and roads, then we can really do something significant for the outer suburbs.

I was most impressed by the presentation given to us by Dr Eddington. I think he showed a great understanding of transport issues in Victoria, and I think the report is something that has given us an excellent plan for the future. There has been some criticism that the area that is being looked at is not necessarily the growth suburbs, and we should be spending our money on developing public transport in the growth regions.

In reality, this is work that perhaps should have been done 20 years ago when those areas of the west were growth suburbs. It is really catching up on what governments of both persuasions — I am not attacking any particular political view here — have let slide and it really is important that we fix that so we can continue to improve the public transport system not only in the outer metropolitan area but also in country areas. I think it would be a significant investment but I think it would be a really important one for Victoria to make.

I also want to refer to Essendon Airport, which is a difficult issue for residents; Melbourne 2030 acknowledges that the airport will close and aviation activities will be relocated. It is the federal Labor government's policy that aviation facilities at Essendon be closed. A master plan has been recently presented by Essendon Airport Pty Ltd, which causes great concern to my constituents in that it proposes a number of changes which would decrease the residential amenity considerably.

The people who live around Essendon Airport — some of them have lived there since before Melbourne Airport was built at Tullamarine — feel that they have been treated badly over the years because they were told that Essendon Airport would definitely close when Tullamarine opened. For a number of reasons that has never happened but Essendon Airport is no longer

suited or has never been suited to a residential area. There is no buffer zone around it at all to protect local residents, and they are increasingly concerned about what the future of the airport should be.

Melbourne Airport is our main airport, which is where jets and major traffic should be operating from, not from a small airport like Essendon, in the middle of a residential area. The master plan that was prepared by the Department of Transport with the assistance of Essendon Airport was done during the previous federal government but is out there at the moment for consideration.

There has been a fairly lengthy process of consultation and the opportunity for people to make a submission. But the proposal that there should be considerably greater jet air traffic is very strongly opposed by my residents. The other item in the plan which is also of great concern to my constituents is a proposal that the curfew should be removed. Some residents live very close to the airport. To remove the curfew would mean that they would have a very difficult time sleeping at night, and I think there are really significant health considerations resulting from the removal of a curfew.

Mr K. Smith interjected.

Mrs MADDIGAN — I thank the member for Bass; it just goes to show that he does not listen. Had he been listening for 2 minutes he would have heard that I said many of them lived there before the airport at Tullamarine was built and were told Essendon airport would close. I am not quite sure how many times I have to repeat that before the member for Bass understands it, but I am more than happy to repeat it to him after I have finished my speech as many times as he likes until the message seeps through. I will repeat it for him again: people in Essendon were told that Essendon Airport would close when Tullamarine airport opened. People in that area have lived there prior to 1971, or whenever it was that Melbourne Airport opened.

There is a major problem for people who live near commonwealth land, and not only in my electorate of Essendon, because that land is exempt from all planning policies. The commonwealth does not have to follow state planning policies or local government policies. In reality the commonwealth government can build whatever it likes on its land without any consultation process, without any involvement by local councils, without any involvement by the state government and without the involvement of residents. I will give members an example in relation to Essendon Airport. The state government was asking for support for the DFO building on the Essendon Airport site. The

commonwealth had said no because the road infrastructure was not appropriate; it was totally ignored by the previous federal Liberal government. The DFO building went ahead, so who had to pay for the roads to allow traffic to get to the building? It was the state government.

It is appalling that in this day and age the commonwealth government owns land that is not subject to planning processes. In the last few years we have seen some extensive development in Essendon and residents have had no input into that. There is no necessity for the commonwealth to tell people what it is doing at the Essendon Airport site. No-one who believes in democracy could see that as reasonable.

The state government has made a submission to the master plan process. It has asked for the commonwealth government to agree that commonwealth land, particularly Essendon Airport, should be under the control of the state government and local council planning laws. I do not think that anyone who believes in a consultative process would believe that a community should not be involved and have a say about issues which might affect their residential amenity. I am hopeful that the master plan will take that into account.

There used to be a consultation committee at the Essendon Airport. There is supposed to be one, and it is supposed to be run by Essendon Airport Pty Ltd. It was a condition of the lease the airport received from the former Howard federal government. I understand that the committee has not met for two years. Despite protests to ministers, nothing has been done about it. The state government submission asks for the consultation committee to be re-established so that people can have the opportunity to at least find out what is happening in an area close to where they live.

Significant commercial development is happening on that site. The master plan proposes a mixed use of the site, which means that houses could be built on it as well. To suggest that any further residential areas are to be established so close to an airport would be totally inappropriate. There is a certain amount of nervousness in my electorate, and in Strathmore particularly, about what will happen regarding this future master plan. We are looking forward to a statement by the federal government about the future of Essendon Airport.

There is a sensitive issue which needs to be assessed carefully. Currently an ambulance service and the police are located on the site. There are some operational problems concerning helicopters flying very close to residences. I hope we can work with those

groups and the federal government to find another airport to relocate those services to in the future and that we can improve hospital access for people who need those services. There are a number of issues that concern local residents. I look forward to working with the commonwealth government to achieve a better outcome than we have had previously. I know this is a significant issue for people in Strathmore.

Overall and apart from transport, there are some issues in the budget which will be very good for the residents of Essendon. A program in my area has been set up for residents in six council areas, and it will provide much cheaper Meals on Wheels. It is a central facility, and I think \$6 million has been allocated to it. It will ensure that people, especially those on pensions who have great demands all the time on their scarce incomes, will be able to access good and nourishing food at a much cheaper price. The other benefit of having a more centralised facility is that the service will be able to better deal with more specialised eating needs than individual councils can do at the moment. Overall I think the budget has many great items which will benefit many people in Victoria. I look forward to some of the programs outlined in it which will begin this year and continue into the future.

Mrs VICTORIA (Bayswater) — I rise to respond to the government's 2008–09 budget. The budget was very predictable. It is one of those Labor budgets that we on this side of the house all expect. It is a budget of missed opportunities and provides further evidence of mismanagement by a Labor government that is inept at managing money.

Let me give members an example of what is going on in my electorate of Bayswater. We have some great people in the electorate, and we, the people of Bayswater, earn the median wage. You would think, therefore, that we would get the lion's share of money allocated to Bayswater for various projects. I will give members an idea of the sorts of things that we did not get funded in Bayswater.

I will briefly talk about education. We have fantastic schools in Bayswater. Before the last election one of the schools was promised a major technical wing. I note that there is a modernisation component to this year's budget of over \$124 million, a lot of which is supposed to be spent on technical wings. There was supposed to be a brand new technical wing at Bayswater Secondary College at a cost of \$2 million.

Mr R. Smith — They wouldn't have lied, would they?

Mrs VICTORIA — The member for Warrandyte asked whether they would have lied. I am not sure whether this issue involves a lie or whether something was forgotten. Three successive ministers for education — and it is funny that we have had so many ministers for education — have promised there will be a new technical wing at Bayswater Secondary College. I will give members a tip: stage 1 of the technical wing was opened 18 months or so ago. There was supposed to be \$1.9 million of state budget money from a few years ago for that project, but the state contributed only \$1.2 million. I have talked about this before, and I do not want to sound like a broken record, but I think it is worth bringing the issue up and reminding people that this government duped the people of Bayswater out of \$700 000 from their education plan a couple of years ago by asking the federal government for the make-up money but not allocating that extra \$700 000 to schools in Bayswater. I have to say that we have a maintenance backlog of over \$2 million in Bayswater and \$700 000 would have gone a very long way.

Bayswater Secondary College did have its technical wing opened — the first half. There are two components; we got one. The other half was promised on paper prior to the 2006 election by the then Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment who is now the Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation. She came out amidst great fanfare, and everybody came to the school. Terrific! We were going to get stage 2 of our building project. The election happened, and the seat was not retained by Labor. The next education minister said, ‘You know what? If we promised it, if it was on paper, we will honour it’. They changed education ministers again. I said, ‘Just a moment, we have it written down; it is on paper’. Guess what! We still do not have it. An excuse came out as to why the school would not get its funding for the second half of the technical wing even though this government talks about building technical wings in this particular budget. We did not get that money because, as I was told in a letter from the minister, we were not part of a cluster. The only problem is that that money was promised, that original second half of the building was promised, before clusters were even thought of in the Bayswater electorate. We should just bring back the Liberal Party; we would get an awful lot more done.

Campaign promises aside, let us talk about the sorts of things they are not doing in education. As I said, we have a \$2 million backlog in maintenance funding that needs to be fulfilled in Bayswater electorate, and we are not getting that money. Last year I had to jump up and down in the media before I could get one of my schools — a primary school — to the stage where it could repair its roof so that it was not leaking. The

preps had buckets under their roof. I have to say there is not a lot of rain in Melbourne, but when it rained these kids were having to sit there with buckets. It was not until I jumped up and down in the media that it was realised that there was about \$150 000 in repairs for this school. It was not going to happen. I hate having to play that sort of politics. I just cannot believe the people in Bayswater, who pay their fair share of taxes, are not worthy of having their fair share of the allocated funds.

Let me talk briefly about health. When it comes to health this Brumby government is well and truly ignoring the people of Bayswater. My closest hospital is Maroondah Hospital. Even though it has had a couple of nice upgrades — we have got a new mental health unit and all those sorts of things — I remember back to the 2006 policy, Meeting Our Health Challenges, which said, ‘Labor will treat more patients sooner, reduce cancellations and invest in our hospitals’. That is a quote. Let us have a look at what is happening at Maroondah Hospital.

Mr Kotsiras — But there is more to be done.

Mrs VICTORIA — There is more to be done. That is what the Labor Party is always saying. Let me tell the house what is not being done. There is not a good result at Maroondah Hospital. Emergency patients are now being put on bypass, instead of 1.3 per cent of the time, which I have to say is bad enough, 3.7 per cent of the time. We have more than doubled the bypass situations at Maroondah Hospital. Let us also have a look at what happens in the emergency department. It is funny to have a look at what has been said about why exactly we had such an increase in patient numbers for last year. I have to say the latest report cracked me up. One of the points said it was due to gastro. Gastro happens every year, and that is no problem, but perhaps if this government managed to fund hospitals to the stage where people got out of the corridors, off the trolleys and into beds, instead of sitting in the emergency departments, we would not be spreading gastro at the rate of knots that it is happening.

Mr R. Smith — There are adults in the paediatric ward at Maroondah.

Mrs VICTORIA — There are adults in the paediatric ward at Maroondah. The stories of gastro, the stories of strikes and all that sort of thing are absolute furphies. Let me tell the house that if the government had actually started to spend money on extra beds and extra services at hospitals, people would not have to be waiting more than 8 hours to get into an admission bed. They would not have to be sitting around in the corridors. The government’s own target of getting

people off trolleys, out of emergency waiting rooms and into admission beds is 80 per cent. Guess what! At under 60 per cent I think the government is falling a little bit short.

Let me tell the house a little bit about what is happening with police. I have already spoken this week on the fact that we had a crime forum in Boronia. Boronia has had its fair share of troubles in recent times, and one of the problems is we do not have enough police on the beat. We can talk about it; we can talk all we like. The police hierarchy wants to tell us there are plenty of police members. That is on the books, on paper, only because if you have 9, 10 or, in Boronia's case, 13 people on the books who are not able to be rostered, who are not able to go onto the street, who are non-operational, who are either not actually able to attend work at all — they might be on maternity leave, they might be on secondment elsewhere or they may well be on a return-to-work plan — they are people who should not be included in the rostering system.

You cannot count them as operational police if they cannot be front-line, on-the-street police, and when there are three divvy vans at Boronia and only enough staff on any particular shift to go out there with one van. Goodness knows, if there is a problem in Croydon or if there is a problem in Warrandyte and one of our vans from Boronia gets called out there, guess what! You could have a burglary right next door, which is what happened at the McDonald's right next door to Boronia police station. We could not even send police in there. We had to get a police car from Knox. Give us more police! There were no new police allocations for the Boronia area — in fact I do not believe there were any new police allocations at all — in this budget.

We can talk all we like about the few police that have been introduced. I am not denying that that is probably a fact, but they are not on the front line. They are not on the ground where we need them. They are not doing prevention, and they are not doing positive policing. If we look at the number of police per 100 000 people, the number proportionately is actually decreasing. Let me tell the house that when the government says crime is down and police are fine, I do not think that is right. Looking at the crime rates when this government took over, there were 31 000 violent crimes in Victoria in 1999. Last year there were 42 000. You do not have to be Einstein or a rocket scientist to realise that is a huge increase. It is not a decrease, as this government keeps talking about.

Debt is something near and dear to all of our hearts. If you own a home, you know about debt; you know how to manage money. Tell me where the logic is in

increasing the debt in this state to the stage where \$1.8 billion every single year is going to be what we pay in interest alone on the debt that this government is putting our kids into. I have a four-and-a-half-year-old. My daughter and all the wonderful children in the gallery today are going to be paying the debt that this government is putting them into. What are we getting? Are we getting more hospitals? Are we getting new schools? Are we getting more police? What are we getting? I do not believe we are actually getting anything for our money, so what I want to say is how can you possibly put debt at this sort of level in our state with a clear conscience? Show us what we are getting for our money, and I will say debt is a fair thing. Debt is not always bad, but I want to see something for my money, and — guess what? — we are not getting it. I want to talk a little bit about public transport.

Mr R. Smith — You have only got 3 minutes.

Mrs VICTORIA — Yes, I have only got 3 minutes, unfortunately. I could talk on public transport for hours. Let me tell the house about the EastLink tollway, the Eddington review and all of those sorts of things together. It is hysterical. When I come to Parliament I travel into town along the Eastern Freeway. What is going to happen when that tollway opens? It is bad enough at Hoddle Street as it is. It is just a car park. What is going to happen to Canterbury Road when all the people are absolutely peeved at having to go down the freeway and then say, 'No, too hard; let's go down Canterbury Road'? Then Burwood Highway is also going to become more congested. This wonder road that we are going to have to pay a toll to travel on is not going to make our lives any easier. So the Eddington review comes along, but what happens? There is no money for major infrastructure in this budget. What are we going into debt for when I am not seeing anything for it?

I have a problem with what has gone on for small business in this state. Small business involves the people who actually look after this state. They employ us; they employ mums and dads. They are mums and dads. They quite often employ schoolkids. They are the bakeries, small shops, boutiques and all those sorts of things. They are businesses that employ small numbers of people. We have the lowest threshold in Australia at \$550 000 before you start paying payroll tax, which is an absolute sham. In Queensland, it is \$1 million.

This government is tax hungry and money hungry, and it wants to drive small business out of this state. The stamp duty on houses is atrocious. If you are paying for a median-price house and if you are entering the housing market in Wantirna, you are looking at about

\$20 000 in stamp duty, but if you are a first home buyer in Sydney and buying an equivalent property, the stamp duty is zero. How much furniture could you buy for \$20 000?

This budget is all about increased debt, decreased services and increased taxes. It is a pattern all too familiar under Labor governments. Time will prove what Liberal voters have always known: Labor cannot manage money.

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — It is with great pleasure I rise to speak in favour of the Appropriation(2008/2009) Bill. It is another great budget by the Brumby Labor government to address the challenges such as increasing demand for transport, education and health presented by the population growth that will see Victoria becoming home to over 6 million people within the next 10 to 15 years. The 2008–09 budget also tackles pressing issues in areas such as community safety and climate change, and delivers the infrastructure projects and services needed to secure our future.

The budget is consistent with sound financial management. The net debt will remain at low levels and is projected to be 0.9 per cent of gross state product by 30 June 2008 and to increase to 2.9 per cent of GSP by 30 June 2012, which is lower than the levels inherited from the Kennett Liberal-Nationals coalition. This is a very healthy, affordable and responsible debt situation that provides top infrastructure investment in Victoria. It is a responsible budget that will result in an operating surplus for 2008–09 of over \$828 million, with a growth of 3.25 per cent.

I congratulate the Treasurer in the other place, John Lenders, on his remarkable effort in his inaugural budget, and I look forward to seeing many more excellent budgets in the future that will enhance Victoria's position as a vibrant economy.

This budget also delivers for the electorate of Cranbourne, which records a population in excess of 67 000, with rapid growth and a high percentage of young working families with a median age of 33. The budget introduces new assistance for first home buyers. This assistance represents a 17 per cent saving — that is, \$2460 — on a median-priced first home, including stamp duty cuts and the new eligibility for stamp duty and first home buyers assistance.

New figures recently released show we are in the middle of a baby boom. Highlights of the 2008–09 budget for the electorate of Cranbourne include a \$5 million expansion of maternity services at Frankston

Hospital. There is \$42 million to expand the special care nursery at Casey hospital from 6 to 20 cots, enabling up to 1000 additional births annually. There are 30 new beds in the community-based facilities for prevention and recovery care services, including in Frankston. This is part of a \$39 million initiative. There is a new 12 hour peak-period ambulance unit in Frankston, with \$3 620 000 providing two ambulances and five and a half paramedics. There are new 24-hour ambulance paramedic teams in Frankston, with \$6 140 000 providing 2 vehicles and 11 paramedics. There is a new mobile intensive care ambulance, single-responder unit in Frankston, which is part of the \$185.7 million boost to Victorian ambulance services.

Safety and security at Frankston Magistrates Court will be strengthened thanks to a \$1.6 million Brumby government state budget funding boost. There will be a new NightRider bus service for Cranbourne with the frequency increased to 30 minutes from 60 minutes on services like the Frankston and Dandenong routes so as to decrease overcrowding and waiting times for passengers. This is part of a \$22.5 million initiative.

There is additional public housing for the Frankston and Cranbourne areas, which is part of a \$39.7 million initiative. The City of Casey has been granted \$538 000 to assist with the ground redevelopment at Casey Fields, which is in the middle of my electorate.

The 2008–09 budget delivers in education. We will see the construction of two new schools in the electorate of Cranbourne: there will be a P–12 college in Cranbourne East and the new Cranbourne North East Primary School. This is part of a \$171.3 million initiative. These are schools the government is building. There is \$19 million to begin the first stages of Victoria's two new selective-entry schools, including one in Berwick — the very first one in the south-east. This is the first time the building of select-entry schools has been planned outside the Melbourne central business district area, once again proving the Brumby government is governing for all areas — inner, regional and country.

An honourable member — Including Warrandyte?

Mr PERERA — Including Warrandyte.

Across the state, the 2008–09 budget also provides an extra \$3000 bonus for people purchasing a new home in regional Victoria, encouraging young families and emerging communities to settle down in less congested regional centres. It provides \$1.43 billion in new tax cuts and reduced business costs, including cuts to stamp duty, land tax, payroll tax and WorkCover premiums,

and \$94 million to improve workforce skills. This is a great initiative for creating jobs.

The budget makes a record \$1.8 billion investment in transport, delivering extra morning peak train services, station upgrades, significant road projects and new transport services in the regions. The Cranbourne railway station will be expanded to accommodate the stabling of six trains every night. There is \$702.9 million for hospitals to treat an extra 16 000 elective surgery patients, to offer an extra 33 500 outpatient appointments and to treat an extra 60 000 patients in emergency departments. There is \$233.3 million for preventive health measures and cancer prevention and treatment.

The budget has a \$37.2 million alcohol action plan to create safer streets and to address excessive alcohol consumption; \$294.6 million for climate change initiatives to drive renewable energy and clean coal projects; and \$99.1 million to improve livability in the suburbs and regions, including \$51.9 million for the transit cities plan to improve the livability of Broadmeadows, Dandenong and Geelong. It also offers A Fairer Victoria initiatives totalling more than \$1 billion to address disadvantage and \$204.6 million to help Victorian farmers and the agricultural sector.

The Labor government's eight years of investment in livability — in key services and infrastructure — have made Victoria a great place to live, work and raise a family. This budget is an action plan to maximise the opportunities and address the challenges of a growing population by providing the best possible services and infrastructure for local families in not only the electorate of Cranbourne but across Victoria. The 2008–09 budget enhances Victoria's place in Australia as the best place to live, work and raise a family. Labor governments have done the job, and maybe after 25 or 30 years, by the time the opposition gets into office, we will have completed the job. I commend this bill to the house.

Mr NORTHE (Morwell) — It gives me great pleasure to make a contribution to debate on the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill. I just want to quickly give a summary of the appropriation bill and the concerns expressed on this side of the chamber with regard to the fiscal management of the Brumby government and the direction in which this state is heading.

We know this government has received record levels of tax revenue; however, as mentioned by the member for Scoresby and many other members, it has failed to increase basic services in Victoria as our population

grows. Victoria's net debt is set to increase in dramatic proportions in future years. Total public sector net debt, which includes the debt of non-financial public corporations such as the water authorities, will increase from approximately \$3.5 billion in 2002 to an estimated \$22.9 billion in 2012. This exemplifies the notion that this government cannot manage money and cannot manage major projects. Examples of this are the fast rail debacle, the HealthSMART system and the myki debacle, which continues to cost Victoria's taxpayers millions.

I turn to elements of the budget, beginning with land tax. We acknowledge the fact that land tax will be reduced by 10 per cent. However, at the same time we are seeing an increase in revenue for this government of somewhere in the vicinity of \$300 million for 2008–09. The general land tax free threshold is to be increased from \$225 000 to \$250 000 and from \$20 000 to \$25 000 for trusts, and the top rate of land tax is being reduced from 2.5 per cent to 2.25 per cent for properties valued at \$3 million or more. However, the fact remains that even with these cuts, the government will still earn in excess of \$300 million more than it did the previous year.

With regard to payroll tax, which has also been mentioned by many members on this side of the house, we are seeing a reduction to 4.95 per cent. Even with that cut, the government will reap an additional \$360 million more than it did in the previous year. The member for Bayswater and, may I say, the member for Murray Valley, who is in the Chair, quite rightly pointed out that we have concerns about the payroll tax threshold remaining at \$550 000. That threshold pales into insignificance when you compare it to that of other states. As was mentioned, the threshold in Queensland is \$1 million, in Western Australia it is \$750 million and even in the ACT and the Northern Territory it is \$1.25 million.

I turn to stamp duty. The projections indicate that stamp duty income for this government will increase by some \$900 million in the coming year despite this government spruiking its wares in saying it has made some real inroads in assisting the community with stamp duty cuts.

The member for Bayswater also gave some examples, as the member for Scoresby did in his contribution, and provided comparisons with other states. I just mention the fact that first home buyers in New South Wales can buy their first home and pay zero dollars in stamp duty, whereas Victorians buying an equivalent home pay in the vicinity of \$20 000. I acknowledge the government for providing the \$3000 grant for regional first home

buyers. I think that has to be acknowledged in context. That will give first home buyers who are purchasing newly constructed homes in regional Victoria the opportunity to purchase their homes sooner, and it will be in addition to the first home owner grant and the first home bonus. I guess you can read that in two ways, one being that it is an attempt to provide some incentive for people to relocate to regional Victoria. I have to say that in the Morwell electorate the bonus is somewhat hypocritical, given this government's decision on the Traralgon bypass, where it effectively abolished the potential for a 3000-resident population between Traralgon and Morwell.

With regard to the Morwell electorate there are some things in the budget I would like to mention. You have to give credit where it is due. One minor element, I guess, or supportive notion for the Morwell electorate, is on page 262 of budget paper 3, service delivery. It refers to the significant challenges facing the department in the medium term. It refers to providing the key infrastructure to facilitate the regional sittings that are occurring in Gippsland later this year in both Churchill and Lakes Entrance. I think commendation is due to those responsible for that particular initiative, and we look forward to hosting the Legislative Assembly in Churchill later this year.

The Latrobe Community Health Service will receive \$21 million in funding for the redevelopment of its facility in Morwell. This is an important project that I have supported right from the time when I was preselected for The Nationals, and it is great to see this finally come to fruition. We have many, many issues with health in the Morwell electorate and the waiting lists that are now upon us, and in particular the waiting list for dental services in the Morwell electorate is quite astounding. I will just go through a couple of those.

The waiting time at Churchill and Moe for general dental care was 65 months — that is correct, 65 months — some time ago. The waiting list for denture care was 39 months. We made some inroads recently when we had the services of a dentist operating the chair full time, which made it possible to reduce the waiting times somewhat, but the waiting times in Morwell, Moe and Churchill are still very significant. So we welcome the news of the redevelopment of the Latrobe Community Health Service, which will also have six additional dental chairs. But the issue we still have is making sure that we clear up the public benevolent institution issue which applies to most of our community health centres throughout Victoria. One of the issues we have had in the Latrobe Valley is attracting and retaining dentists in our communities, and I am sure that is an issue right across the state.

I also want to talk about what is not in the budget for us, and that includes no funding being allocated to the Latrobe Regional Hospital. Unfortunately that statistic is worsening by the day. It is something this government needs to recognise. I know the Minister for Health has visited our area and is acutely aware of the difficulties that we have in relation to the number of beds and the issues surrounding the emergency department and the like.

Over the last six months, compared with the previous six months, total admissions at the hospital have increased by some 728 and presentations at the emergency department have increased by 696. Those not admitted with a length of stay less than 4 hours have dropped by 4 per cent in six months, and that is very alarming. To give credit where it is due, the triage category 1 patients are always seen immediately and there is a 100 per cent rate, which is fantastic. The triage category 2 figure has reduced from 96 per cent to 90 per cent in six months, which is of great concern to us. The category 3 patients seen within 30 minutes have gone from 82 per cent to 76 per cent in six months. Those admitted to a bed within 8 hours have reduced from 73 per cent to 50 per cent in six months. These are declining standards within our hospital that put great pressure not only on the local community but also on those working within the health system.

I hope the minister and this government recognise the facts on the issues we are experiencing in our local hospital. It is disappointing to see that there is nothing in the budget that refers to the Latrobe Regional Hospital. The master plan is currently being developed. We hope once that has been developed and ratified this government will put the appropriate funding towards that particular cause.

The budget commits \$110 million over six years towards cleaner coal technologies, including a large-scale pre-commercial carbon capture and storage demonstration project. We look forward to that. We encourage that. We believe the investment in the cleaner coal technologies is very important not only for the Latrobe Valley community but for Victoria as a whole. We have seen some examples of those cleaner coal technologies. We will see in the very near future the retrofit of the Hazelwood power station. We have seen a demonstration plant for what is called mechanical thermal expression at Loy Yang on a smaller scale. HRL will commence very soon, we hope. I note that the energy minister is in the chamber at the moment. We are just waiting for sign-off, so we prompt the government on that. That is a 500-megawatt gas-fired power station that will hopefully be on line. There is also some carbon capture and storage

happening at Loy Yang as we speak. So with these types of new technologies we can see a real way forward. They will reduce the requirement for the coal reserves but also for water, which think is a very important point. We need to get onto that shortly.

Some \$12 million has been committed over two years for a clean coal Victoria organisation. What I say to this government is that this was in last year's budget as well and it seems very little action has been taken in regard to its establishment. The government has stipulated that it will be in the Latrobe Valley and we look forward to that. But I encourage the government to make sure that the local community, including local business, is actively engaged in any consultation on the purpose of and the role that clean coal Victoria may play; and to use the services of institutions such as Monash University and the local TAFEs to ensure that we do not have bureaucrats in Melbourne running this, but that it is done at a local point for the Latrobe Valley community. I see great potential in that.

I have noted something that is of great concern to me relating to concessions, as referred to on page 36 of budget paper 3, service delivery:

The water and sewerage concession provides a 50 per cent discount on water consumption, sewage disposal and service charges up to a maximum cap. The initiative will increase the cap by 14.8 per cent to \$182 from 1 July 2008.

I have great concern about this. Gippsland Water, the local water authority, has proposed to increase the rates for ratepayers in 2008–09 by some 22 per cent. I refer to an article in the *Herald Sun* headed 'Brumby announces 14.8 per cent price rise'. This concerns an issue where the Premier has stepped in and capped some of Melbourne's water prices at 14.8 per cent, yet in the case of Gippsland Water's proposal to increase its rates by 22 per cent the Premier did nothing. The article states:

'Obviously, these increases are not acceptable to the government', Mr Brumby said. Instead, all water bills will rise by 14.8 per cent in the 2007–08 fiscal year.

Where is the parity in that? Nothing like that seems to apply to regional water authorities. The Premier can step in and cap the metropolitan water authority rates at 14.8 per cent, yet he does nothing about the rates of regional water authorities. I can tell the Premier and the government that our local community is very upset with this. We were expecting more in this budget in relation to concessions for those who were eligible for a concession rate. Latrobe Valley people pay more for water and they pay more for petrol. We expected more from the government in relation to concessions for our people in our local community.

I also want to talk about police. The members for Kew and Bayswater suggested that the government is just re-advertising what was in previous budgets. Where are the police? Members of my community ask me all the time, 'Where are our additional police?'. The local police ask, 'When are the vacancies going to be filled?'. The Churchill police station, for example, is not open 24 hours a day. It is a community of 5000 people, but it cannot get a 24-hour station. It is simply not in line with community expectations. It has been demonstrated, and we all agree, that a police presence reduces crime.

Regarding emergency services, something I have been pushing for quite a while — and it is part of Labor policy — is the provision of free access to national parks to emergency services volunteers. I am pleased to finally see that included in this budget for next year. It is a token gesture, I guess, for the fantastic work that emergency services volunteers undertake throughout Victoria.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr NORTHE — I will sum it up the other way, then. I know there are some good things in the budget for the Morwell electorate, but we have concerns about the fiscal management of the Brumby government and the direction in which we are heading overall.

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — It is a delight to finally be able to contribute to the debate on this bill. Before I address the substance of the bill I congratulate the Treasurer in the other place, John Lenders, on his first budget. It is a magnificent budget. It is well balanced, economically responsible and socially progressive. It addresses disadvantage, builds the state as a whole and certainly improves our infrastructure.

I also congratulate the Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance, Grant Hehir, and his team on a flawless effort. The budget is as much a result of their intellectual firepower and experience as it is a result of the government's good policies. I also congratulate the Premier, who I am sure contributed solidly to the big-picture items in the budget — it must have been extremely difficult for him to break past habits and not jump into the nitty-gritty of a budget formation.

It is the nitty-gritty that is important in a budget. Whilst the budget has its own priorities and addresses the issues of economic and community need that we have heard about today, it is also a product of past budgets and is consistent with the general flow the government has had since 1999. It develops on our previous budgetary settings and on our previous strategies of rebuilding infrastructure, developing fairness and

creating a general improvement in the community good.

When it comes to Eltham, this is the important issue. A lot of members have spoken today about their local electorates, and I will also do so. The Eltham electorate is a little unusual. It has the lowest unemployment in the state, the highest rate of participation in employment and the highest employment. It has a large degree of home ownership and a high number of professionals and small businesspeople — self-employed tradespeople. A strong economy is crucial to the quality of the lives of these people and their children.

When we talk about the strength of the budget and Victoria's economic settings, it is absolutely crucial not just for a piece of paper or for the debate here but also for the quality of the lives of people in areas such as Eltham who rely on a strong economy. They rely on economic growth and low unemployment to pay their mortgages, send their kids to school and enjoy their quality of life.

I have listened to a lot of comments made so far today. I was gobsmacked when the member for Bayswater, a couple of speakers earlier, seemed to say that the Liberal Party opposed EastLink. It was news to me; I had no idea it opposed EastLink. It will be interesting to see whether members of the Liberal Party use the road when it is completed. It will be a magnificent addition to the state.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HERBERT — I now hear that it opposes the tolls. It did not do that with the Tullamarine Freeway or with CityLink. I think it expects the money to simply fall from the sky — that seems to be its economic solution. I well recall when the government came to office in 1999.

Mr R. Smith interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Jasper) — Order! The honourable member is interjecting out of his place, and I will not accept that.

Mr HERBERT — In 1999 we came to office and set a range of long-term goals, which we see reflected in this bill. Those goals were: to be economically, fiscally responsible; to grow the whole state; to rebuild Victoria's central infrastructure after the devastation that the previous government had created by pulling apart schools and flogging off hospitals; to rebuild our hospitals, roads and public transport; and to ensure that we govern for everyone. Those goals are as relevant to

this budget today as they were in 1999, and the budget builds on that.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HERBERT — I hear members of the opposition talking about debt. I took the opportunity to have a look at the 1998 budget brought down by then Treasurer, Alan Stockdale, 10 years ago. I was absolutely gobsmacked when I went through it, both at the level of debt but also at what a measly little budget it was, at the size the economy was then. It is amazing, after hearing the whingeing, whining and carping of members opposite, to look at this old budget and see how little it delivered for the state. It is amazing to see how strong our economy has grown.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Jasper) — Order! Through the Chair.

Mr HERBERT — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I ask whether those are appropriate comments for a member to shout out, and I ask the member to withdraw his comments.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Jasper) — Order! The honourable member, without assistance from the opposition, and I will note any comments made, if they are inappropriate.

Mr HERBERT — We can look at some of the statistics, for example infrastructure spending 10 years ago. We heard about the tax take: it has gone up because the size of the economy has grown remarkably in those 10 years. In 1998 infrastructure spend or the total spending on schools, hospitals, roads — the infrastructure necessary for our future prosperity — was about \$800 million; today it is \$4 billion. That shows how much the economy has grown.

We can look at schools alone. In their contributions many members opposite bemoaned the fact that schools in their electorate did not get capital works. According to the budget speech back in 1998, \$78 million was allocated for capital works; today it is a \$592 million capital spend. That is a massive growth in 10 years because the rebuilding of the schools after all those years of neglect under the previous government is a massive task.

Back in 1998 the surplus of \$767 million was not bad; today it is \$828 million — some \$902 million every year over the three years of the forward estimates. Back in 1998 unemployment was 8.3 per cent; today it is under 5 per cent. If we look at migration, money on

hospitals and all the parameters of this budget today, we see an economy that is thriving, a state that is thriving and a much bigger effort — and that has been the result of the last range of budgets since 1999.

I would like to look at some of those budgets and initiatives. On transport we have heard a lot of carping, whining and whingeing from the other side. This budget has a record \$1.8 billion spending on transport, and it needs that because patronage has doubled in the last couple of years. We are seeing record numbers of people using public transport, and that is a good sign. It is a sign of confidence in the public transport system.

Dr Harkness interjected.

Mr HERBERT — I thank the member for Frankston for reminding me that 1500 extra people a week are using it. Public transport is as important in Eltham as it is anywhere else. There have been consistent improvements and demand on the Hurstbridge railway line. We have seen \$30 million for a bridge at the conflux of the Epping and Hurstbridge lines at the Merri Creek, \$8 million for new signalling equipment and a 120-car park is being built at Eltham station.

An honourable member interjected.

Mr HERBERT — Yes, I am the first to admit that it needs more, but it is happening. It is a decent task, and \$1.8 billion will go a long way to make improvements and meet that need.

In every single budget since we were elected in 1999 we have seen a massive boost to health, and this year is no different, with \$1.8 billion extra, which will dramatically — not just in a small way — improve hospital services. We can talk about hospitals that did not get funding, and of course you are not going to fund everything in a budget, but this budget enables a lot more hospital treatments: 16 000 elective surgeries; 33 500 more outpatients; and 60 000 more people will go through our emergency departments as a result of this huge increase in funding. It is a massive increase, and it will go a long way to meet the health needs of people in this state.

We have just seen the biggest increase in ambulance funding the state has ever had, with an allocation of \$185.7 million. I am pleased that my local station at Montmorency will receive \$3 million of that because the extra services will go a long way to meet the needs of people who require ambulance services.

Importantly, as we grow older we are seeing more and more instances of cancer devastating people's lives and

the lives of their families. It is a fact of life that most of us will know people who have cancer, who get cancer, and we know the impact it has. One of the important aspects of this budget is the \$150 million for the cancer plan to improve treatments and try to look at improving our tackling the causes of cancer, reducing those causes and improving those treatments. It is a very important area.

Everyone in this house, no matter what their political persuasions, would say, 'Yes, we want to have a crack at doing our part to tackle cancers that are growing and impacting on our lives' and that is one of the best things about the budget. We have set an ambitious target of 10 per cent increase in survival rates by 2015 — I think it was commented on by the other side that it is an extra 2000 lives — and it will not be easy, but we need to have ambitious targets to meet if we really want to make an impact on things such as the rise of cancer in our society.

I will speak a little bit about education — something that I have been passionate about for a long time and which has been a major part of my life. Since 1999 the education budget has been the no. 1 priority of this government. The massive spend of \$592 million is part of one of the biggest capital works programs this state — indeed, Australia — has ever seen for schools, in a genuine attempt to rebuild our entire school system. It is not going to happen overnight — one would have to be absolutely crazy to think you could do that — but it will happen. As long as we keep putting these sorts of amounts — the likes of \$500 million and \$600 million — into the capital works budget, we will transform our schools into modern educational facilities.

I am even more delighted that one of those schools is in the Eltham area. Eltham Primary School is one of the great iconic local schools. It has one of the oldest buildings in Eltham; it has been a central part of people's lives for 100 years. The school is receiving \$4 million as a stage 2 to rebuild it; a couple of budgets ago it got its first stage. This stage involves rebuilding all of the old front part. This will totally transform the school. It already has great teachers, fantastic parents and a really good and innovative curriculum, and now it will have fantastic buildings. I think that is a terrific move for Eltham. I think it will go a long way to strengthening the perception of public education in the area.

I do not have much more time, but I would like to comment on a few more things in the education part of the budget. You can talk about money but you can also talk about where the need is. In this state we do pretty

well. In literacy and numeracy testing we usually do quite well against national and international comparators, but there are pockets of weakness. There are parts of Melbourne that consistently underperform and schools that consistently underperform, and they have done so for a long time.

This budget starts to address that issue. It targets money to some of the most disadvantaged schools and communities in a genuine attempt to lift them up and give those young kids the same opportunity to go to university, to get good jobs and to do trades as anyone else in Melbourne. The budget delivers \$71.4 million for targeted support for those schools where we need to lift the performance. It will provide incentives and support packages for high-achieving teachers to go in there. You can put money into improving existing buildings and building new schools, but you need to get teachers to — —

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

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — This year's Victorian state budget was a major disappointment for the people of my electorate, who have yet again been ignored by this city-centric Brumby Labor government. Very few of the top priorities for Narracan were funded, despite the current Labor government benefiting from record state tax and GST revenue flowing into the Treasury coffers. The Brumby government has failed to use its huge budget windfalls to deliver better services in Narracan and the wider Gippsland region, to help grow industries, to lay the base to turn around slowing business investment, to repair worn-out infrastructure or to build Victoria's economic, social and competitive infrastructure for the future.

I would like to outline some of the things we did get in Narracan so that I am not completely negative in this debate. The Rural Ambulance Victoria station upgrades and service expansion initiatives provide funding for the second and final stage of the government's election commitment. This project includes a capital upgrade to the Neerim South high-priority facility. Under a commitment to secure the future of small rural schools, Buln Buln Primary School and Darnum Primary School were funded for the replacement of relocatable buildings. The replacement of portable buildings at both of these schools was an election promise in 2006. It is disappointing that it has taken so long — almost two years — for that commitment to be honoured by this government. The people of Narracan should not be put on hold by the government and be left waiting for money that was promised years ago.

Additionally some statewide announcements were positive for some residents of the Narracan electorate. The government announced tax cuts and reduced business costs, including reduced stamp duty, land tax, payroll tax and WorkCover premiums. But while the Labor government is gloating about its announcement to support families and small business with tax relief in this year's state budget, it should not go unmentioned that the government is taking more than five times as much from Victorians as it will give back in the 2008–09 budget. First home buyers will get the biggest benefit from stamp duty adjustments, saving \$2460 on the cost of a \$317 000 house. A \$3000 bonus will be given to first home buyers who build in regional areas. Despite Labor's claim to have cut payroll tax, revenue from payroll tax is up by \$360 million on last year's budget; and despite Labor's hype on land tax reductions, land tax revenue is up by almost \$300 million since last year's budget.

The Labor government is allowing the state's debt to blow out to \$23 billion over the next four years. The Premier is once again misleading Victorians by downplaying this skyrocketing debt and quoting only the general government sector net debt of \$2.3 billion for this financial year, growing to \$9.5 billion by 2012. The truth is that the Brumby government is hiding a massive blow-out in total state debt and has no plans to repay it; instead it will become a frightening legacy for the next generation.

What did we in Narracan miss out on? When the member for Broadmeadows was officially sworn in as Premier on 30 July 2007 he promised to be an inclusive and decisive leader who would make education for Victorians his priority. Less than 12 months on from that promise this Brumby Labor government has once again let down the people of Narracan when it comes to education funding. The 2008–09 budget has again neglected major upgrade funding for Trafalgar High School. During the 2006 election the Labor government committed to an \$8 million upgrade of Trafalgar High School. The school's community was waiting for and expecting the money to be allocated in last year's budget, but it was not provided. Again the money is nowhere to be seen in this year's budget. The government had plans drawn up for the redevelopment and presented them to the school two years ago, yet it seems that it is avoiding its promise and no funding has been allocated.

Warragul Regional College received a partial upgrade three or four years ago. As part of that upgrade the toilets were supposed to have been completely renovated at a cost of about \$1 million dollars. The toilets I used in my higher school certificate year in

1969 are still being used by students at Warragul Regional College today.

Since Labor has been in power Victoria has had the lowest funding of state school students per capita of any state. Victoria also has the lowest literacy and numeracy levels of any mainland state, and our teachers are the worst paid in the country. The Victorian government tried to strike a copycat, budget-eve pay deal that would make Victorian teachers the highest paid in Australia. Once again this will prove to be a big con. It is obvious that the Brumby government was stung into action after the Victorian Liberal-National coalition made such a commitment to all Victorian teachers just prior to the budget being announced. However, as we go into the detail we will see that that teacher deal is an absolute con. The majority of teachers will not get the increases they thought they were going to get, particularly those who need the increases and those who may not be members of the education union. They are the ones who will miss out.

Taxes on business have become more oppressive under Labor, and the number of Victorian hospital beds will remain the lowest per capita in Australia, despite record revenue being collected. There was nothing in the budget to address any of the issues that the West Gippsland Healthcare Group is faced with. There was no funding to address the shortfall in weighted inlier equivalent separation allocation to cover the cost of servicing the enormous increase in demand. No funding was allocated to alleviate the pressure on the local emergency department. No funding was made available to ease the pressure on midwifery services at the West Gippsland hospital, while many other hospitals, particularly in metropolitan Melbourne, were promised funding relief. Some \$31 million was promised for metropolitan hospitals to ease the burden on midwifery services, but there was nothing for the hospital service in Gippsland that continues to perform so well. There was nothing to relieve the pressure on those midwifery services, even though the number of births this year will exceed targets that were expected to be met in 2022.

The government has again ignored the commuters on the public transport system who travel from the Gippsland region. There was no funding under the park, ride and relax project for the upgrade of parking required at the Warragul railway station. Country commuters and road users have been ignored again. Despite many requests for the upgrade of the dangerous Lardners Track level crossing, no funding is available. The crossing is on the fast train line. The government originally made a commitment that every level crossing on the line would have boom gates. However, the government has admitted that it is just too costly to do

that at this particular crossing. What price does this government put on people's lives?

The government is claiming this budget provides a record funding boost for police services. The government is spending \$1.75 billion on Victoria Police in this budget, and \$657 million on a community protection package. However, Narracan communities will not be seeing any of this funding. The Neerim South, Drouin and Trafalgar police stations will struggle on with only 16-hour police availability, although 24-hour police availability is needed in these towns as they struggle to keep pace with the growth in population. The rapid growth in the corridor containing the Warragul and Drouin communities was also not acknowledged in this year's budget, with no funding made available for the duplication of the old highway between Warragul and Drouin. In summary, the Narracan electorate has again been forgotten in a Brumby state budget.

Premier Brumby has neglected Narracan families for yet another year. This time it is his first as Premier. The Premier and the Treasurer have raided my constituents' future to pay for Melbourne-based projects for another year. Narracan families are missing out on extra hospital beds, public transport infrastructure, additional police and desperately required education funding despite the Brumby government taking an extra \$1.5 billion in taxes. After prising an extra \$1.5 billion in taxes from the pockets of Victorian families all Premier Brumby could find for Narracan was the funding of three projects in this year's budget, two of which were election promises from 2006 that should have been funded before now. This budget should have focused on building the next decade for Victoria instead of trying to buy the next election for the people of Melbourne.

Mr FOLEY (Albert Park) — I rise to support the Appropriation (2008/2009) Bill because it deals with the challenges and opportunities that growth brings to this state. It does so with a view of upholding the key values and approaches that distinguish the two sides of this house. It is these issues that bring into sharp contrast the difference between the government side of this Parliament and the opposition side. When it comes to how and why you manage the state's finances and in whose interests you do so, the values held by those on both sides of Parliament come into sharp contrast. Bills like this reflect our relative political positions and bring to the surface what each side of Parliament is really about.

So far the contributions from members of the opposition have been their normal sad reflection of the

depths to which the ragtag coalition has sunk. I would like to make one point in this regard about one policy area — education. The member for Eltham quite rightly pointed out that education is a priority of this government, as indeed it was of the Bracks government. In my own electorate I am pleased to say that after the dark years of having three primary schools sold off within my community, all of which would now be full if they were still operating, we have had a significant investment of \$4.7 million announced in this year's budget for the redevelopment of Port Melbourne Primary School, so ably led by the dynamic principal, Peter Martin, and the fantastic school council president, Dr Rebecca Lew. What we heard from the other side is constant carping that somehow their schools are being targeted and that their communities are somehow being judged harshly in comparison to some mysterious process that deliberately targets communities for making the sad error of electing a coalition member of Parliament.

Let us look at the facts. My own community received \$4.7 million in this budget as extra funding for the redevelopment of a primary school. How does that stack up against some examples from electorates of members on the other side of this place? For instance, schools in the electorate of the member for Box Hill, who is at the table, received \$6.2 million of extra funding in this budget. That would go down very well in any of the schools in my electorate. It does not end there. The schools in the electorate of the member for Hastings received \$8.4 million extra funding over and above normal funding. That is almost twice as much that has come into the good district of Albert Park.

The member for Eltham would be interested to know that his electorate received \$6.3 million for extra education funding. The member for Bass, who is present in the chamber, tops the chart: there is \$9 million extra for the public schools in the electorate of Bass. Give me some of that hard treatment by the Brumby government! I would be very pleased to take that message back to my schools. I could go on, but given the representations of members of the opposition I think that would highlight some of the gross hypocrisy we get served up as political debate from the other side.

Why do opposition members serve that up? Because they do not believe in public education. It reveals their view as to what is really important. They moan and carp, but they do not believe in the values of public education and the opportunities that brings for ordinary people to improve their lives. It is that fact alone that is important. Regardless of where the school is, this government, through its budget process, funds schools

on need; it funds schools on where the best value for those young people can be found.

The education debate and the bill broadly reflect the values of how we see the world on both sides of this place. On this side we see the role of government as a good thing for society. We see it as an opportunity to build an inclusive, well-skilled, harmonious community. On the other side somehow or other it appears as a burden on the community. We see a modern government as an efficient, lean government, constantly looking at how it goes about its business as a force for social good. On the other side government is seen as an agent of injustice and somehow or other as a blockage to reform.

According to the contributions of members opposite to debate on this bill, the government is somehow a burden on the community. They believe the government should be shunned. They want endless cuts to services and taxes while, at the same time, they want to milk the government for all the pork-barrelling exercises they can dish out on some mysterious basis to their particular mates and causes. We see an appropriate, modern government engaging with communities and delivering on issues that are important.

We want to ensure that we have a competitive economic structure building on our human and social capital and making the best of innovation and knowledge sectors that will provide the future employment for our community. We see it as building an investment in a modern health system, built around prevention and community health, while ensuring that the large tertiary sector of our hospitals is in a position to cope with the ever-increasing demand. We have a view of building an early childhood development and education system that delivers outcomes based on need and based on early intervention, and getting young people off to the best possible start in life.

On the government side there is a commitment to do all of this whilst delivering responsible economic management, maintaining and in fact far exceeding our policy position of returning a minimum amount of surpluses, which in this year's projected figures is some \$828 million of buffer for future investment in our competitive economy. We also see it through our leadership role in the national reform agenda as reducing, where appropriate, the burden on business and fostering a competitive and dynamic modern business culture.

Whilst keeping the finances of the state on track, this government is also about investing for the future. We

are about delivering a budget, as we say, well in excess of the target of \$100 million surplus. We see these future surpluses as being vital opportunities to invest in infrastructure such as schools, hospitals and public transport whilst bringing forward urgently needed investment in areas such as water infrastructure and those areas of public transport in my electorate, such as the new tram arrangements that we so readily look forward to. We are doing this whilst ensuring that we have a competitive business environment that makes Victoria indeed the place to do business.

If I could perhaps, in the limited time I have left to me, focus on what some of this might mean for the district of Albert Park beyond the project of Port Melbourne primary, which I have already alluded to. Even though we would have done very nicely with some of the allocations given to the opposition members in their communities, we are more than happy with proceeding down the path that my friend the Minister for Education has allocated to us.

This is a budget about building our competitive and equitable futures now. It is about building communities such as the one I have the pleasure to represent. As we know, the Brumby government is committed to the best education and training system to build this future. A \$1.9 billion program to rebuild, refurbish and modernise all Victorian schools has received a further boost by the extra \$592.3 million to extend that program into a further 128 schools across the state.

As I say, locally in Albert Park we have invested record amounts in both early childhood development and in our schools. But it is not just in education. I note with some pleasure the arrival of the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The time has come for me to interrupt the proceedings of the house. The honourable member for Albert Park will have the call when this matter next comes before the house.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella) — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Maroondah Highway–Killara Road, Coldstream: traffic lights

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — My request for action is to the Minister for Roads and Ports. On receipt of a letter from the minister I understand that construction of the traffic lights at the Melba Highway and Maroondah Highway intersection at Coldstream is set to commence in approximately one month's time, July 2008. I again implore the minister to consider relocating the lights to the Killara Road and Maroondah Highway intersection in Coldstream.

In 2001 I tabled a petition in this house regarding the need for lights to be installed at this intersection. The need is now more urgent. The growth of the Yarra Ranges tourism industry has seen more wineries and bed and breakfasts open along Killara Road in recent times. This is responsible for dramatic increases in the volume of traffic along Killara Road. Chronic congestion is causing Maroondah Highway to become an endless stream of cars. It is very difficult for motorists to exit Killara Road and merge with oncoming traffic.

For the Coldstream Country Fire Authority, the impact of the congestion is catastrophic as it impacts on their ability to respond to emergency rescue calls in a timely manner. Given that response times are a key indicator of the efficiency of Victoria's emergency services, the Coldstream CFA is being unfairly hampered and the minister's decision to place the traffic lights at the Melba Highway intersection are not going to help this.

I am sure the government would be interested to do everything in its power to improve the response times of our emergency services which have been unduly delayed by circumstances beyond their control. As I said, several minutes can be added to the CFA response time as units wait to exit. They also have a problem that when they finally do start to edge out into the traffic, cars are cutting around behind and in front of them, compounding the situation.

Coldstream residents were told that more motorists would receive greater benefit from the lights at the Melba Highway intersection. However, volume should not have been the Victorian government's only consideration. Accessibility should also have been part of the equation for the residents and responding units. Residents have been told that the breaks in traffic will be sufficient with the lights at the Melba Highway for them to exit.

At the last election the Liberal Party committed to fund these lights at Killara Road, and I understand that the

previous transport minister's decision was made in response to my party's commitment and trying to establish a point of difference, as one does in these election campaigns. I quite understand that, but I ask the minister to reconsider the location of the proposed traffic lights in Coldstream and install them at the Killara Road intersection. It is the option that is preferred by Coldstream residents, and I urge him to respond to the local residents, not so much to VicRoads.

Ambulance services: Geelong

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — The issue I raise tonight is for the Minister for Health. The action I seek from the minister relates to the recruitment of extra ambulance officers within my electorate of Geelong. As members are well aware, since 1999 I have said on many occasions the health sector in Geelong has been transformed from the absolute neglect of the previous Kennett government, including improvements to ambulance services in my electorate.

The Greater Geelong region, not just my electorate, has seen a number of new ambulance stations constructed and services provided. For example, this year's budget has provided for a new mobile intensive care ambulance, or MICA, unit. Earlier this week the Minister for Health announced the amalgamation of the Rural Ambulance Victoria with the Metropolitan Ambulance Service, forming Ambulance Victoria. Out of this it has been announced that the Geelong region will get an extra nine paramedic officers. This is a very positive announcement. The action I seek from the minister is for him to work with Ambulance Victoria to ensure that the new paramedics are recruited and trained as quickly as possible, so that they are on the job and on the ground in the very near future.

As I said, through the merger of the ambulance bodies, Ambulance Victoria will be formed as of 1 July 2008. As a part of this change, the combined entities will receive an extra 258 paramedics — of this number, 30 extra mobile intensive care paramedics and 21 extra paramedics will be recruited into the Barwon South region. Of these 21 extra paramedics, as I said before, 9 paramedics will be recruited for the Geelong region, 5 will be recruited for Colac and the remaining 7 will be recruited for Warrnambool, Hamilton and, as I understand it, Portland. No doubt these new paramedics will be going into these areas because they are required in the south-west region.

This week some announcements were made regarding Ambulance Victoria. It was welcomed by the people of Geelong and the wider south-western region. It is

important that the new paramedics are on the ground as quickly as possible. Therefore I look forward to the minister acting to work with Ambulance Victoria to make sure that those officers are on the ground in Geelong, in the south-west region of Colac, Warrnambool, Portland and Hamilton as quickly, efficiently and effectively as possible.

Aboriginals: transport vehicles

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — I raise an issue for the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. The issue I raise is regarding the need for funding for transport vehicles for the Goulburn River clans men's group.

The action I seek is for the minister to provide funding for two vehicles, which are badly needed by the group to help provide transport to the group members, or for the provision of two surplus four-wheel drives. Many of these men do not have their own vehicles. The group has identified the type of vehicle they require; it is a double cab four-wheel drive diesel utility. A number of Victorian government departments and bodies, such as the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Parks Victoria and the Department of Primary Industries, maintain a large fleet of these types of vehicles. The group has asked me to ask about the possibility of it receiving two vehicles that are surplus to requirements or which are due to be traded in.

I met with Mr Noel Briggs, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocate from the Regional Information and Advocacy Council and the council's chief executive officer, Mr Steve Duran, in my office. They told me of the great work of the Goulburn River men's group. It meets on a weekly basis to provide support for and assistance to men, most of whom are Aboriginal. It receives \$15 000 per year from the Department of Human Services as a part of the indigenous family violence strategy. That program is provided in a non-threatening environment to many men who are disengaged from their communities and community organisations. They are now learning to re-engage again.

There are some positive outcomes from this program: the men are developing skills and confidence. They are also carrying on the tradition that Aboriginals have had for thousands of years of gathering around a fire and talking. They are learning to break barriers and they are becoming positive role models. Mr Noel Briggs wants to give back to Aboriginal men their standing in their community and family. They are learning to gain self-esteem and confidence. But they need a reason to get up in the morning.

There are three projects that the men's group is involved in: the central Victorian group training program; the Mooroopna cemetery project — the group would like to put in a car park and a walking path there; and the group works with men who are on court and community-based orders. There are also 930 unmarked graves at the Mooroopna cemetery. The hospital section at the cemetery has many unmarked graves of people who died from 1861 to 1941. There are also 200 graves of children but which have no markers. Those graves belong to Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. The men want to make markers to put on the graves and headstones.

The group is also creating a business which produces traditional Aboriginal artefacts such as didgeridoos and boomerangs by using traditional materials from the bush. The group also makes furniture. The group needs these vehicles to be able to transport the group around, to go to the forest and to the programs it is involved in.

Local government: building access

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning in the other place. The action I seek is the establishment of a systemic approach of accessibility to the built environment; specifically I refer to local government planning schemes regarding access provisions which are pending resolution.

The adoption and implementation of access provisions are a key opportunity for government to address a key course of disadvantage for people with a disability, aged Victorians, parents with babies and young children and others who may have temporary mobility issues.

I want to congratulate the councils, the Victorian Council of Social Service, organisations and individuals who have been persevering with their presentation and lobbying for the case of accessibility to the built environment. A number of local governments, including Moonee Valley City Council, Melbourne City Council and Yarra City Council, have pending planning scheme amendments relating to access provisions.

In 2005 Melbourne City Council confirmed its clear intentions when Cr Clarke, a former executive director of the Victorian division of the Property Council of Australia, moved that council would proceed with its accessibility provisions and would work to have them included in the building code. An initiative of the Victorian government, funding for rural and metro access workers, was provided. Whenever I have had the

pleasure of meeting these innovative workers, I have learnt that the constant problem for people with mobility issues is access to the existing built environment.

Accessibility is an issue for one in five Australians. It is not hard to think of examples where able-bodied people, previously ignorant of this issue, are suddenly hit with the reality of trying to live with the experience of accessing an inaccessible building. They might have a family member who has developed paraplegia from a work or traffic accident or has suffered a stroke or the effects of an aneurysm. There is also a gradual deterioration of the body over time because of the normal ageing process.

There are numerous examples that we can all think of: we may try to go out with family and friends who have a mobility issue and we find they cannot easily access many restaurants and the recreational and artistic world we would like to enjoy with them. We cannot come through the front door of a building together; we have to go around through the back. I see that as an indignity for a person with a disability. People with disabilities are a part of the community; they should never be seen as being apart from the community.

Good access is good business. The combined efforts of Moreland City Council, its state funded metropolitan access officer and the Moreland disability advisory group — —

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

Gas: South Gippsland supply

Mr K. SMITH (Bass) — I wish to raise an issue for the Minister for Energy and Resources and ask him to involve himself and his department in the dispute that is occurring between Alinta, Origin Energy, BassGas and any other group that is delaying delivery of gas to the South Gippsland natural gas extension project. This project was launched by the then Minister for State and Regional Development, now the Premier, on Friday, 5 August 2005, when he announced the start of the \$50 million project to deliver natural gas to Korumburra, Leongatha, Inverloch and Wonthaggi and a separate project to deliver gas to Lang Lang.

Lang Lang was to be a separate project as it is close to the pipeline delivering gas to Melbourne and a connection point had been left for Lang Lang residents. Everyone was very excited about this, because they were going to be getting natural gas. In November 2006 work commenced on the city gate, which is the main

connection point, and construction works so that Lang Lang would have natural gas flowing through the pipes in mid to late 2007, according to issue 5 of the Multinet Gas newsletter of May 2007. The problem is that this has not occurred. The Lang Lang work is 99 per cent complete, but there is no gas. We, the community, are being told there is an argument regarding cost, but at the end of the day people have built new houses with all natural gas appliances but cannot keep warm, cannot cook and cannot have a shower or bath because they have no hot water. Origin Energy, BassGas, the energy retailers and VENCORP cannot say when the gas is going to be connected. It was meant to be working in mid to late 2007.

We have a similar problem in Korumburra, where people have installed new or replacement appliances on the basis of having gas connected. I am concerned for these people, for businesses and for those people who believed gas would be delivered. This is holding up expansion plans for Burra Foods as there is no certainty that gas will be connected. These were election promises made by a government that had not delivered properly on any of its 34 natural gas projects across Victoria. I understand the workers doing the pipe work have gone back to their homes until this stupid argument is resolved. This may well delay the balance of the gas connections to Wonthaggi and Inverloch.

The government is the facilitator of this project. I ask the minister to forget all his failures in each of the ministries he has been involved with, to fix this problem as soon as possible and to have at least one success in his miserable career as a socialist Labor minister.

Housing: Northcote estate security

Ms RICHARDSON (Northcote) — The matter I raise is for the Minister for Housing and concerns the car park at the Frank Wilkes estate in Holmes Street, Northcote. There has been an increase in vandalism of residents' cars parked in the car park overnight. I call on the minister to take action to increase security at the car park at the Holmes Street estate. Ms Italia Cessarelli brought to my attention the spate of attacks that have taken place on vehicles in the car park. Her vehicle has suffered attack on three separate occasions, and the latest attack involved the smashing of the car window and the theft of her radio. In all about \$1300 worth of damage was caused to her vehicle. As I said earlier, this is not isolated. Jim Gillas had three of his four new tyres slashed, and others have suffered attacks on their vehicles.

Just venturing out these days is a fairly hair-raising prospect for Italia, because she is concerned she will run into the culprit who did this damage to her car. Holmes Street residents are very special people indeed. I was fortunate to be at the presentation of a storytelling project which was put together by the residents of the estate. It is called *Our Lives, Our Holmes* and reflects the care these residents have for the Holmes Street estate and for each other. Carmelina Di Guglielmo was the artist in residence who supported the work, and the photographer was Christopher Deere, whose photographs are on display in the High Street window. The publication itself is now in the state library. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate those who put the book together.

What is clear to me is that the residents of this estate are elderly and frail. Many of them depend on their vehicles, and as pensioners they cannot afford attacks on their cars. They cannot afford to repair the damage that is done, and they have raised with me the possibility of security cameras, increased lighting, security guards and patrols by police. As I stressed earlier, this is not an isolated attack; it has been going on for some considerable period of time. I therefore call on the minister to take action to increase security at the car park for the benefit of all residents at the Holmes Street estate.

Warragul RSL Community Memorial Centre: funding

Mr BLACKWOOD (Narracan) — The action I seek is for the Minister for Community Development to reaffirm the Brumby government's commitment to provide \$182 000 in funding that was announced in January this year for the refurbishment of the Warragul RSL Community Memorial Centre and ask if this funding can be increased. The reason I call on the minister to reinforce and increase this funding allocation is that the federal government has reneged on its contribution to the project. Over 12 months ago the Howard government approved the funding application through the regional partnerships program. The application was ticked off and strongly supported by the Gippsland Area Consultative Committee, which is a longstanding process adopted in Gippsland to assist community groups to tap into the regional partnerships funding program.

The Baw Baw Shire Council, which is also a party to this project, committed \$25 000 because the project was deemed to have significant community benefit. The refurbished facility is intended by the RSL to be made available to community groups for meetings, health and wellbeing sessions and a wide range of community

activities as well as the RSL's own regular monthly meetings and group activities. Funding for this project was intended to come from four sources: a federal government contribution of \$376 000, a state government contribution of \$182 000, a shire contribution of \$25 000, and the RSL was going to use funds it has available from the sale of its old building.

The RSL has been operating under very difficult circumstances for over two years since the sale of its premises in Smith Street, Warragul. It purchased a building formerly used by the Exclusive Brethren, which was in serious need of a major revamp. The federal government grant was announced 12 months ago and the shire made its commitment around the same time, yet it took the Brumby government until January this year to commit. The project should have commenced 12 months ago. If it had, the federal funds would have been forthcoming and expended well before the federal election. The shameless and heartless decision of the Rudd government has left our local war veterans and their families in a very difficult situation. They desperately need clarification from the state government as to the status of its contribution so they can make a decision on whether to proceed and about what scope of works they can now afford.

The RSL has spent over \$30 000 preparing applications for the federal and state governments and on architects plans, which will now have to be reviewed at more cost. I call on the Minister for Community Development to reaffirm his funding commitment and seriously consider increasing the Brumby government allocation in light of the disgusting and unprincipled decision of the Rudd government.

Housing: East Reservoir neighbourhood renewal project

Mr SCOTT (Preston) — The matter I raise is for the attention of the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs, who is at the table. The action I seek is that the minister approve the funding application made by the East Reservoir neighbourhood renewal project for funding of the Go for Your Life Active Places program to run Staying Active in East Reservoir. The Active Places program aims to increase participation in physical activity by people with low or no current participation.

The proposed East Reservoir neighbourhood renewal project will focus on single-parent families, indigenous people and those from linguistically diverse backgrounds residing in one of the most disadvantaged areas of the northern suburbs. East Reservoir is a community of significant disadvantage, with many

migrants, lower employment than most areas of Melbourne and low rates of educational attainment. Thankfully East Reservoir has not been forgotten by the Bracks and Brumby governments.

The neighbourhood renewal project in East Reservoir has already touched the lives of many local residents, building community pride and reducing disadvantage, particularly amongst residents who live in public housing estates in the area. The member for Yan Yean and other members of this place would know well East Reservoir and the people who live there. It is a fantastic community that deserves the support of the government, which it is receiving. Therefore I ask the minister to support the grant application and to help more fantastic work to be done in East Reservoir.

School buses: conveyance allowance

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education concerning the Victorian conveyance allowance. The action I request is that the minister implements a recommendation to index the conveyance allowance for inflation from 2004–05 and provide schools with information as to why the allowance was not indexed four years ago.

A review of school bus services in 2001 recommended that the Victorian conveyance allowance be indexed for inflation each year, commencing with the 2004–05 financial year in order to avoid repeated calls for review. This would have given the government two years to implement the new system and put in place all necessary arrangements. Seven years later it still has not been done. There is of course a good chance that the minister simply has not got around to it yet. The report says:

The review panel is of the view that whatever changes are made, the government should consider indexing allowances, payments and charges on a regular basis to maintain the level of government support for student travel.

The report suggests that the indexation cover both payments made by fare-paying customers as well as allowances paid to students or schools, and it stresses that indexation must be built in if the government hopes to establish a fairer and more equitable transportation system. Interestingly, the government has implemented all the recommendations made in the report with the exception of this very important one. As a result the Victorian conveyance allowance is now failing to adequately meet the needs of schools and students around the state.

During a recent visit to St Marys of the Angels, a secondary school in my electorate, I was concerned to hear that the school is finding it increasingly difficult to fund its private buses because the government has not indexed the allowance. Although its conveyance claim has remained at \$170 000 each year, the price of diesel has increased by more than 125 per cent since the report was released. Clearly, the school has been put in a most difficult situation. Its bus service is vital to its students, most of whom are unable to access public transport, and yet it no longer has the funds to maintain its daily rounds.

It is all very well for the minister to suggest that schools find an alternative, but in rural towns such as Nathalia, where St Marys of the Angels is based, there is no public transport system upon which students can rely; and after more than a decade of drought, there are very limited community funds upon which the school can draw. The school needs the government to do its job. Rural students are at a terrible disadvantage and schools are facing financial pressures with which they are increasingly unable to cope.

If the government continues to ignore calls for the indexing of this allowance, not only will it fail rural communities, but it will find itself faced with repeated calls for the revision of the allowance every few years. I urge the minister to act promptly upon this recommendation to make the transport system more equitable.

Mill Park Secondary School: synthetic playing surface

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs who is at the table. The action I seek is for him to provide funding of \$300 000 to Mill Park Secondary College senior campus for the construction of synthetic playing fields under the Drought Relief for Community Sport and Recreation program. The school plans for these playing fields to have two soccer pitches and a cricket pitch. I am really pleased to see that it is actually a partnership between the local school and council. The grounds will be lit and a sports toilet will be constructed on site.

The design of this multipurpose facility fosters innovation to maximise the use of synthetic surfaces by locating the grounds off school property. This will mean that not only will they be accessed by school students during school hours but after school hours and during weekends. The ground design also allows multiple sports to access the facility for training and competition purposes.

The multipurpose fields at the Mill Park Secondary College were originally intended to be constructed as a natural turf ground but with the onset of drought and the ongoing water restrictions, the school and the council have sought an alternative solution. I am really pleased that between the council, Mill Park Secondary College and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development there has been a licence agreement signed so that this can be facilitated.

I have been concerned for some time about the low participation rates of kids in organised sport in the city of Whittlesea. We know, and I know as a parent and I think the broader community knows, that great health and social benefits are derived from team sport. I have been advised by all the football codes that kids in the city of Whittlesea have the lowest rate of participation of any area across metropolitan Melbourne. As someone who grew up in country Victoria and absolutely loved football and being involved in that every weekend, running the boundaries as an umpire, I have worked so that all kids in my community will be able to experience that as well. It will keep them fit and give them something that they can enjoy for a long time in their lives.

Last season I was very concerned about the impact of drought and the lack of access a lot of football clubs had to playing surfaces in the city of Whittlesea due to the way the restrictions were applied. With funding for synthetic services, this issue could be very much dealt with. I urge the minister to fund this very worthwhile project, and I commend the council and school for initiating it.

Responses

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — The member for Yan Yean raised a very important matter of the synthetic surfaces program and a very good project at Mill Park Secondary College. We are in the middle of the worst drought in Victoria's history, and the Brumby government is acutely aware of the importance of sport and the challenge that the drought has placed on sport right across Victoria. We have dealt with it in a number of ways. In the summer of 2006–07 the then Bracks government announced the Drought Relief for Country Sports program and the Drought Relief for Community Sport and Recreation program. That provided \$6.6 million for 228 projects in 72 Victorian councils.

As we know, the drought continued and late last year I announced an additional \$12.9 million for the Drought Relief for Community Sport and Recreation program 2008 and the synthetic surfaces program. This has led

to a whole range of important drought-related initiatives right across the state, whether it be the installation of drought-resistant turf, water irrigation, the sinking of bores or recycling. A number of local councils have used the backwash from their local aquatic facility, treated that water and then used it on the adjacent ovals.

Another initiative has been water storage. Water carting, as a last resort, is also a part of the program. We carted water to the Geelong region last year to ensure that the football and soccer leagues could continue to hold matches. There was an issue in the Wimmera region just a few weeks ago which also involved some carting of water to ensure the football leagues there could continue.

As the member for Yan Yean said, this is a partnership; it is a partnership between local sports clubs, associations and leagues and local government. It is having an impact, as you can see if you compare where we are this year with where we were last year. Last year many leagues started late and there was no pre-season in many leagues for those local clubs. This year every football league across Victoria has started on time. That is in no small way due to this program and the partnership with local clubs, organisations such as the Victorian Country Football League, and local government.

A key component of the drought relief program is our synthetic surfaces program. That is important for a couple of reasons. Firstly and obviously, it is dealing directly with the impact of the drought through the installation of synthetic services; but also, as the member for Yan Yean mentioned, this is also about participation. Synthetic surfaces are much more able to withstand quite intense use. That deals with increasing demand and promotes increased participation in our community.

Another important factor in the member's request is that this project would utilise facilities at the local school for joint benefit — that of both the local school community and the wider community. I can assure the member for Yan Yean that I will strongly consider this project at Mill Park Secondary College.

The member for Preston raised a matter in regard to the Active Places program. This is one of the ways in which the Brumby government is showing national leadership when it comes to getting our local communities to lead more healthy and active lifestyles. The program provides more than \$1 million over four years to increase participation in physical activity by people from disadvantaged communities —

communities that are all too often overrepresented in statistics relating to obesity and type 2 diabetes.

To give members of the house a better understanding of how this program works, I would like to run through an example of one of the projects currently being undertaken in the south-east in the neighbourhood renewal areas of Ashburton, Ashwood and Chadstone — and I would like to note the strong support the member for Burwood has had in this project right from the initial development stage.

This project is very similar in scope to the activity promotion program in East Reservoir mentioned by the member for Preston. In relation to Ashburton, Ashwood and Chadstone, 21 per cent of residents who live in this neighbourhood renewal area live in public housing, and research has shown these groups are more likely to experience health and wellbeing issues, including lower levels of physical activity. In fact 80 per cent of the residents surveyed in these three areas described themselves as physically inactive. Many residents expressed the desire to have the opportunity to exercise but reported being constrained by numerous barriers such as access, including transport to facilities; financial hardship and cost of programs — for example, fees; equipment, such as cost of shoes and the like; lack of affordable and appropriate child care; and health issues, including physical disabilities.

Thanks to an \$80 000 funding grant from the Brumby government, the Inner East Community Health Service and the MonashLink Community Health Service have brought together local neighbourhood houses, health providers and local recreation facilities with the aim of significantly boosting the level of participation amongst community members in the region. The project is looking at several measures to achieve this, such as the provision of onsite child care at some existing venues; development of physical activity programs that are enjoyable and also create opportunities for socialisation, such as walking groups; promotion and provision of greater access to existing community groups or activity groups; and looking at running programs out of local venues closer to the target areas.

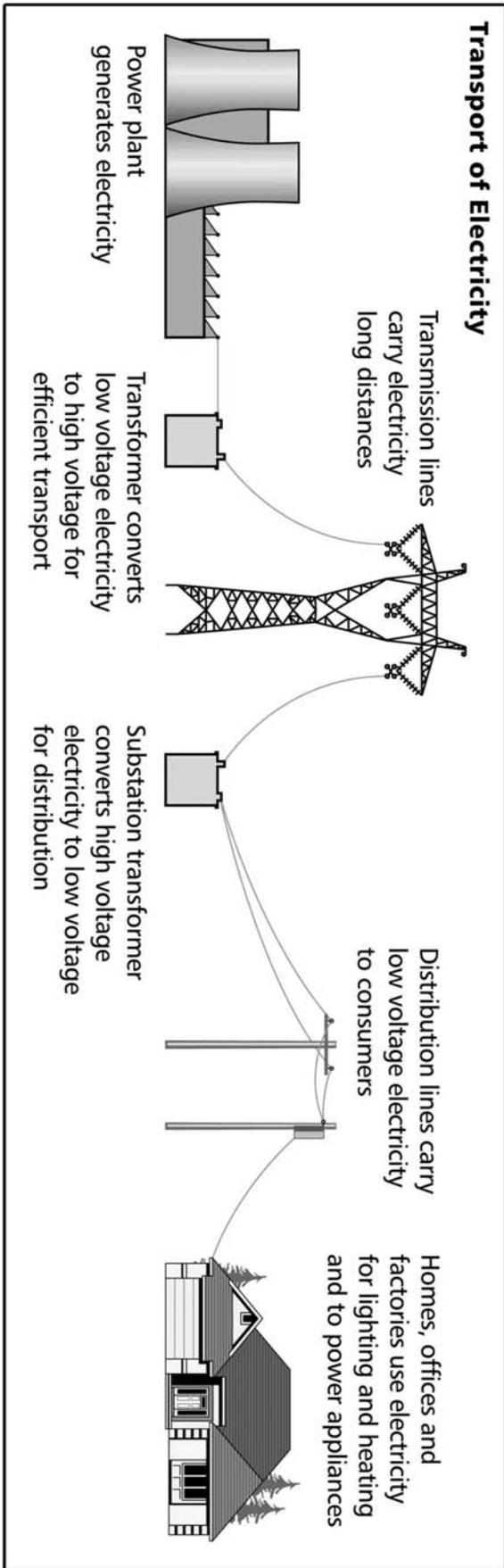
I very much look forward to launching that program next month. Its firm goal is to increase the level of participation of residents of the areas' public housing estates by 20 per cent by 2010. Only with the support of the Brumby government is this project possible.

The Brumby government's Go for Your Life program is a national leader in tackling obesity levels and chronic health problems such as type 2 diabetes, and I can assure the member for Preston I will strongly

consider the East Reservoir project. I thank him for his interest in it.

The member for Evelyn raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports, the member for Geelong raised a matter for the Minister for Health, the member for Shepparton raised a matter for the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the member for Pascoe Vale raised a matter for the Minister for Planning in the other house, the member for Bass raised a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources, the member for Northcote raised a matter for the Minister for Housing, the member for Narracan raised a matter for the Minister for Community Development and the member for Rodney raised a matter for the Minister for Education. I will ensure that those matters are raised with the relevant ministers for their responses.

House adjourned 10.36 p.m.



Source: *An Introduction to Australia's National Electricity Market*, NEMMCO, June 2005, available at: <http://www.nemmco.com.au/nemgeneral/000-0187.pdf>

