

**PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA**

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES  
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**

**FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT**

**FIRST SESSION**

**Thursday, 7 February 2008**

**(Extract from book 1)**

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## **The Lieutenant-Governor**

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

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Minister for Industry and Trade, Minister for Information and Communication Technology, and Minister for Major Projects . . . . .	The Hon. T. C. Theophanous, MLC
Minister for Housing, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs . . . . .	The Hon. R. W. Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary . . . . .	Mr A. G. Lupton, MP

## Legislative Assembly committees

**Privileges Committee** — Mr Carli, Mr Clark, Mr Delahunty, Mr Lupton, Mrs Maddigan, Dr Naphthine, Mr Nardella, Mr Stensholt and Mr Thompson.

**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.

## Heads of parliamentary departments

*Assembly* — Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Mr R. W. Purdey

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

*Parliamentary Services* — Secretary: Dr S. O'Kane

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**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

**Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier:**

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

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie	Bendigo East	ALP	Lindell, Ms Jennifer Margaret	Carrum	ALP
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Asher, Ms Louise	Brighton	LP	Lupton, Mr Anthony Gerard	Prahran	ALP
Baillieu, Mr Edward Norman	Hawthorn	LP	McIntosh, Mr Andrew John	Kew	LP
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Batchelor, Mr Peter John	Thomastown	ALP	Marshall, Ms Kirstie	Forest Hill	ALP
Beattie, Ms Elizabeth Jean	Yuroke	ALP	Merlino, Mr James Anthony	Monbulk	ALP
Blackwood, Mr Gary John	Narracan	LP	Morand, Ms Maxine Veronica	Mount Waverley	ALP
Bracks, Mr Stephen Phillip <sup>1</sup>	Williamstown	ALP	Morris, Mr David Charles	Mornington	LP
Brooks, Mr Colin William	Bundoora	ALP	Mulder, Mr Terence Wynn	Polwarth	LP
Brumby, Mr John Mansfield	Broadmeadows	ALP	Munt, Ms Janice Ruth	Mordialloc	ALP
Burgess, Mr Neale Ronald	Hastings	LP	Napthine, Dr Denis Vincent	South-West Coast	LP
Cameron, Mr Robert Graham	Bendigo West	ALP	Nardella, Mr Donato Antonio	Melton	ALP
Campbell, Ms Christine Mary	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Neville, Ms Lisa Mary	Bellarine	ALP
Carli, Mr Carlo Domenico	Brunswick	ALP	Noonan, Wade Mathew <sup>4</sup>	Williamstown	ALP
Clark, Mr Robert William	Box Hill	LP	Northe, Mr Russell John	Morwell	Nats
Crisp, Mr Peter Laurence	Mildura	Nats	O'Brien, Mr Michael Anthony	Malvern	LP
Crutchfield, Mr Michael Paul	South Barwon	ALP	Overington, Ms Karen Marie	Ballarat West	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Ms Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Pallas, Mr Timothy Hugh	Tarneit	ALP
Delahunty, Mr Hugh Francis	Lowan	Nats	Pandazopoulos, Mr John	Dandenong	ALP
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Donnellan, Mr Luke Anthony	Narre Warren North	ALP	Pike, Ms Bronwyn Jane	Melbourne	ALP
Duncan, Ms Joanne Therese	Macedon	ALP	Powell, Mrs Elizabeth Jeanette	Shepparton	Nats
Eren, Mr John Hamdi	Lara	ALP	Richardson, Ms Fiona Catherine Alison	Northcote	ALP
Foley, Martin Peter <sup>2</sup>	Albert Park	ALP	Robinson, Mr Anthony Gerard	Mitcham	ALP
Fyffe, Mrs Christine Ann	Evelyn	LP	Ryan, Mr Peter Julian	Gippsland South	Nats
Graley, Ms Judith Ann	Narre Warren South	ALP	Scott, Mr Robin David	Preston	ALP
Green, Ms Danielle Louise	Yan Yean	ALP	Seitz, Mr George	Keilor	ALP
Haermeyer, Mr André	Kororoit	ALP	Shardey, Mrs Helen Jean	Caulfield	LP
Hardman, Mr Benedict Paul	Seymour	ALP	Smith, Mr Kenneth Maurice	Bass	LP
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 <sup>3</sup>	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

<sup>1</sup> Resigned 6 August 2007

<sup>2</sup> Elected 15 September 2007

<sup>3</sup> Resigned 6 August 2007

<sup>4</sup> Elected 15 September 2007



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## Thursday, 7 February 2008

**The SPEAKER (Hon. Jenny Lindell) took the chair at 9.32 a.m. and read the prayer.**

### EDITOR, ASSEMBLY

**The SPEAKER** — Order! I would like to take just one moment of the time of the house this morning to extend on my behalf, and perhaps on behalf of all members, best wishes to John Hickey on his last day with us. He has been in the Hansard position of Editor, Assembly, since 1998 and was with us well before then. Many members would know that John is particularly passionate about Hansard's role in serving this Parliament and obviously through this Parliament the people of Victoria. He is universally respected by all those who have worked with him. His dedication and thoroughness are well respected, as is his uncompromising approach to ensuring the accuracy and integrity of our parliamentary record.

I would certainly like to thank him on behalf of all members for his dedicated service to the Parliament of Victoria. I wish him all the very best. This is his last sitting week. He will be having an extended period of long service leave, and his official retirement will be later in the year. Our very best wishes to John.

*Honourable members applauded.*

### BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

#### Notices of motion: removal

**The SPEAKER** — Order! I advise the house that under standing order 144 notices of motion 88 to 110 inclusive 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 2.00 p.m. today.

### NOTICES OF MOTION

#### Notices of motion given.

#### Mr DONNELLAN having given notice of motion:

**Mr Clark** — On a point of order, Speaker, I believe that the latter part of the honourable member's notice did not constitute a notice of motion but was rather a statement, and I request that you review what he purported to give as a notice of motion and rule accordingly.

**The SPEAKER** — Order! As members know, the clerks do some editing of notices of motion if they do not fit the prescribed format, and the Clerk has already cut and trimmed that notice of motion.

#### Further notices of motion given.

### PETITIONS

#### Following petitions presented to house:

#### Water: north–south pipeline

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the proposal to develop a pipeline which would take water from the Goulburn Valley and pump it to Melbourne.

The petitioners register their opposition to the project on the basis that it will effectively transfer the region's wealth to Melbourne, have a negative impact on the local environment, and lead to further water being taken from the region in the future. The petitioners commit to the principle that water savings which are made in the Murray–Darling Basin should remain in the MDB. The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria rejects the proposal and calls on the state government to address Melbourne's water supply needs by investing in desalination, recycling and capturing stormwater.

#### By Dr SYKES (Benalla) (239 signatures)

#### Water: north–south pipeline

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the proposal to develop a pipeline which would take water from the Goulburn Valley and pump it to Melbourne.

The petitioners register their opposition to the project on the basis that it will effectively transfer the region's wealth to Melbourne, have a negative impact on the local environment, and lead to further water being taken from the region in the future. The petitioners commit to the principle that water savings which are made in the Murray–Darling Basin should remain in the MDB. The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria rejects the proposal and calls on the state government to address Melbourne's water supply needs by investing in recycling and capturing stormwater.

#### By Dr SYKES (Benalla) (14 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:

The economic rationale for deepening shipping channels is inadequately justified against the environmental costs. The vast majority of benefits will stay with overseas shipping lines and shippers, and a POMC witness admits that financial benefits to individual consumers will be 'immeasurably minor'.

Port Phillip Bay heads area outranks the Great Barrier Reef for diversity of reef life, colour and interest. Dredging will cause turbidity and sedimentation, smothering of marine species, and re-release of toxicity from Yarra sediments — all of which will seriously threaten our recently created marine parks, Ramsar wetlands, dolphins, seals, penguins, recreational and commercial fisheries, residents around the bay and tourism industries.

The petitioners request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria ensure that the proposal to deepen shipping channels is rejected and that alternative solutions making better use of a mix of interstate rail from existing deep water ports and sea transport are engaged.

**By Mr BAILLIEU (Hawthorn) (158 signatures)**

**Tabled.**

**Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Hawthorn be considered next day on motion of Mr BAILLIEU (Hawthorn).**

**Ordered that petitions presented by honourable member for Benalla be considered next day on motion of Dr SYKES (Benalla).**

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

### Mandatory ethanol and biofuels targets in Victoria

**Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) presented report, together with appendices and minutes of evidence.**

**Tabled.**

**Ordered that report and appendices be printed.**

## DOCUMENTS

**Tabled by Clerk:**

*Freedom of Information Act 1982* — Report of the Attorney-General on the operation of the Act 2006–07 (in lieu of report previously tabled on Thursday 6 December 2007)

Police Integrity, Office of — Exposing corruption within senior levels of Victoria Police — Ordered to be printed.

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

### Adjournment

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

That the house, at its rising, adjourn until Tuesday, 26 February 2008.

**Motion agreed to.**

## MEMBERS STATEMENTS

### Minister for Public Transport: performance

**Mr O'BRIEN** (Malvern) — I was contacted last year by constituents concerning the construction of an unsightly fence abutting the railway track in Turnbull Avenue, Toorak. The fence abruptly stops, thereby enabling people seeking to illegally cross the tracks to simply walk a few metres and continue. The City of Stonnington agrees that it is no deterrent. I therefore wrote to the Department of Infrastructure (DOI) seeking an on-site meeting with council, concerned local residents and me.

On 27 September 2007 Tom Sargent, general manager at the DOI, replied, stating 'I would be pleased to meet you on site to discuss the issues', and a meeting was arranged for 14 January 2008. However, prior to the meeting DOI informed me that the office of the Minister for Public Transport had ordered Mr Sargent not to attend. I subsequently discovered that the minister was, in fact, on leave at this time. I understand that it was her ministerial adviser Raoul Wainwright who gave the department its orders — the same Raoul Wainwright who drafted the infamous email to Labor MPs warning them not to bother the minister with complaints about our abysmal public transport system.

The minister needs to explain why she allowed her office to interfere with a legitimate meeting between a public servant, members of the public and their member of Parliament. This censorship and political interference characterises this government's true attitude towards accountability and transparency. The minister's jumped-up factional minder should be put back in his box and the minister moved from a job for which, given her antipathy towards the public, she is clearly unsuited.

### Australia Day: Mitcham electorate

**Mr ROBINSON** (Minister for Gaming) — A number of residents in the Mitcham electorate have recently been recognised in the Australia Day honours

list. I want to place on the record my congratulations to Emeritus Professor Paul Grundy, who was made a member of the Order of Australia for services to engineering, particularly in the areas of structural stability and fatigue, as an academic researcher, and through his leadership roles with professional organisations.

Another Blackburn resident, Sue Lockwood, was made a member of the Order of Australia — very well deserved — for service to the community, particularly women with breast cancer, through consumer advocacy and support roles, and for conservation and environment protection of the much-loved Blackburn Lake Sanctuary. Jennifer O’Sullivan of Vermont was the third recipient, and she received an Order of Australia Medal for services to the community as a speech pathologist, particularly to people with hearing impairments, and as a contributor to the development of cognitive thinking techniques.

These people have given great service to the broader Victorian community, and these honours are a worthy recognition of that great contribution.

### **Rail: freight network**

**Mr DELAHUNTY** (Lowan) — Anger is rising in country communities as rail freight services grind to a halt because of the inaction by this city-centric Labor government. This government has no vision and no commitment to rail freight services. With government ownership of the track, it is time for consistency in the rail freight industry, consistency on access charges for all forms of freight, and consistency with train-path assignment across all lines. Every million tonnes that go off rail means an extra 50 000 B-double truck movements and an extra 30 million kilometres of travel on our stressed road network. This will also cause transport gridlock in Melbourne. As Tim Fischer said, the case for rail freight is formidable for economic, social and environmental reasons.

### **Racing: country meetings**

**Mr DELAHUNTY** — Country Victorians, and particularly country race clubs, are also frustrated and angry with this city-centric government’s lack of support for country racing. In my electorate of Lowan we have lost four race meetings from Casterton, Edenhope, Hamilton and Wimmera, and we have lost TAB status from the Apsley, Coleraine and Edenhope race meetings.

These announcements have hit our voluntary committees extremely hard. Their members work

tirelessly to get their race tracks up to standard and provide excellent recreational activities. Removing race meetings and TAB status from these country towns not only impacts on their local economy but also impacts heavily on their ability to attract horses, trainers, owners and supporters from across western Victoria and South Australia.

Victoria is bigger than Melbourne, and country Victorians expect more from their government in relation to both country rail freight services and country racing, which forms an integral part of the social fabric of rural communities.

### **Australia Day: Richmond electorate**

**Mr WYNNE** (Minister for Housing) — I would like to congratulate four people who received Australia Day honours last week who are or were longstanding members of the Richmond electorate.

Mr Jonathon Rush and Ms Anita Narduzzo received honours for their services to orthopaedics and community health respectively, and Mr Frank Thompson, who of course would be well known, received an honour for service to the community. He was mayor of Collingwood in 1979–80; he was a member of the Collingwood council for 10 years; he was a well-known activist in the local community; he was made a life member of the Australian Labor Party in 2005; and of course now he is residing down in the Rosebud area and offering great contributions to people in that area, particularly in the area of community health.

I am particularly pleased that the Honourable Brian Howe received a second Australia Day award. He was appointed an officer of the Order of Australia on 26 January. This honour follows his appointment as a member of the Order of Australia. The award was for services to education and the community as an academic, an advocate for social sustainability and a facilitator of debate about public policy, particularly in the housing, employment and welfare sectors, to the development of public administration, to theology and to the arts. The award is very well deserved by this great Australian — a mentor to me and the member for Bentleigh.

### **Hospitals: waiting lists**

**Mrs FYFFE** (Evelyn) — Any resident in Yarra Ranges in my electorate who cannot afford private health cover and relies on the public health system — anyone who is unemployed, is on an aged or invalid pension, or is a single parent — is facing a bleak future

in Victoria's frightening world of a serious lack of medical services. Operations are cancelled at the last minute. Sick people face a 12-month wait to get an appointment for a consultation before being put onto a waiting list for very necessary operations and treatment. Urgent operations are classified as elective — when they are clearly not — to justify cancelling at the last minute. The nearest two public hospitals, Maroondah Hospital and Box Hill Hospital, have horrendous waiting lists for consultations and surgery.

Brian was diagnosed with an enlarged prostate in the middle of last year. In July he received a letter from Maroondah Hospital advising of an appointment with a specialist. On 19 October he was told the appointment was cancelled and another one was made for May 2008. Brian has not even had a biopsy — he has been living with the uncertainty of not knowing whether he has cancer or not. Richard was booked in for desperately needed surgery. He had been checked in and processed to the point of putting on a gown and being placed in a side room when his surgery was cancelled. This was despite the fact he is a diabetic and had not eaten for 15 hours.

These are just two examples of the dozens of complaints my office receives on this issue. That is just the tip of the iceberg of the deplorable state of the Victorian health system.

### **Dr Eric Cunningham Dax**

**Ms NEVILLE** (Minister for Mental Health) — I know I join with other members of the house and many people both locally and internationally in being saddened by the recent death of Dr Eric Cunningham Dax.

Dr Dax came to Victoria in 1952 with his wife and family, having been invited to take up the position of inaugural chairman of what was then known as the Mental Hygiene Authority. Dr Dax believed people with a mental illness should be treated humanely and with respect. With this as his guiding principle he used his powerful intellect and unflagging energy to transform our public mental health system over the next 17 years. He introduced a series of reforms, including community-based mental health care, new and improved treatments, rehabilitation projects and improved training for clinical staff. He went on to other senior positions and continued to make a significant contribution as a leader across the mental health field.

In my own area, Dax House in Geelong, which was completed in 1978, was named after Dr Dax in recognition of his extensive work in mental health. It

was a fitting tribute to him as it was the first mental health facility built and integrated with a public hospital in Victoria. Dr Dax is perhaps best known in the wider community for the Cunningham Dax collection, a wonderful art collection which now comprises over 12 000 artworks by people who have experienced mental illness or psychological trauma. The collection is both a significant legacy and a lasting tribute to a man who was a visionary and a great reformer in mental health services in Victoria. My condolences go to his family and friends.

### **Government: performance**

**Mrs VICTORIA** (Bayswater) — I am astounded that the Labor government continues to pocket enormous amounts of revenue yet does so little with it. We heard last week that a whopping \$1.35 billion was frittered away by Victorian gamblers in just six months, and this government gleefully pocketed the associated taxes. Land tax is crippling Victorians, and payroll tax and WorkCover levies are still a monstrous burden on large and small businesses.

My welfare agencies in Knox and Maroondah would be ready and willing to advise the government on what to do with a reported surplus of more than \$800 million. This huge pot of gold could go a long way towards diminishing our hospital waiting lists, and the waiting lists for those waiting lists. It could completely eradicate the school maintenance backlog, or improve our roads and transport system, which has never seen such dark days. Members can take their pick from a very long list of services that are not being delivered or are simply being ignored by the government — police, mental health, aged care, community services and housing shortages and affordability.

The Premier says he does not want Melbourne to become a backwater, but members should look around them now. This state used to proudly spruik that it was on the move, but now, it seems, it is not in the same direction.

### **Country Fire Authority: Bayswater brigade**

**Mrs VICTORIA** — I wish to congratulate Captain Craig Ferguson and all at the Bayswater brigade of the Country Fire Authority for their innovative approach to a lack of space in their station. They did a great job thinking outside the square, and they continue to help look after the outer east with true professionalism.

### **Tarneit electorate: sports uniform grants**

**Mr PALLAS** (Minister for Roads and Ports) — I recently had the pleasure of joining the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs at the Werribee Sports and Fitness Centre, where we presented sports uniform grants to local clubs.

The 11 clubs in the city of Wyndham that received the grants and will be dressed for success were the Glenorden Cricket Club, the Hoppers Crossing Club, the Hoppers Crossing Junior Basketball Club, the Hoppers Crossing Soccer Club, the Hoppers Crossing Swimming Club, the Little River Cricket Club, the Old Westbourne Amateur Football Club, the Werribee Basketball Association, the Werribee Junior Football Club, the Werribee Little Athletics Centre and the Wyndham Olympic Soccer Club. Each club spoke of how the grant would help their clubs, and many clubs recognise the importance of uniform grants to financially disadvantaged members.

The \$1.5 million from the Our Club Our Future sporting uniform grants program is part of the \$26 million that was saved from delivering the Commonwealth Games under budget. While being able to provide world-class facilities to elite athletes for the games, the state government has ensured that our grassroots sportspeople are also supported.

The Brumby government is committed to supporting our local sporting clubs, and this initiative ensures that all members will be able to have new uniforms and represent their clubs and Wyndham proudly. The uniform grants were well received by sports clubs in the growing electorate. These grants will encourage many people in Tarneit, especially younger residents, to play and enjoy sport in the area.

### **Water: tank rebates**

**Mr JASPER** (Murray Valley) — The Victorian government has introduced a range of support services encouraging Victorians to conserve water and to be aware of the importance of water, particularly in dry weather conditions. However, the water tank rebate scheme shows discrimination against many Victorians living in country areas. The current policy to access the government subsidy requires that the applicant must be serviced by a reticulated water supply system. In practice this means that country people living outside cities and towns are not eligible to access the financial support.

Over recent years I have made and received from constituents extensive representations pointing out the

discrimination in the application of this policy. In responses I have received from successive ministers they have rejected any change to the policy on the basis that this encourages those on a reticulated water supply system to be economical with water usage, but those people living outside of town water supply are already aware of conservation of water and do not need the subsidy. This policy totally ignores the fact that farmers and others outside reticulated water areas are often totally reliant on tank water for their normal usage. My most recent response from Minister Holding continues to support this policy of discrimination against an important section of country Victorians.

I call on the government and the minister to again review this policy and change it immediately to assist people outside reticulated water supply systems.

### **Banksia-La Trobe Secondary School: regeneration project**

**Mr LANGDON** (Ivanhoe) — Today I wish to congratulate the school communities of the Banksia Secondary College and the La Trobe Secondary College. At the start of this school year these two schools became one — Banksia-La Trobe Secondary School — as part of the Heidelberg regeneration.

I particularly wish to acknowledge the enormous work undertaken by the two principals, Gerry Fogarty and Glenn White, the school councils, the teachers, the staff, the parents and the students to establish this new school. The planning has taken months. The new school is situated at the former Banksia Secondary College site; the La Trobe Secondary College site has been earmarked for a future senior campus with over \$4 million being committed by the state government at the last election for a new maths-science campus.

The merger was undertaken by the school communities without any involvement by either me or my office. Despite all the great work the school communities did by themselves, this did not stop Cr Jenny Mulholland issuing an outrageous press release condemning the merger and me, which was so totally wrong that it showed how out of touch she is and to what lengths she will go to get attention. Cr Mulholland should learn from these two great schools that hard work, dedication and forward planning bring results, not lies and deception.

I wish to advise the house that my request to the Minister for Education for a public consultation committee to be established to ensure that the entire community has ownership of the school generation in

Heidelberg has been approved, and the committee will commence shortly.

### **Police: Mornington Peninsula**

**Mr MORRIS** (Mornington) — This summer the Mornington Peninsula has been busier than ever before — more holiday-makers, more traffic and more business — and happily we have had less trouble, in part because the Mornington Peninsula Shire had the foresight to introduce very strict controls on the transport of alcohol, but also because for the summer we have a reasonable complement of police. Now that January is gone we are back to normal, and our undermanned and overstretched police again face their daily battle.

The peninsula is not the crime capital of Australia, but we do face our challenges. The members of the police force do a great job, but the constant chant from this government — its great hoax — is that police numbers have risen since 1999. Perhaps in aggregate they have, but we need police available on operational duties, not on secondment to fill other vacancies and not acting above their rank because their superior officers have had to fill other gaps. We need them on the streets and roads of Victoria visibly policing the state, and we need them now.

### **Frankston Freeway: environment effects statement**

**Mr MORRIS** — The Southern and Eastern Integrated Transport Authority (SEITA) has for some months been engaged in work on the Frankston freeway environment effects statement. There are a number of identified options for investigation. It has sent out a communications plan, which has been somewhat effective, but many people do not seem to be getting the message. One of the options proposes a wholesale change to the Moorooduc Highway, with dramatic impacts not only for the people who live and work along that road but for the people of Mount Eliza and Moorooduc. If the plan proceeds, we will have a freeway where none is currently anticipated. The case should not be prejudged, but the owners of all the affected properties need to know what is going on. I urge the minister to take the issue up with SEITA.

### **Australia Day: South Barwon electorate**

**Mr CRUTCHFIELD** (South Barwon) — At the recent Australia Day awards ceremonies in my electorate several members of the South Barwon community received awards for their significant community work.

One such person is former nurse Mary Elliott, who was presented with an Australia Day citizen of the year award by the Surf Coast shire for 20 years service as a Rotarian and for raising wider community awareness about the Australian organ donor register, which is a program I fully support. Richard Embleton of Highton received an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for his service in providing for the welfare of veterans and their families. He has also made a significant contribution to local junior sporting organisations, including the Geelong Falcons as head trainer and player welfare coordinator and the Australian Football League development program.

Neville Whitley is a well-known figure in local football circles, clocking up nearly 50 years in the sport as a player, coach, administrator, community worker and president of the Geelong and District Football League and as a contributor to the licensed club industry as a co-founder of Buckley's Entertainment Centre. Mr Whitley was also awarded an OAM for his selfless efforts. Belmont's Marion Neil, who runs the Kalkee Korner Shop, was recognised with a Order of Australia Medal for her passion for volunteer work within the community and for raising vital funds for the Kalkee community aged care service. John Brady of Barwon Heads was recognised for his services to the local community through his work with sporting, charitable and social welfare groups.

Without these local heroes many sporting and charitable organisations would not exist, and I sincerely thank them for their hard work and congratulate them on their efforts.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to City of Greater Geelong councillor and former mayor Shane Dowling, who was first elected in 2001 to the Deakin ward. Shane has been a passionate and successful advocate for Geelong, and the citizens of Geelong will be the poorer for his retirement.

### **Rail: Boronia and Ferntree Gully stations**

**Mr WAKELING** (Ferntree Gully) — Residents in the Ferntree Gully electorate demand that the Brumby Labor government listen to the concerns of Victorian public transport commuters and recognise that immediate action is needed to improve the safety of railway stations within the city of Knox. Boronia station has the unenviable distinction of having the third highest rate of crime recorded of any metropolitan station during the first six months of 2007. Furthermore, Ferntree Gully railway station has been the scene of numerous assaults over a sustained period of time. Recently one poor victim had a bottle broken

over his head before being stabbed in the upper body by the broken glass.

The time for talking is over. I call upon this government to immediately act, firstly, by increasing staff numbers at Boronia station, and secondly, by upgrading Ferntree Gully railway station to premium status by allocating permanent staff as well as constructing an appropriate waiting area for commuters.

### **Boarding houses: controls**

**Mr WAKELING** — Despite repeated calls from Ferntree Gully and other communities throughout Victoria, the state Labor government has failed to enact adequate legislation to deal with the proliferation of boarding houses across the state. Current planning legislation applies only to boarding houses that contain more than 10 habitable rooms. Furthermore, only certain establishments require registration under the Health Act. Consequently a number of establishments have been constructed in inappropriate locations. Furthermore, local communities have been unable to have any input into the decision-making process. I call upon the government to listen to the concerns not only of my community but of communities throughout Victoria, work with key stakeholders and establish appropriate legislation forthwith.

### **Aldercourt Primary School: community development**

**Mr PERERA** (Cranbourne) — Last week I had the pleasure of visiting Aldercourt Primary School in Frankston North to welcome all the preps to the 2008 school year. I congratulate the school's principal, Susan Schneider, the staff and members of the school council, who are taking the lead in implementing innovative and restorative practices which build caring communities around the students at Aldercourt Primary School. The school is recognising and encouraging the contributions made by staff, parents, carers and the community in promoting great relationships. It is a fantastic concept.

### **Cranbourne electorate: sports uniform grants**

**Mr PERERA** — I congratulate the following grassroots sporting clubs which were successful in this year's sporting uniforms grants program: Cranbourne Junior Football Club, Cranbourne Meadows Cricket Club, Cranbourne Storm Basketball Club, Cranbourne Dandenong Pistol Club, Langwarrin Soccer Club, Frankston Pines Soccer Club, St Anne's All Stars Basketball Club and the Peninsula Fencing Academy.

### **Stephen Jamieson**

**Mr BLACKWOOD** (Narracan) — On 2 January, while most of us were still welcoming in the new year, Stephen Jamieson of Bendoc was constructing a firebreak with his dozer to try to contain a fire started by lightning in the Snowy River National Park north of Bendoc. Tragically Stephen lost his life in the process as his dozer slipped off the side cut he was building and rolled, pinning him beneath the machine and killing him instantly. Some of you may have read a small piece in the newspapers of the day or heard of the accident via TV or radio, but regrettably this tragic loss of life occurred and received little recognition beyond East Gippsland.

Stephen, like most Victorian timber-harvesting contractors, had for many years provided critical front-line support for bushfire suppression, shutting down his timber-harvesting activities and sending his machinery to the fire front to assist Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria. Stephen's legacy should be to remind us all of the enormous danger faced by all who confront a wildfire on behalf of fellow Victorians. His death is another painful reminder of the significant risk that all firefighters so bravely ignore as they struggle to protect the lives and assets of country communities under threat during a bushfire.

To Stephen's wife and children I say: be very proud of your husband and father. Without question he lost his life as he worked diligently, using the experience and expertise that is unique to timber harvesting contractors familiar with the demands of the type of conditions under which Stephen was operating. Stephen died applying his great skill in the pursuit of the safety of others and the ultimate protection of the bush that he loved.

### **Tertiary education and training: overseas students**

**Mr SCOTT** (Preston) — I rise today to draw the house's attention to a shocking article in yesterday's *Australian*, entitled 'Foreigners are exploited'. The article outlined that approximately 60 per cent of overseas students working in Australia are paid less than the legal minimum wage. Further, the article outlined the strong economic importance of the educational services export industry, which last year overtook tourism as Australia's largest service export industry, worth \$12.5 billion, with over 450 000 overseas students in Australia.

Further, overseas students play an important role in Australia's migration program, with many students after their studies choosing to participate in the skilled migration program. This plays an important role in meeting our skills shortages and in dealing with the demographic issues faced by Australia, given our ageing population. The exploitation of one person in our community diminishes us all, but the exploitation of such a vital part of our economic and social future is an injustice our society cannot afford.

### **Preschools: speed zones**

**Mr CRISP** (Mildura) — My office has been contacted by concerned local residents regarding the lack of a reduced speed zone out the front of kindergartens, the like of which are found in front of primary and secondary schools, where the zone is 40 kilometres per hour between the hours of 8.00 a.m. and 9.30 a.m. and between 2.15 p.m. and 4.00 p.m. on relevant schooldays. A public plea to motorists to slow down and be cautious when approaching kindergartens, many of which in my electorate are located on major, busy roads, was made through the local media.

Because of the staggered starting and finishing times of children at kindergarten, they are not deemed by VicRoads and the state government to qualify for a lower speed zone outside their gates. Further, this situation applies across the state. I understand that there has been ongoing debate on the implementation of 40-kilometre-per-hour zones for kinders between Meredith Carter, chief executive officer of Kindergarten Parents Victoria, and the Minister for Roads and Ports.

There is another, more expensive option to ensure the safety of our preschoolers, which would be to put the onus for safety around these areas back onto local government and install speed humps near these facilities, a suggestion that I am sure is not welcome. I call on the Minister for Roads and Ports to accede to the request by the kindergarten groups to make our kinders safe places. The government-proposed program of Arrive Alive 2 should include reduced speed zones in front of our kindergartens to protect these young and most precious members of our community.

### **Rail: Lara station**

**Mr EREN** (Lara) — Commuters of Lara are very excited indeed with the work that has started on a \$700 000 upgrade of the Lara train station, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Public Transport for her commitment to regional travellers. The upgrade will provide train passengers

with an improved waiting area, new toilet facilities and a station kiosk. Improvements to the station will complement the new Lara Parkway facility, which was completed late last year at a cost of \$600 000.

The new-look Lara station will include a new coach-train interchange; a larger passenger waiting room; a new cafe for customers; a new staffroom/meals area; new toilets for staff and customers, including facilities for the disabled; structural improvements to the building; and painting and landscaping improvements. With increased parking and, soon, greatly improved passenger facilities, Lara passengers can look forward to a more enjoyable travel experience. This comes on top of reductions in V/Line fares and safety improvements at the level crossing. Our government is really delivering for Lara.

Actions speak louder than words, and on that basis it is only the Brumby Labor government that is committed to improving transport services and facilities for regional Victorians. The project is due to be completed by the middle of the year, and I certainly look forward to being involved in the opening of this fantastic facility.

### **Office of Police Integrity: report**

**Mr McINTOSH** (Kew) — The tabling of the report by the Office of Police Integrity (OPI) into last year's corruption hearings may provide just a bit more clarity about the extent of police corruption in Victoria Police. However, Victorians will be none the wiser as to the full extent of the allegations of corruption exposed at last year's hearings. Of course, Victoria does not have a body that has the legislative power of the OPI to investigate corrupt behaviour in the public sector generally.

Throughout the course of the latest investigation several high-ranking public officials and public servants were named, directly or indirectly by inference, in relation to alleged corrupt behaviour. The OPI has made it perfectly clear that it cannot investigate this behaviour because it does not have the legislative authority to do so, and most importantly it does not have the power to make adverse findings about these people. Likewise it has no power to exonerate these people.

What is clear is that Victoria urgently requires an independent, broad-based anticorruption commission which is fully accountable to a joint parliamentary committee — just like New South Wales, just like Queensland and just like Western Australia — and which the Prime Minister of Australia, the Premier of

New South Wales and the former Premier of Queensland all reckon Victoria is just nuts not to have.

### **Kinglake West Mechanics Institute: upgrade**

**Mr HARDMAN** (Seymour) — I rise to thank the Minister for Regional and Rural Development for a timely and much-needed grant for the Kinglake West Mechanics Institute hall and reserve precinct. The \$56 400 grant from the Small Towns Development Fund is part of the Brumby Labor government's plan to make provincial Victoria a better place to live, work and raise a family. The grant will go towards a \$95 500 project to upgrade the hall and the reserve precinct, and involves relocating and improving a 110-square-metre former library building from the adjacent state school site on to the reserve.

The building was actually erected by Kinglake West parents and friends a few decades ago. The building will be modified and fitted out for use by various local organisations. It will become home for the Kinglake Ranges Tennis Club, which has experienced a large growth in membership and has outgrown its existing clubrooms. The grant will also go towards many other elements, which include a new storage area, constructing barbecue facilities and shelter, landscaping at the reserve and installing water tanks to harvest water from the roof of the adjacent hall.

It is great to see these improvements actually happening to the area, and the committee of management deserves great thanks for helping to make Kinglake West a better place to live.

### **King Street and Templestowe Road: upgrade**

**Mr KOTSIRAS** (Bulleen) — I condemn this lazy government. This government will not listen, especially to constituents in my area who have been calling out for upgrades to King Street and Templestowe Road. These two major roads need major upgrading, and despite the fact that I have raised this issue on numerous occasions the government has ignored the pleas and the needs of the residents.

How many people must get hurt or killed before this government provides the money to upgrade these two roads? King Street will cost approximately \$12 million to upgrade and Templestowe Road will cost about \$20 million. At the last election the Liberal Party promised that both these roads would be upgraded. This government refused to listen and continues to refuse to listen to the residents of the Bulleen electorate. I urge the Minister for Roads and Ports to actually visit my electorate. As I have said previously, I am happy to

provide the coffee and biscuits and to drive the minister around to show him the appalling condition of both these roads. I urge the government to do something other than organising media stunts for its ministers.

**Ms Asher** — On a point of order, Acting Speaker, I refer you to a document that was tabled earlier this morning, the report by the Attorney-General on the operation of the Freedom of Information Act for 2006–07. I have obviously just picked up this document but I note on the inside cover that it says, 'This report is tabled in lieu of the report tabled on 6 December 2007'. We have here something highly unusual: the Attorney-General tabled his annual report on FOI in December, and this morning, without much fanfare at all, he has tabled a new report on FOI without any explanation whatsoever.

I am asking, Acting Speaker, if you could request the Attorney-General to provide an explanation to the house of why two FOI annual reports by him have been provided to Parliament and what the reason is for the withdrawal of the first report.

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms Munt)** — Order! I will refer the member's request to the Speaker for her consideration.

## **ANNUAL STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS**

### **Debate resumed from 5 February.**

**Mr BAILLIEU** (Leader of the Opposition) — This statement was trumpeted by the Premier as a major reform. 'Historic', the Premier said, 'a landmark'. The government said it was an initiative that would increase accountability in this state. They demanded the attendance of members of the other house and the attention of all Victorians. It was a Brumby version of a State of the Union address, delivered fittingly on Super Tuesday. On cue the troops rose at the finish to cheer and applaud the president. But as great moments in parliamentary democracy go, this fell as flat as the proverbial effluent carter's hat.

The Premier's message in the document which accompanied the statement commenced with a commitment to increase 'accessibility and accountability' and to 'finding new ways to engage the public, be accountable and strengthen the trust' the community places in government. He then invited Victorians to join 'the increased consultation opportunities the government is offering'. That was on Super Tuesday.

But this week we have seen the government dismiss country Victorians opposing the government's plans for the north-south pipeline as 'ugly, ugly people'. We have seen government members vote down a private members bill designed to increase public scrutiny of the channel deepening project. Not one single member of the government had the courage to argue the case against the bill proceeding. We have seen government members of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee prevent disclosure of documents to explain the transport ticketing fiasco and the minister flatly refusing to answer questions on the subject. We have seen the Premier tell country Victorians that they are too far away to warrant the provision of a rescue helicopter. And we have seen the establishment of the Ministry of Truth, the Premier's own spin machine, with 1000 public servants building the biggest media monitoring and propaganda unit in Australian political history.

This statement has little to do with the government's intentions and more to do with the Premier's pretensions. Since 1999 the member for Broadmeadows, as minister and Treasurer, had presented to the house only one ministerial statement, and that was in November 1999. It was the now Premier's first attempt to take the parliamentary spotlight. It was an early display of the now famous chip on the shoulder. The speech he gave then was so long that it was described by the then Leader of The Nationals as 'the longest press release in the history of man'.

It was not until 2001 that the now Premier got to strut the stage for the first time as Treasurer with his first budget speech. That was the first of seven in a row. Each became a piece of highly orchestrated theatre. Each salved the wounds the then Treasurer had received over who should have been Premier. Each was designed to show just who was running the show. It was the annual statement of Brumby's intentions. It was Prince John's time in the parliamentary spotlight, comfort for the uncrowned king.

Suddenly the Premier finds himself again without a stage for making grand parliamentary statements. He is no longer the Treasurer, and there are no gala parliamentary performances, just the very evident pain of question time. So here we are, and what was originally announced as the tabling of a document has been converted into theatre.

Each of those grand performances of the past was themed, each with its intentions and flourishes. What was it that the now Premier said in those speeches? In 2001 the then Treasurer promised 'a new level of

openness and accountability', the 'standardisation of regional railway gauges', 'a seamless freight system across the state, integrating Victoria's industries with the national and global economies', 'improved access to Victoria's ports for regional business and industry', and 'an integrated transport system for the whole of Victoria'. He promised to 'drag Victoria's transport system into the 21st century'. He promised to improve 'literacy and numeracy' and that Victorians 'could feel safe in their homes, streets and communities'.

In 2002 he proclaimed 'education as the government's top priority'. He heralded 'a new climate of confidence in Victoria' and 'communities where there is trust and support'. He promised 'world-class schools and hospitals', 'modern transport' and 'safer places for people to live and work'. He said we Victorians 'had the wind in our sails'.

In 2003 he said we were 'on track' to providing 'every Victorian' with 'first-class health care whenever and wherever they need it'. He promised then 'a new Department for Victorian Communities to work together with communities across the state to tackle problems, create new opportunities and secure their futures'.

**Dr Napthine** — That's gone.

**Mr BAILLIEU** — As the member for South-West Coast reminds us, that is gone.

In 2004 the Premier promised again, because he had to promise it again, to 'improve rail and shipping access to the port of Melbourne'. He said these improvements were 'critical to maintaining Melbourne's position as Australia's leading freight hub'. He promised to provide 'detailed feasibility and design studies' for — guess what? — 'the deepening of the shipping channels' in Port Phillip Bay. And he promised 'fully detailed designs to improve rail links to and within the port, with the aim of increasing the amount of freight carried by rail, reducing road congestion around the port and boosting the efficiency of Victoria's freight sector'.

In 2005 he said we were 'driving ahead'. He promised Victorians 'clean, healthy and safe communities'. And he promised 'decent, affordable housing', 'state-of-the-art public hospitals and health services', and again, 'modern, reliable transport systems'. It is fascinating to review those contributions over time. By 2006 the rhetoric was waning and the intentions were fading. The best the then Treasurer could muster was a generalist comment that Victoria was 'a world-class state and economy'. If only it had all been true.

By 2007 a clearly frustrated and ambitious Treasurer was struggling. He was highlighting problems and in so doing was acknowledging the failure of the Labor government to deliver in so many areas, including in freight transport infrastructure. The talk at the time was of a Treasurer counselling the then Premier to go or he would — and guess what happened? The best he could muster in that last budget speech were some narrow claims about our state leading in just a handful of indicators.

What has the Premier committed to in this statement of government intentions? The bold intentions have gone or merely been recycled, and the government is clearly labouring. The Premier has committed in this document to providing a website opportunity for Victorians to have input. The address is [www.yoursay.dpc.vic.gov.au](http://www.yoursay.dpc.vic.gov.au). 'Yoursay' is the name; shame, then, that there are other sites with the same name. If you Google 'yoursay', you will find a website providing commercial online survey sources, or even the *Herald Sun*'s feedback line, 'Have your say'.

The *Herald Sun* website is an open site. Comments are posted there for all to see, and on Tuesday readers were giving the Premier a right old towelling. I do not think that is what the Premier had in mind. If you try hard, you can find the Premier's site, but it is a one-way site. Those seeking to comment have to register, and full details are required. You can make a comment, but no-one else will get to see that comment, and in so doing commentators will be captured by the Department of Premier and Cabinet — the very same department that is now running the propaganda machine. Join the email list? The email list is run by the Premier's personal propaganda unit. Now we know where Sharon went after the Office of Police Integrity debacle!

What are the Premier's claimed priorities? When the Premier took office in 2007 his media release proclaimed his priorities were education, skills and lifelong learning, public transport, urban development, planning, preventable diseases, major projects and services to farmers. In an interview on *Stateline* in August last year he proclaimed they were to 'implement the policies the government took to the election', but there was no mention of the nearly 40 opposition policies the government has implemented since the election. And he certainly did not mention his broken promises, like the north-south pipeline.

In the house on Tuesday the Premier again proclaimed that education was his no. 1 priority, but in the message in the accompanying document he said government priorities are 'families, communities, water and climate

change'. When it comes to priorities Victorians could be forgiven for being a little confused about the Premier's message. I guess priorities change and all we can do is accept whatever is in his most recent statement.

This statement sets out the government's intentions for the year, and presumably they are derived from those priorities, and the statement seeks to highlight in particular the government's parliamentary agenda. So it is instructive after all the pomp to consider what legislation the government has introduced this week. Legislation has been introduced this week — what a relief! — but there is only one bill. There is only one bill of the 60-odd heralded in the accompanying document, so we must look to that for a sense of priority. There we have it — a bill to deal with the management of the flower and garden show! 'Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!'. I am convinced: this statement stuff is really instructive.

The real story is in the Deputy Premier's message buried in the accompanying statement — the document that demonstrates that the statement could have been delivered and probably should have been delivered by press release. There it is on the opening page:

Some of the bills outlined in this statement will not be brought before Parliament until 2009.

So there we are — in delay again! This list is a grab bag of bills, some of which may or may not see the light of day. They have been patched together for Show Day, a Show Day with a show bag and Polly Waffle to boot.

**Mr K. Smith** interjected.

**Mr BAILLIEU** — A lovely interjection from the member for Bass. What legislation does not get a mention in the statement? It is, of course, just as instructive to consider that. There is absolutely no mention of two particular bills. One is the Water Amendment (Critical Water Infrastructure Projects) Bill. This bill was so critical to the future of water security in this state that Parliament was recalled in the week before Christmas 2006 to provide for its urgent passage. It still lies on the bottom of the notice paper, and as for the government's intentions, we still do not know what they are.

The other is the Senate Elections Amendment Bill, which was also introduced in 2006. It, too, rots on the notice paper. A federal election has come and gone, and the government intention for that bill still remains a mystery.

There are a number of major issues that have not been covered. We cannot cover them all in the time allowed here, but I want to cover some. One of the major issues confronting Victorians at this time is the channel deepening project. There is widespread and passionate interest in this project, and, understandably, much attention has been drawn to the environmental issues. But equally in recent months public attention has been drawn to the land use issue, the alternative port options issue and also to the freight and traffic issues which arise from the project. We might have expected that these issues would have featured in the government's intention statement, but they do not. And in this regard I want to highlight a glaring omission.

After seven years of promises and millions of dollars spent there is still no freight and logistics strategy for Melbourne or indeed Victoria. The strategy was promised by the government in 2001 as being vital to the development of future infrastructure development decisions. It should have led the metropolitan growth strategy, Melbourne 2030, which was released in 2002; it should have led the port development plan. It should have led decisions about freight rail; it should have led decisions about road and rail links. Sadly it did not, and it did not because the work was not done. It was urgent, the government said. It was essential, the government said, but it has been buried. We have raised it many times in this house, but government embers — 'embers': there is a slip of the tongue! — government members have dropped it as a subject.

On 7 October 2003 in the course of debate on the port of Melbourne bill I raised industry concern about the lack of the promised freight and logistics strategy and asked the question: where is it? The then Minister for Transport intervened: 'It is in good hands', he said! His hands were chopped off, and we still do not know whose hands it has been in because there is no strategy. It does not rate a mention in this statement of intentions. All that exists is a website for the freight and logistics strategy — another website! There are one and a half pages on that website. Go to it, and you see it refers to a grab bag of other reports. Most of those reports refer in turn to the pending freight and logistics strategy — round and round, like a circle in a spiral.

Word around government circles is that in the last few weeks a group in the Department of Infrastructure has been desperately trying to cobble together a document ahead of forthcoming road announcements. The industry is rolling its collective eyes, and the Premier wonders why industry figures give him a bucketing. But it is all too late; so many decisions have already been made, and the tail has wagged the dog. And, oh, what a dog! No wonder there is no clarity on the future

of Hastings as a port, or freight rail, or standardisation, or traffic, or congestion. It is a tragedy that there is no freight and logistics strategy from this government after seven years.

There are many other things missing from this statement. In health, where is the mention of the patients currently on the waiting lists and the strategy to relieve that, and the patients on hidden waiting lists and waiting on lists to get onto the hidden waiting lists? Where is the plan to achieve any specific outcomes in terms of increased throughput in our hospitals? Where is the mention of dental care? Where is the mention of the faltering rural ambulance network in regional Victoria? Where is the mention of a south-west rescue helicopter? Where is the mention of the shortage of medical professionals in country Victoria? And in education — the government's trumpeted priority; or at least on occasions it is the government's trumpeted priority — where is the mention of the rising maintenance backlog in our schools? There have been years and years of increasing maintenance backlog.

Where is the mention of the reduction in the number applying to become teachers in Victoria this year? Where is the strategy for addressing the real problems with literacy and numeracy? We do not want illiteracy and innumeracy in this state. Where is the mention of the 4000 teachers currently in schools who have not yet had police record checks? Where is the mention of the continuing exodus of Victorian students from government to non-government schools and the exodus of teachers to other states? And why is it that Victoria spends less per student than any other state?

On law and order, where is the mention of the truth about crime statistics being propped up by changed reporting? Where is the mention of the thousands of Victorians who have been the victims of violent crime on our streets in the last 12 months and indeed in the last eight years, and the staggering growth in the number of assaults and crimes against the person? Where is the mention of police officers who are under enormous strain attempting to respond to escalating violence with fewer and fewer front-line officers, or the commitment to providing additional officers over the next three years? Where is the mention of the violence in our suburbs, regional centres or country towns, or a commitment to any target for reducing the incidence of violent crimes? Where are the increased human resources for our courts, which continue to languish at the bottom of the national league tables?

On transport and roads, where is the mention of that triumph, the over-budget and overdue transport ticketing fiasco? We have a billion dollars worth of

tickets when we have already got tickets. What we need is trains, trams and tracks. Where is the reference to the delays, overcrowding and cancellations on our rail network, or a specific proposal to increase rolling stock for our public transport system? Where is the mention of the South Morang rail extension, which is long promised, or the proposals for a Rowville extension, or a light rail to Doncaster? And where is the reference to the current and future bottlenecks around Melbourne's ports and what has been done about them? I have referred already to that freight and logistics strategy. And where is the concern about violence on the public transport network, or bringing forward the urgent level crossing upgrades? We have again seen tragedies in at least two locations in the last fortnight. Where are the connections to the ring-road and the Frankston bypass and other important road projects?

On tax, economic and business matters, where is the reference to the crippling taxes this government imposes on Victorians, or the soaring land tax and stamp duty burdens, or the high price of housing and renting in Victoria that threatens future employment, security and growth? Where is the effort to reduce the dependence on gaming revenue and the pain of problem gamblers? Where is the reference to inflation and the looming crisis in monetary policy on top of the current crisis in housing affordability, or any strategy or plan to boost Victoria's exports and make sure the newly deepened channel works both ways? Where is the reference to the impact of the subprime mortgage crisis on Victoria's public sector agencies, a crisis the Premier has ignored in this house on many occasions?

On water and the environment, where is the mention of the national water plan for the Murray–Darling Basin? Where is the reference to the government's intention as to whether it will sign up to a plan that has been agreed to by almost every other jurisdiction? Where is the mention of new public land management strategies to prevent ecological devastation of the type seen in the 2002–03 and 2006–07 megafires? Where is the reference to those people in regional communities still suffering from the catastrophic effect of megafires, followed quickly by flash flooding? Where is the reference to the backlog of stormwater upgrades, first identified by the Auditor-General four years ago? On essential services, where is the new investment in Victoria's baseload power supply, which is rapidly approaching demand? Where are the new dams or any plan to address the water crisis in the next three years, free of the shallow ideology of Labor?

On local government, where is the acknowledgement of local government's struggle against the onset of additional poker machines in communities? Where is

the mention of local government's ability to fight against executive intervention on other planning decisions? And what about the cost shifting to local government of the maintenance of local roads and bridges, and the important issues of governance, democracy and accountability?

Where is the reference to Victoria's anticorruption framework and the massive gaps covering oversight, jurisdiction and enforcement of standards of probity among public officials? Where is the acknowledgement of the need for an independent broadbased anticorruption commission? Why does this statement hide the lack of probity and transparency around major government contracts, including the lotteries and gaming licenses, the ticketing system and other contracts which have received attention in this place? The lack of public disclosure around data collected on the channel deepening project is to be very much regretted. Where is the commitment or the intention of this government to require ministers to actually answer questions in this place? Where are the Premier's intentions with regard to the conduct of his ministers and staff and public officials? Where are his intentions on upper house committees that continue to be snubbed by the Premier, his ministers and the government? And where is the commitment to reining in the size of his own staff and bureaucracy?

What is included in this document? There is a list of bills such as those usually contained in the annual list of departmental legislative bids; but here, spruced up for the occasion, some 60 of them get a mention. Twenty seven of them are machinery bills. A dozen are bills aligning legislation with commonwealth or other legislation or meeting Council of Australian Governments requirements. Nearly half have already been foreshadowed. Some will be welcome debates on socially progressive issues, which will attract conscience votes; and most of the rest anticipate future reviews. We can only imagine how long that will be strung out for, and I am sure local councils and communities are looking forward to yet another drawn-out erosion of their planning powers. It would also have been constructive if the Premier had indicated his intentions to promote the introduction of private members bills, but the events of this week suggest that is unlikely to happen.

What is new in this document? Not much. Some of the early childhood proposals pick up on Liberal Party policy at the last election, which was initially ridiculed by the government, and we will be watching that one with interest. A rewrite of the Health Act will no doubt keep a swarm of public servants and health industry professionals occupied while the problems in health

care persist. But I, for one, will be keen to see measures in the preventive health sphere. There is much more we can do with alcohol, drugs, obesity and mental illness issues.

What should be in the document? What should be on the Premier's mind? He should be putting Victoria back on the top of the table rather than leaving it languishing; making it a state of excellence and first choice; leveraging our competitive advantages and our strengths; introducing a definitive view on freight and logistics to lead and drive planning and investment for freight, rail and development. There should be a detailed plan to grow our electricity supplies and make clean use of our coal resources; a plan for harvesting untapped water resources, including dams and recycling, unrestrained by empty ideology. There should be a plan for the farming sector to allow them to get on with the job rather than constantly fighting the yoke of Spring Street.

There should be a plan for our manufacturing sector; a plan for driving our quality tertiary education sector and supplying additional places for Victorian students; an elevation of multiculturalism and language skills; a plan to protect our lifestyle advantages; a plan for affordable housing and giving encouragement and hope to young families; a plan for lowering the cost of government and providing genuine transparency; and a plan to rid Victoria of the stench of corruption and to lift the veil of secrecy that has descended on this government, on its ministers, on its projects and on its conduct, which has made Victoria the current holder of the title 'The Secret State'.

This Premier knows that what we have had instead is the pedestrian monologue of a Premier who knows he is in strife and blew it. He knows his government has not delivered, that it has squandered perhaps the greatest political opportunity in decades and wasted the good times. He failed to do what was necessary. He failed to make the decisions in a timely way, and the legacy of the do-nothing government has come back to haunt the Premier. He has blown the money, the power, the majorities and the goodwill, and now there are no more excuses. It may have been show day for the Premier, but it was little more than a filibuster for the Parliament.

**Mr RYAN** (Leader of The Nationals) — The annual statement of government intentions which was delivered by the Premier on Tuesday of this week was a dreadful disappointment, both in its content and for Victorians at large. Unfortunately — tragically even — the rhetoric within the document simply does not match the facts of what is happening, and more particularly

what is not happening, in Victoria at the moment. Before addressing some of the issues contained within the statement and some of the elements that were not in it but that need addressing, I want to make reference to some basic matters that underpin the way in which this state and its communities should function. I want to address those comments in part to the government.

The first thing to be said to this government is that it should grow up. It has to recognise that it is now in its ninth year of governance of the state of Victoria. It took over the governance in the last century. It needs to come into this century. On my count there are 14 members of the Legislative Assembly who were here in 1992 at the time of the former government, using that term in its generalised sense — 6 of them from the Labor Party, 6 from the Liberal Party and 2 from The Nationals, including of course the Father of the Parliament, the renowned member for Murray Valley, who has been here forever.

**Mr Baillieu** — And long may he be!

**Mr RYAN** — This government has to accept responsibility for who it is and for what is its task, and for what it is and is not doing across Victoria. That is its first job — to grow up.

The second thing is that it has to govern to unite communities and not divide them. At the moment division is rampant, and we saw more of it this week out on the front steps and beyond. We see it on a daily basis.

I give credit where it is due. I do it as a matter of course, and I give it again today. The work of the current Premier in the lead-up to the 1999 election was a pivotal factor in enabling Labor to sit where it now sits. I give him that credit. But when I look now at what is happening under the premiership of the same person, it is worlds apart. If you look at the sorts of headlines that appeared in 1999 before the now Premier lost his position as then Leader of the Opposition, you will see emerging much that we are still seeing happen in Victoria. You will see much of what happened then still happening now. I think it is a terrible worry for all Victorians.

We saw it here last Tuesday when this protest happened out on the front steps of Parliament. The failure of the government to grow up and accept responsibility was clearly demonstrated. These good, decent people came along to put their point of view. In the end of course we saw a shemozzle in this chamber. I have never condoned conduct of that nature, and I do not condone it now. But the deeper issue is: this government has to

examine why it is that that sort of conduct comes about. It cannot stand aside from it.

What drives a group of honest, decent, hardworking people to come to the steps of Parliament in the first place and then involve themselves in that activity? This is why it can justifiably be said that this government is not accepting its responsibilities. Even worse, of course, was that the government then cast aspersions upon the member for Benalla — it happened again today — and upon The Nationals at large when we had absolutely nothing to do with the events that occurred in this chamber the other day. That is another element of the disgrace resting upon this government and why it ought to grow up.

This issue of dividing communities has been rampant under this government. We had the terrible saga of the toxic waste dump issue. For literally years people tore themselves inside out, and we saw the waste of millions of dollars in fighting that issue. In the end the government conceded. To this day I do not know what its policy is over the issues that drove that absolutely immoral attempt to construct that toxic dump in the place it was intending. It was a terribly divisive initiative. We have seen the VEAC (Victorian Environment Assessment Council) inquiry report that has now come to the government. Something like 6000 submissions on behalf of individuals across country Victoria in particular were received, and yet we have seen nothing from the government as to what it is going to do. This is a document calculated to cause massive disruption to country communities. It is shockingly divisive. Then of course there is the issue of water and its management. I will return to that in a moment.

The third point I want to raise is financial management. This government cannot manage the finances of this state. It is running a budget of about \$35 billion. When it took over last century the budget was about \$19 billion. Victoria is enjoying a period in its history which has not been surpassed since the days of the gold rush, yet Labor cannot make it work. Today 26 per cent of its income is from GST payments. It gets about \$700 million a month on average just for turning up, just for being here, but it still cannot make it work. That money was not even part of government income when Labor took over last century.

Twenty per cent of its income comes from special purpose payments, yet we still have rampant stamp duty in Victoria. We have the land tax issues. We have the rhetoric from the government in the speech by the Premier and in the accompanying document, talking about families and what is important for them and the capacity to be able to buy and own your own home and

all those attendant things, yet we have a government that is simply thriving upon the levels of stamp duty and taxes at large that it enjoys. This is all in the face of now having this income from GST and from the special purpose payments. Yes, we run a budget in surplus, but thankfully that happens because throughout the whole time — over seven, eight and now almost nine years — of this government the budgeted income has been exceeded. The real question is: what happens when the music stops? What happens when this driving economy falters? What happens if and when we see the situation that we now see in the United States? That is the problem for us here in Victoria.

The fourth issue I want to raise is that we are an export-driven economy. We must look outward as a state, not inwards. From 1992 to 1999 our commodity exports in Victoria expanded from about \$11 billion to about \$19 billion or \$20 billion in round figures. From 2000 through to 2007 our exports increased by \$1 billion. It is an appalling performance on the part of this government. We have a major systemic problem in Victoria simply because our export capacity is being strangled. Yet the word 'export' does not appear in the Premier's speech. The word 'export' turns up on page 37 of the accompanying document and then there are some oblique references to the development of industry at large. But we are an export-driven economy. If we do not grow our exports in Victoria, we will be strangled as a state within this nation. Yet this government will not acknowledge it, let alone do anything about it. As I say, we have a major systemic problem around that issue.

The government says its priorities are to do with families, communities, jobs, water and climate change. Let us look at some of the specifics around those issues. On the question of water, the mismanagement by Labor of water in this state is going to cause cathartic consequences for Victoria in a variety of ways. Politically, Labor is already losing seats. It lost the seat of Morwell at the last election in 2006. The member for Morwell now sits here proudly under The Nationals banner. It lost the seat of Narracan. The member for Narracan is now here on behalf of the Liberal Party. What we are seeing is the gradual retraction of the Labor Party representation across Victoria. Labor now has no political representation in the Assembly beyond a radius of about 150 kilometres from Melbourne. It is withdrawing gradually to Melbourne. It is a message surely, and it is crucially around this issue of water. The basic problem of Labor is that it has absolutely no empathy with people around this critical issue.

I have no doubt that the Minister for Water, with his photographic memory, has by now read almost every

document ever created on the issue of water. I have no doubt that he remembers them. But I also have no doubt he has utterly no empathy with rural water needs and what water means to country communities. He simply does not understand it. Similarly the Premier of this state, who should know better, is involved in this escapade north of the Divide at the moment. He should know better, but unfortunately he also has no empathy with these people. The issue with water from a country Victoria perspective is that it is the last great competitive edge for country Victorians. It is the thing which makes the difference, and Labor recognised that going into the election in November of 2006. It swore in its documentation that it would never pipe water from north of the Great Dividing Range — no qualifications; it swore it would never do it — and now it is betraying that trust.

We strongly support the food bowl development in relation to the investment of those millions of dollars up around the Goulburn region. We think it is a great initiative, and as far as that is concerned, all credit to the government. We do have issues with how it is actually being expended and with some of the outcomes it will produce, but the principle behind it we strongly support. We support it because those communities understand that through the use of this last great competitive edge they can actually grow product, they can produce things and they can ensure that they maintain their position in this all-important export market which is so crucial to Victoria.

When you look at those figures for our export performance you can see that we are able to maintain — almost — our export capacity in Victoria out of those commodities. That is because these people are innovative, they think laterally, they use what they have as well as they can, they take what they have got at the time to work with and they do it absolutely brilliantly — and all credit to them — but they understand that in time to come the preservation and the growth of those communities is essentially going to be around this all-important issue of water. Of course they are in a system now which cannot even remotely supply its own needs, and we have a government that swore it would never pipe water across the Great Divide — yet it is pursuing that.

I say shame on the Labor Party, not only for the breach of its promise and not only for betraying the trust of those people, but also for putting a spear through the heart of one of our great export industries — all that enterprise — and I talk about it in the broad sense. The on-farm element is not the only issue behind this; what is behind it and supporting it is all the forms of manufacturing enterprise and all the retailing and all the

commercial activity around it, all of which is fundamentally based on the notion of having water available to it. That is what drives these people who are objecting to the inane proposal this government has dreamt up to build a dirty great big pipeline over 85 kilometres in length to take water from a system that cannot provide for itself and pump it into Melbourne, which should provide for itself. All of this is happening in the smart state — the state which is supposed to be one of the great leaders of the democratic world in the way in which it uses technology. It is a disgrace.

In relation to the issue of the desalination plant, we are not averse to desalination — it is part of the policy we took to the last election — but the problem here is the way in which this government has gone about it. The process has been appalling — absolutely appalling — and it is no wonder that we saw representatives of the people out there during the course of the week complaining bitterly about it, including the 10 or a dozen people who have been served with acquisition notices down there in the South Gippsland region. Their land will be taken away from them forcibly to enable this to happen. As a general principle desalination should be done only when other means have been exhausted and when it remains the only option available. We support the principle of it, but not the dreadful way this government has sought to go about it.

The construction of more dams in Victoria: of course we should examine that alternative. In northern Victoria we have large catchment areas in our dams. We have places like Eildon Weir with a capacity three times that of the Thomson Dam, whereas over in Gippsland, east of the Thomson, the only dam we have is the pond known as Glenmaggie Weir, with 190 gegalitres — about 20 per cent of the capacity of the Thomson Dam. Last year in those flood events in June and November almost 800 000 megalitres — 800 gegalitres! — of water went straight out to sea. Of course I am not suggesting for one moment that the whole of that should have been collected, but there is scope to build new facilities there which will do justice to Victoria's needs — and I emphasise this — not only in an economic sense and not only in a communal sense but very importantly in an environmental sense, particularly with respect to the Gippsland Lakes. On this whole issue, Melbourne should look after its own water needs. There is plenty of capacity to do it. On the government's own documents, it should happen.

Insofar as rail issues are concerned, the rail system in Victoria is a shambolic mess. We have, of course, the recent report from the former Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer, and what a great job he has done. This government promised standardisation of rail in 2001.

Where has that money gone, for heaven's sake! That \$90-odd million seems to have disappeared into the ether. That is where the Leader of the House, as he is now known and was known then, got that great name Pig-Iron Pete. It is no disrespect to him but just a reflection of the fact that at the time when he was the minister responsible the whole thing just never ever happened. I ask rhetorically, where is it now? The recommendations of the Fischer review should be pursued and pursued quickly. A project estimated at \$80 million, which was the original figure for fast rail, eventually somehow cost \$750 million in quintessential Labor terms. If you put up about half that amount of money over a five-year span, for example, it would make an enormous difference.

Health services are in a parlous condition across much of country Victoria. The professionals who provide the services are doing a magnificent job, but the South Gippsland region is a snapshot of what is happening in other places. Paramedics are again very concerned about the way in which they are being supported in their service provision. It is two years to the day since I stood up in this place to express concerns about the situation with Rural Ambulance Victoria. I was told by the government that there was not a problem; history would say there certainly was, but still the problems persist. At Wonthaggi we have got difficulties in being able to provide services. The doctors are struggling, with paramedics having to provide much of the service. Of course the member for Bass has talked about this regularly and continues to do so. In my own electorate of Gippsland South across the campuses of Korumburra and Leongatha, Gippsland Southern Health Service is very concerned about the way in which it is being funded with regard to what it does. The closure of the Warley Hospital on Phillip Island: what an unmitigated disgrace it is in this apparent new age of federalism that that should have been able to happen, leaving the people of Phillip Island without acute services.

In education, completion rates in country Victoria are lagging behind those in Melbourne. The rate of uptake of our tertiary courses and the training courses for our kids is lagging badly behind the rate in Melbourne. These children want to go — and they should — to get their training and their education, and we then want them to come back, but we need to support them and give them proper help. We have an ageing cohort of teachers. That issue needs to be addressed urgently by the government. We need to have proper programs to encourage teachers out to the country parts of our state.

In policing, the numbers are stretched in a variety of areas, and we saw that again recently, particularly in the coastal areas. In my own electorate in places like Venus

Bay the police did the best they could over the recent festive times, but still they struggled. On the road system, we have been making calls on the government in that area for many years, and still the improvements are slight. We support the Arrive Alive strategy, but we still do not have a strategy from the government in relation to country roads as such. All of this, of course, spills over to our families and local communities — those wonderful people who constitute our country community.

There are opportunities for this government in what is the current structure of politics in Australia. I appreciate that initiatives are being pursued at the Council of Australian Governments, and I welcome that, but I also say to the government that it has a generational opportunity here to make positive change, and one of the keys to that is going to be the ministerial council meetings. The government needs to bring onto the agenda of those meetings many of the issues which bedevil our respective jurisdictions.

There have been calls, for example, for container deposit legislation to be introduced in Victoria. If it is such a good idea and works in other places, why do we not have it here? The government should put it to that ministerial council and let it be examined. On the issue of teacher salary structures, it seems to me we are not paying our teachers enough. Let us benchmark that through those ministerial councils. With issues like waiting lists in hospitals, we should be able to benchmark those sorts of things through the ministerial council meetings. I urge the government to take this once-in-a-generation opportunity and make sure those ministerial council meetings serve the purpose which I think is available to them.

A lot of this statement that I am responding to talks about Melbourne's growth rate. Do not forget country Victoria, I say to this government. This great city of Melbourne — which we all know and love — we support, but the cause of country Victoria is a great one; it underpins the fortunes of this state. I proudly represent the party that for 90 years has spoken on its behalf, and this government should do likewise.

**Mr HULLS** (Attorney-General) — I join members of the house in supporting the Premier's 2008 annual statement of government intentions. This is an historic document. It is the first time in the history of the Victorian Parliament — and it is a first for any Australian government — that the government's legislative agenda for the coming year has been publicly released and people have been invited to contribute to the formation of legislation.

From the outset this government said we would govern for all Victorians; now we are asking all Victorians to participate in the way we govern. This statement provides a new opportunity for people to engage in the political process and also to have an input into the development of laws that directly affect their lives. Instead of having a democracy that starts and ends at the ballot box, we are encouraging people to get involved in the public debate of issues at an early stage and through the development of legislation. The Brumby government believes in participatory democracy, not just representative democracy. We know that government is not the font of all wisdom and that we get much better public policy when all members of society are engaged in the debate of issues.

As a government we have always consulted widely and we have always canvassed a wide variety of views. Indeed some members on the other side have criticised us for doing too much consultation. As strange as it may sound to those members, we want to hear a range of views and we are always looking for ways to better engage the community.

Contrary to the current rules of political engagement, this government wants to empower each and every individual, wherever they live, whatever their occupation and whatever their allegiances. We want to encourage them to participate in the formation of the laws of the state. We do not want to hear just from lobbyists, interest groups, business entities and community groups — although of course their views are keenly sought and welcomed. We also want to encourage all Victorians — retirees, parents at home looking after their kids, students, shop assistants, factory workers and executives alike — to take more interest in public issues and feel that they can have an input into the decision-making process and that their input is valued and worth while.

From this year the public will have more opportunities to influence the final shape of new laws through the release of discussion papers, targeted consultation with interested people and groups and the wider use of exposure draft bills. The statement of government intentions guides people on how to get involved. It also tells a story about a particular issue for those just wanting to be better informed. The public will be able to quickly access documents which provide the background of an issue as well as read up on the current debate in relation to a particular issue.

The statement is fundamentally a work plan — something that those opposite might find a bit foreign — for the government over the next 12 months. Further, it provides all Victorians with a blueprint of

how their lives may change under this government. It provides some details of that change well in advance of it actually happening, and it invites people to have a real say in what those changes might look like.

The statement shows that we have some real challenges ahead. We have set ourselves an ambitious and reforming program that tackles a large number of issues ranging from health, education, transport and community safety to bills dealing with climate change and growing the economy through major infrastructure projects and, of course, good financial management.

As Attorney-General I have a number of pieces of legislation outlined in the statement under the heading 'Addressing social challenges'. The heading says it all. There are some big — indeed important — social challenges ahead. This government is not about taking the easy path — avoiding issues that should be dealt with or putting them off until tomorrow when they need to be addressed today. Some of the matters up for debate include a review of the Equal Opportunity Act, access to assisted reproductive technology and surrogacy and tightening laws with respect to the regulation of tattooing and body piercing. I am also involved in looking at ways to make our communities safer by modernising our Crimes Act and reforming the way our courts work to deliver justice more quickly.

These are some of the issues that I am personally responsible for, but the government's agenda is broad and exciting. I hope many Victorians will take advantage of this new opportunity and have their say on aspects of the government's agenda that concern or interest them. This government prides itself on being inclusive. We believe in consultation, in listening to a range of views and in making decisions in the best interests of the entire Victorian community. That is not to say that the government will agree with everything people say, nor will we be able to please everyone — particularly on more contentious issues where there are often quite divergent views that are strongly held by different sections of the community.

Of course the ultimate decision rests with the government of the day, and we do not shy away from our responsibilities in these matters. However, we also know that you get good public policy outcomes by listening to a wide range of views and working through the issues with the whole community.

When one looks at the *February 2008 Annual Statement of Government Intentions* one can see a whole range of important challenges and issues that the government will be dealing with over the next 12 months. They come under appropriate headings,

including, 'Investing in Victorians', where we talk about education, preventive health care and supporting a fairer Victoria. Under the heading 'Building stronger and more livable communities' we talk about accelerating public transport improvements, improving urban development and making our community safer.

One of the acts I am responsible for is the Crimes Act. We will be rewriting the Crimes Act in its entirety. We deal with serious sex offenders in the community, which is a very difficult balancing act. We have people who have done the crime and done the time, but objectively there is a view that they still pose a serious risk to the community. How do you deal with those difficult issues? We are not going to shy away from them; we are going to introduce legislation to deal with those issues.

To address endemic family violence we will have a new, stand-alone family violence act in this state. We expect it will be a groundbreaking piece of legislation that will be followed in other jurisdictions.

A whole range of other reforms fall under the heading 'Promoting innovative and sustainable growth', and they are about securing Victoria's economic future, delivering major projects and events, and protecting our agricultural sector. This is a groundbreaking, innovative document. It is certainly a Victorian first and an Australian first.

In conclusion I would like to thank Michael Kane and his team in the Department of Premier and Cabinet for their thorough work on the statement. I thank my department and other departments as well. I thank people like Louise Glanville and her team in my private office, who have had such input to this groundbreaking document.

The statement of government intentions is about making Victoria's legislative process even more inclusive and, in the long run, about building a stronger and healthier democratic system in this state. This is a great statement, and I hope it is supported not only by all members of this place but also by all Victorians, who will now have greater input into the democratic process.

**Ms ASHER** (Brighton) — Another day, another piece of spin and another glossy, self-congratulatory publication — complete with, of all things, colour photos of the Premier and Deputy Premier! I never thought I would say this, but in a photographic sense at least I very much regret the retirement of the previous Premier and the previous Deputy Premier.

First of all this document is one of complete spin. The Premier's message talks about accessibility and accountability. This government is the most remote government in Victoria's history: there is no accessibility and no accountability.

I make reference to the Deputy Premier's message, and the Leader of the Opposition has commented on it. The Deputy Premier is deluding himself if he thinks that a one-way website is participatory government. The Deputy Premier has flagged that some of the bills referred to in the statement will not be brought before Parliament until 2009 — again evidence of a major projects approach, with the Deputy Premier signalling that the government may well delay some of these provisions.

I take up the point made by the Leader of the Opposition in relation to the government's priorities. When the Premier was installed on 30 July 2007 he issued a press release in which he listed a range of priorities. His priorities in this statement, we note, have now changed. On the day he was appointed Premier water was not a priority for this man, but all of a sudden water has become a priority for the government. Victorians will not be deluded by spin and they will not be deluded by this statement, and we will see whether the government can even implement this statement throughout the course of this year.

I want to turn to my own portfolio areas and make a couple of observations. The first one is in the skills area. The government proposes to introduce some university legislation reforms. It proposes, as always, to issue a discussion paper at some stage this year and to introduce template legislation to 'modernise' the universities' acts. In doing so the government claims that it will rationalise 20 pieces of legislation and deal with two private university acts. A key test for the government will be whether the Premier's statement will apply to this piece of template legislation and whether the universities will get their say in terms of their own legislative administration.

I want to comment on the section on water, which is headed 'Ensuring water supply'. If only this government had secured our water supply. If it had, we would not have the problems in country Victoria or, indeed, in metropolitan Melbourne that we now face. The government has flagged two bills, the first one in relation to water entitlements, which it says will qualify water rights. That will immediately cause concern among stakeholders. I note at page 41 of the document that the government is saying there will be some consultation. We know, however, that this government has form — its consultation on the north-south

pipeline, for example, has been non-existent. This proposed legislation immediately flags significant areas of concern.

I want to concentrate on the second piece of legislation the government has proposed, which is about reform of the metropolitan water retail sector. On 14 August 2007 the Premier announced that at that stage the VCEC (Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission) would be the body to undertake this so-called reform. I, however, would make the observation that if the Premier is concerned about equity pricing of water across Melbourne suburbs — where, for example, people in Footscray pay more than people from Brighton for certain components of water use — the government needs to look at rising block tariffs, which it introduced and which have allowed for significant differentials in pricing across Melbourne suburbs.

At the time he announced this inquiry, the Premier made the following observations. I quote from his press release of 14 August 2007:

Melbourne's three water retailers have provided a quality service to date but reform is required so the industry can provide a better, more responsive and value for money service to Melbourne households and industry for the future.

The Minister for Water said on the same day:

We recognise the need to look at issues such as inequities in prices across Melbourne and the potential for greater efficiencies through economies of scale ...

The Premier and the Minister for Water made it very clear that they were looking at substantial structural reform for the metropolitan water authorities.

The Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission issued its report, titled *Water Ways — Inquiry into Reform of the Metropolitan Retail Water Sector*, in December 2007. This must be the one independent body left in Victoria, because the VCEC is not of the same view as the government. At page xxiv the commission made the following observation:

However, the commission's review of the current three retailer structure in Melbourne demonstrates that changes to this structure can at best only have a relatively small impact on the overall costs of the sector ...

On the next page it makes the observation:

There would also be significant transitional costs ...

and indeed there were other costs and risks that were non-monetary.

On page xxvi the commission said:

Reducing the number of retailers to two would involve many of the same transition costs as moving to a single retailer, but would yield smaller ongoing savings. Consequently, this option would yield only a very small reduction in the growth of average water bills over the next five years.

The VCEC has a very different view of where structural reform for the Melbourne water authorities should be heading, and we wait with great interest to see how the government will resolve the Premier's and the water minister's more bolshie approach to structural reform and what the VCEC has thrown up.

While I have the opportunity I would also like to draw the government's attention to page 44 of that report, which makes negative comments on the government's dividend collection policies. The comment has been made by the VCEC:

... on an after-tax basis the dividend payout ratio for all retailers has risen materially over the past three years ... These ratios indicate the retailers are currently paying out as dividends an increasing proportion of post-tax profit.

That is the point the opposition has been making now for the past year — that is, that the government is stripping these water authorities of profits, it is pocketing them in the form of dividends and it is not expending that money on the water infrastructure that Melbourne and country Victoria so desperately need.

One element that is missing in this statement is the critical Water Amendment (Critical Water Infrastructure Projects) Bill. The Leader of the Opposition made the very valid point that we were recalled to Parliament in December last year because this bill was urgent. In fact we were told that the Bendigo pipeline could not proceed without the critical water infrastructure bill. The pipeline is now built, so, again, we have another piece of nonsense and subterfuge. I request that the government make clear its intentions on that particular bill.

I note also that there will be a small business bill to change business name registrations, which is dependent on results of a meeting of the Council of Australian Governments. However, much of what is in the statement of government intentions is something that is part of the government's ongoing work. I refer the government to the Governor's speech, which was delivered to the Parliament after the 2006 election. There is nothing new — nothing new at all — in this statement of intention, because in his speech the Governor made the following observation:

... by 2010, the process of reviewing and modernising all of Victoria's legislation, a task begun in 2000, will have been completed.

Again I make the point that so many of these bills are 'reviewing' and 'modernising' — those words are used right through the document — and this is a task the government has embarked on since the year 2000 and intends to continue up to the year 2010.

This is not a visionary statement. It is not something to show that Premier Brumby is leading the state forward in some new direction; it is simply picking up the work of modernising. It is picking up the routine legislative work that the government commenced in 2000 and will continue on until 2010, and that was made very clear in the Governor's speech in 2006. Whilst I appreciate the list of bills in advance of what the government may intend to do this year, I still make the observation that this is nothing but a piece of spin. We expected it would always be so. It is not visionary; it is just a work document.

**Mr LUPTON (Prahran)** — I am absolutely delighted to be able to stand in this place today and speak in support of the annual statement of government intentions, because this is an historic day and an historic document. It is the first time that such a piece of work has been done in an Australian Parliament, and Victoria is again leading the nation in this regard.

The importance of an annual statement of government intentions — this being the first of what is to be an annual document — is that it sets out in significant detail the bulk of the government's intended legislative program for the year ahead. Historically in the Victorian Parliament and in other, similar parliaments the legislative programs of governments have been announced relatively shortly before bills are introduced into Parliament. There has been a limited amount of time for public consultation and discussion and a limited amount of time for members of Parliament on both sides of the chamber to be engaged in that process.

What the Brumby government has done in developing a statement of government intentions is develop a legislative program for the 12 months ahead and announce that program to the people of Victoria and the Parliament of Victoria so that the people and this Parliament can be more engaged, more informed and more involved in the development of this program as we go through 2008, and of course that process will continue and be repeated in years to come.

I want to congratulate the Premier for this initiative. I also want to pay tribute to the very hard and dedicated work that was carried out by the staff of the Cabinet Secretary's office, who put in a great amount of work, and also staff of the Department of Premier and Cabinet who in this instance were led by Michael Kane. I also

pay tribute to the way in which all the ministers in the government and their offices and departments worked particularly hard to bring their legislative program together so far in advance so the detail of that program could be incorporated into the statement that was announced by the Premier earlier this week.

The statement covers the significant themes that the government intends to pursue through the course of this year. Those themes will not be any surprise to the people of Victoria, because, in essence, they are the themes that this government has been pursuing assiduously over its years in office. In particular the themes cover the areas of investing in Victorians, building stronger and more livable communities, promoting innovative and sustainable growth and leading Victoria and the nation.

When we look at those individual themes, we note that investing in Victorians involves promoting education, which of course has been and continues to be this government's no. 1 priority; it means strengthening health-care provision in this state; and it also involves supporting A Fairer Victoria. Our approach to education in particular this year involves integrating education. It involves early childhood development, further reform of school education and reform of legislation covering our universities. What an example of integrated education those pieces of legislation will provide, because it will go through early childhood development, through our primary and secondary schools and into making our universities more strategic and better able to meet the demands that are placed upon them in the 21st century.

In relation to health care, the focus of the government, as announced by the Premier, will be on strengthening preventive health care. We will be introducing a public health and wellbeing act, and we will also be making significant further reforms to reduce the harm caused by alcohol abuse in the community. Our far-reaching program, A Fairer Victoria, which has been running over the last few years, will continue to be a focus of this government's attention. In particular there will be more protection for consumers. We will be updating equal opportunity laws. We will be reforming the law regarding access to assisted reproductive technology and surrogacy.

We will be improving the law in relation to residential tenancies, strengthening multiculturalism and also making community organisations better able to function effectively by removing unnecessary red tape. Overall that program for investing in Victorians will strengthen our communities and make our education and health services better and make Victoria a fairer and stronger

community as we go forward. We will also be continuing with our themes of building stronger and more livable communities, in particular by accelerating public transport improvements. We will be improving urban development through reform to the planning and environment legislation and strengthening building legislation.

We will also be continuing to make our community safer. Victoria is the safest state in Australia — we are very proud of that — but we cannot rest on our laurels in that regard. We have to continue to make sure that we drive the crime rate down and that Victoria remains the safest state in Australia. We will be introducing the Victoria Police Bill to reform police legislation and legislation that will reform the Crimes Act and deal with serious sex offenders. We will be simplifying the evidence laws and introducing a modernised coronial system.

We will also be continuing to make sure that Victoria is a great place for innovation and sustainable growth. We will be securing Victoria's economic future through streamlining our resources law. We will also be providing for better and fairer accident compensation laws in this state — that of course is a very important part of this government's policy framework. The ways in which we will continue to provide innovative and sustainable growth stretch out to every corner of Victoria. We will be making sure that we protect and improve our agricultural industries and ensure our water supplies through the provision of important water infrastructure reforms, reforming the metropolitan water retail sector and ensuring water entitlements. We will also be making sure that the environment is protected. This is another of the great hallmarks of this government. We will be moving forward with legislation that will address issues of climate change, the reduction of industrial waste and the improvement and protection of our national parks.

All these reforms — all of the initiatives of this government, the things that make Victoria a great place to live, to work, to raise a family and to invest in — are based on the sound financial management this government has made a hallmark of its period of office. In that regard we will be continuing to ensure the strong financial management of this state. In particular we will be moving forward with legislation in relation to financial management reform. As has been debated this week, we will also be making further improvements to freedom of information. There will be continuing public administration reform so that the public sector in this state remains at the forefront of Australia. We will continue to make sure that we lead Australia through the national reform agenda of which this government

has been the driver over recent years. We are very pleased that we will now have the opportunity to work with a cooperative federal Labor government to continue to drive that policy initiative and keep reform happening in this country, because that is the way we will maintain our prosperity going forward.

In this document, this statement of government intentions, we have a blueprint for the way in which the government intends to legislate through the course of this year to ensure that Victoria remains a great state in which to live, to work and to raise a family. We will continue to make sure that through this statement of legislative intentions we will give the people of Victoria a greater opportunity to have a say and to be involved in the development of laws that affect them. Through the Your Say website we will encourage the people of Victoria to comment on the legislation that is in the public arena and that we have made public through this statement of government intentions so early in the legislative process. We will ensure that there are more exposure drafts and consultation processes to enable people to have input into the making of the best laws we can possibly make for the people of this state.

We will continue to have a prosperous and thriving democracy in Victoria. We will continue to make sure we are leading the nation in so many of those important services that the people of Australia need their governments to work with them to provide. And we will make sure that Victoria remains a great state where we have a first-class education system and a health system that is the envy of the rest of the world, the safest state in Australia, a great state to invest in and a great state to live in. I commend the government and the statement of government intentions to the house.

**Mr WELLS** (Scoresby) — I rise to join the debate on the annual statement of government intentions for 2008. I guess the Liberal Party sees this as a bit of a State of the Union address by the Premier. In past years the Premier has stood up here and had the matching tie, the budget documents and the spotlight exclusively on him; as Premier, he does not get the chance to present the budget anymore. He is not able to pull out the brand-new tie to match the brand-new budget documents, so now he presents a State of the Union-type of document.

It is interesting, as the Leader of the Opposition mentioned, that the government could not even get the front page right with regard to the message from the Premier and the message from the Deputy Premier. Is that not just incredible? One of them says, 'This is the intention. This is the plan. This is the map for 2008', but the other contradicts the Premier and says, 'Hang

on a minute, we might have the Premier saying this, but some of the bills in the statement will not be brought into Parliament until next year'. There is already a contradiction. Yesterday in one of the law and order debates we heard how the Deputy Premier had contradicted his Premier by coming out and saying, 'I will make sure we are going to decriminalise public drunkenness', when two months later we have the Premier and the chief commissioner coming out and saying, 'We are going to be tough on crime, and we are going to be tough on people who are drunk in public'. It is just a slight difference between the Premier and the Deputy Premier, but to put it in print is an absolute classic.

Can I say that the document, and the event that took place, is the epitome of spin and rhetoric — and no substance. When we were sitting on the opposition front bench we were wondering when the next part of the document would be tabled. We were waiting for the 10-point plan or action plan to be distributed. We were looking for the attendants to start distributing them. We received the speech and the glossy brochure, but then we started fumbling around looking for what would happen next. What would the government do to fix the problems in this state? We have overcrowded and late public transport; we have longer waiting lists in our hospitals; the quality of education is falling; school maintenance is a shambles; there has been a massive increase in violent crime — up 34 per cent since the Labor government came in; and there has been a massive increase in debt from about \$3 billion heading to \$20 billion. There is nothing of substance to fix just one of the main problems that we face in this state.

I have read *Delivering for Victoria — February 2008 Annual Statement of Government Intentions*. The mushrooms opposite are getting excited and saying that I have not read the document, but I have read the speech and the document, and if anyone on the back bench can tell me where I can find how we will fix the public transport system, the health system, the school system, the increase in violent crime or the increase in the debt, please tell me. If you are going to set out a set of intentions of what you are going to achieve in 2008, it should be included in *Delivering for Victoria*, because we need solutions. Despite massive tax hikes there is not one mention of what the government plans to do for tax reform — not one mention of tax reform! The government says it will look at the Financial Management Act and public administration, but what will it do regarding tax reform?

**Mr Hudson** interjected.

**Mr WELLS** — The member opposite interjects, saying, 'Wait for the budget'. Why would you not make that part of this document and say you will look at tax reform, including land tax, payroll tax or stamp duty? Why would not you put up your intentions about what you are planning to do to fix these problems?

Recently we saw Victorians bled dry with increases in taxes. We have seen the incredible issue with land tax. I refer to an incredible press release about land tax from the Treasurer of Victoria entitled 'Victorians pay less land tax in 2008 following reforms'. The Treasurer goes through in great detail how Victorians will pay less land tax, but the reality is that in the update budget paper that the government released in December it is very clear that Victorians will pay more land tax. On page 79 of the budget update under 'Taxation' the government forecast in May last year that it would collect \$765 million in land tax.

That is what the government forecast it would collect this financial year. But just seven months later it went back and said, 'Hang on a minute, we've got those figures wrong'. It said it would collect \$880 million — a \$115 million increase in land tax from the time the government wrote the budget in May last year to the budget update in December of the same year. An increase of \$115 million! Yet the Treasurer has the audacity to come out and try to con and spin more rhetoric that Victorians will pay less land tax. It is a blatant lie. The government has delivered another blatant lie. It is misleading and deceitful when the people of Victoria will pay another \$115 million.

It is an unfair tax. How do you increase your revenue because of an increase in the value of the property? You cannot increase your revenues coming in because land values increase by another \$20 000, \$30 000 or \$40 000. Recently I visited a timber merchant in Clifton Hill and she told me she was paying \$30 000 in land tax now and she is petrified about whether she will be able to hang on to her business when she gets her new land tax bill. As she said, 'Am I going to get another 2000 customers coming in because the property values have increased?'. No, of course not. It is interesting to note that when Labor came into government it collected \$411 million in land tax, but with the budget update it will increase to \$880 million. It has doubled the take on land tax in just eight years. The government tries to tell Victorians it is cutting land tax! You can see the massive increase in payroll tax and stamp duties.

The last issue I want to touch on very carefully is the issue of transparency and accountability. I have been listening very carefully to the member for Polwarth talking about this ticketing fiasco. The government

prides itself in the document on talking about greater accountability. I do not understand what is happening regarding what the government is saying and what it is actually delivering. We on this side of the house are strong supporters of the Auditor-General. We believe he has to produce reports without fear or favour. He has the responsibility to ensure that taxpayers receive value for money, and we strongly support the position of the Auditor-General and his office.

I am very concerned about an article I read in the *Herald Sun* written by Ellen Whinnett, because she points out that when John Brumby was appointed to the position of Premier he promised to be open and accountable. Yet, as she points out, the Premier has given instructions, or has been seen to be giving instructions, to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee about shutting it down and not allowing documents to be tabled in that committee. The committee does have a strong role to play in this, but what concerns me greatly with this article is that the government is being anything but open and transparent.

**Ms GREEN (Yan Yean)** — It is with great pleasure that I make my first contribution to the debate on the government's annual statement of government intentions. I am pleased to see that Victoria has achieved another first in outlining its legislative program. It is the first time that any government has done so in any jurisdiction in Australia. It will offer an unprecedented opportunity for the community to be involved in a partnership with government and to have a look at, a discussion and a dialogue on what we intend to do throughout the forward year. It is something that I welcome and I know my community welcomes.

I represent a young electorate, an engaged electorate and a very thoughtful electorate, and I have been pleased by the two electorate-wide surveys that I have conducted in my time as a member. I am always pleased to hear the views of my constituents. I know from the views they have shared with me that they will value this sort of input.

I noted in the Premier's contribution that he committed the government to having education as the first priority of our government. The changes that were outlined include tackling the difficulties experienced by underperforming schools; looking to the future of what we need in education for our kids in the 21st century; having a better connection between the early years and primary school, with a review of the Children's Services Act to improve what happens with those services; and also the offer of a report card, or transition statement, for kindergarten students before they go to

school, which will certainly be welcomed by families in my electorate. I have many families in that category.

We have built many new schools in my electorate, and I have been pleased to serve on four of those school planning committees. I know that those schools are working very well with the children's services hubs that we have funded and that this statement will assist them in their work. I have encouraged the minister to have a look at their work as an example of how it might operate across the state. I know the Lakes School in Mill Park in particular is engaging well with the kindergarten at this point.

The Premier said we are going to look at reviewing the 50-year-old Health Act, which is crucial, and introducing a public health and wellbeing bill. Too often in health there is a focus on illness rather than on promoting wellbeing, so I welcome that. It builds on what we have already done in terms of investing in capital, particularly in the hospitals that serve my electorate, the Austin and Mercy hospitals. It is the largest ever redevelopment project of any hospital precinct in this country. There have been three successive upgrades to the Northern Hospital. Anything that continues to work on the health of my community will be welcomed, and I look forward to contributing to the debate on those matters.

My community, particularly on the Nillumbik side, is interested in the issues of equity and fairness. The changes to the Equal Opportunity Act to protect people and tackle discrimination will be welcomed. They are some of the important social things that we need to deal with in a modern community in the 21st century.

I will welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate and discussion on reproductive technology and surrogacy, and also, importantly, on something I have had a passion for ever since my early political formation when I was a very young woman — that is, abortion law reform. I would like to have laws governing abortion put on the statute book of this state and have it removed from the Crimes Act. It would be significant to do this in the year of the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage. It will be a real advance, and the female and male members in this chamber will be able to do something significant for the women of this state.

The communities in my electorate, both the communities in the growth corridor and the established communities, are passionate about transport, and any changes to the Transport Act to provide better integration and transport planning will merge well with our *Meeting Our Transport Challenges* document,

including the recent extensions to bus services, which the member for Eltham and I have welcomed. The orbital bus routes that will soon come online and the new services into the growth communities will also be welcomed.

When the current Premier took office I welcomed not only the changes that will put children's services into the education department, creating a new department, but also the changes creating the Department of Planning and Community Development. It is something that is crucial to the outer suburbs. In light of that, the review of the Planning and Environment Act to look at more sustainable and affordable communities will also be welcomed by my community, and I look forward to that debate.

I also look forward to making a contribution to the debate on the new police act. It will be developed in three stages over the next 12 months to strengthen the effectiveness of the employment arrangements for Victoria Police, and it will also cement the role of the Office of Police Integrity as Victoria's pre-eminent police corruption watchdog. A third bill will replace the Police Regulation Act, providing for a more accountable framework for police operations and employment. Policing is something we have been really committed to. Community safety is extremely important. We need to ensure that Victoria remains the safest state, and we are very committed to that and also to having good places for police to work in. I remind the house of the new police stations that have been built to service my electorate — in Diamond Creek, Eltham, King Lake, Hurstbridge and Warrandyte.

I welcome the Premier and Attorney-General outlining a new detention scheme for serious sex offenders who pose a high risk to the community. That is another way of ensuring that Victoria retains its status as the safest state. There will also be new laws covering family violence. Following extensive consultation with victims groups, we will continue to improve the protection for families in this difficult area.

In terms of the environment, we are doing some more work on Victoria's renewable energy targets. I look forward to the opportunity to work with a federal government that recognises that climate change is here to stay and will work with the states, unlike the previous federal government and those on the other side — the 'flat earth society' and the climate change nay-sayers. This is one area on which the community definitely recognises that we are forward looking, and this legislation will confirm that. I hope those on the other side have the common sense to support that.

I know my community will also welcome the proposed amendments to the Water Act. We have three Melbourne water storages in my electorate: Sugarloaf, Yan Yean — Melbourne's first water storage — and Toorourrong reservoirs. Water and water saving is very close to the heart and soul of my community, and I particularly congratulate those in my community who have had some of the highest water savings of all households in Melbourne. I commend those families in Mernda and Doreen, who have had some of the most difficult tasks in water savings in that they have been establishing gardens for new houses. They are putting in drought-proof plants and setting an example for the rest of Melbourne.

In the time that I have remaining I welcome this first annual statement of government intentions as a good innovation in the operation of this Parliament. Those on the other side would never have thought of this. I am not surprised that they have talked it down, because they are not looking forward to anything beyond the next election and trying to get their bums on the seats on the government side of the house. That will not happen until they get their act together. I commend this statement to the house.

**Mr MULDER** (Polwarth) — I can absolutely and totally endorse the member for Yan Yean's comments. We would never, ever have thought of this, because this is nothing other than an absolute hoax. It is nothing but trickery. Members opposite know it, we know it and the Victorian community knows it. What is its short title? *Delivering for Victoria*. You would think that if you had a document tabled in this Parliament that was delivering for Victoria it would actually have something in it — a new project or new services. But this has absolutely nothing in it. It delivers absolutely nothing for Victoria. It is nothing other than an absolute hoax, and everybody knows it.

We thought we would be looking at the provision of new trains, new trams, new tracks, safety upgrades, level crossing upgrades, more police and more authorised officers on our stations. What did we get? We got nothing from a Premier who stated that he was going to fix the public transport system. But within this document there is a concern, and it is on page 18. In terms of delivering, the government says it is going to:

... provide a streamlined regime to facilitate the delivery of critical road and rail infrastructure projects.

A new regime is what we are going to get — in other words, another bureaucracy.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Mr MULDER** — You should stop listening to the left-wing loonies out there, who have been sending messages saying, ‘We need another bureaucracy over and above everything else we’ve got’, and to all those who are promoting this new regime because they are looking for jobs. You should not listen to them. How many more bureaucrats and how many more government agencies do we need in this state to get a train to turn up on time? This week we saw the embarrassing situation of a train on one of the regional lines running out of diesel and another train coming behind it and pushing it all the way into the new Southern Cross station — with the passengers on board! What a joke, and what an absolute disgrace. But hey, we are going to get it!

As for all the talk about public safety and the announcement that was made yesterday in relation to Arrive Alive 2, if you want an understanding of how empty this government is in terms of policy thinking, have a look at what it did. It stole the ideas from the Road Safety Committee and transferred them into Arrive Alive 2. Its own members on that committee recognise that the information was stolen from reports of the deliberations of the Road Safety Committee, because the government has no idea of how to go about putting together a policy in relation to road safety.

So we are going to get a new regime to help the Minister for Public Transport and the Minister for Roads and Ports. I tell you what, they need another bureaucracy, because the only agencies and organisations they have at the moment to help them get the trains to run on time and sort out the traffic congestion issues are the following — and I will name them, because then you will understand why Labor needs some more.

There are hundreds of gnomes and mushrooms, Labor hacks and Labor advisers, sitting in the following: VicRoads; VicTrack; the Southern Cross Station Authority; Metlink; Public Transport Safety Victoria; the chief investigator, transport and marine safety investigations; Marine Safety Victoria; the Transport Ticketing Authority — what a beauty that is; the Southern and Eastern Integrated Transport Authority; V/Line; Connex; Yarra Trams; the public transport ombudsman; the Victorian Freight and Logistics Council; the parliamentary Road Safety Committee; the Victorian Rail Safety Level Crossing Committee; the Public Transport Access Committee; the Victorian Bicycle Advisory Council; the Victorian Motorcycle Advisory Council; the Victorian Road Freight Advisory Council; the Victorian Taxi Directorate; and the Port of Melbourne Authority. There are numerous industry bodies, including the Victorian Taxi Association, the

Victorian Transport Association and Bus Association Victoria — and I have probably missed some. But they are all advisory groups and they are all agencies and organisations that are there to help these dumbclucks — these two ministers — who draw great salaries from the public purse, along with chauffeurs and limos. Yet they need another regime to get this to work for them.

What an absolute hoax this document is! I think a man on a white horse will arrive: we will end up with a general director of transport and infrastructure. We are going to get more fat cats, more consultants and more Labor hacks. And won’t the minister at the table, the Minister for Roads and Ports, and the new Minister for Public Transport be busy setting up this regime?

Imagine how they will spend their next 12 months. There will be offices to rent in the Collins Street Towers. There will be a new board and government-appointed chairman, of course; and a worldwide search for the CEO (chief executive officer) will be carried out, no doubt, by David White’s Hawker Britton. Then we will have the usual army of gnomes and mushrooms, consisting mainly of Labor hacks, as well, of course, as the Labor-government-recommended media spin doctor, so that he can liaise on a day-to-day basis with the Minister for Roads and Ports and the Minister for Public Transport. There will be a new computer system to put in place, along with the black-wood boardroom table and the Moran leather chairs. This new regime will be making progress within the first three months as it chews up millions of dollars of taxpayers money.

But there will be more work to be done, because they will need a marketing firm: ‘Someone ring Bill Shannon and ask him for a quote. We need a logo and we need it fast, because someone has to know who we are and what we are doing’. They will set up yet another website. This corporation will be going ahead in leaps and bounds, all under the direction of the minister at the table and the Minister for Public Transport. There will be corporate colours to select and a taxpayer-funded launch and dinner to organise.

Do not worry about the stranded passengers on Caulfield railway station, do not worry about those people who are being shunted into buses on the Pakenham line because the signals have collapsed again, and do not worry about the people who are getting bashed senseless on the platforms at Dandenong and Frankston railway stations because the police officers and the authorised officers are not there to assist and help.

This new regime will be going ahead in leaps and bounds. Overseas fact-finding missions will have to be

organised by the Minister for Roads and Ports and the Minister for Public Transport, and the CEO will have to undertake a media course to make sure he can get the message and the spin out about this new regime. About \$5 million later the corporate photographers will be called in, because we will need photos for the annual report. The annual report for this other useless, hopeless agency and this new regime that will be put into place will, of course, be dumped in the last week of Parliament, along with each and every other annual report that this government puts together. That is what the government has planned — a new regime to sit over all these other government agencies, referral bodies and community organisations — because we have two ministers who are not up to it. They are completely and totally incapable of doing the job.

In the last few weeks we have seen the Transport Ticketing Authority and the disgraceful \$1 billion of taxpayers money for tickets. We do not have enough trains or trams, we cannot do rail extensions to Cranbourne East or to South Morang and we cannot help the people of Rowville — we cannot do any of that work — but we can spend a billion dollars on tickets. That is the third billion-dollar project that I am aware of that has completely and totally been stuffed by this government.

On fast trains, can you imagine on the fast train corridor a train getting pushed into Southern Cross station because it has run out of diesel? What an embarrassment! A billion dollars down the drain. On the channel deepening, just have a look at what that started out at and what it has built to now — another billion-dollar project. There are dredges sitting out there that cannot even start work because the government did not get the job right in the first place in relation to the environment effects works.

We have a billion dollars worth of tickets, and, as the minister himself acknowledged on television this week, there is a bit of a problem with this equipment on the trams, because the overhead powerlines interfere with the equipment. Would you not have thought, when you went to sign a billion-dollar contract, that you might ask, 'Does this equipment work in Melbourne?'. Good heavens above!

**Mr Hudson** — It will work!

**Mr MULDER** — The honourable member for Bentleigh said this will work. I will hold him to that as this project moves forward, because this document is an absolute dog. Government members should all be ashamed of themselves: they would be struggling to get to their feet and defend it.

**Mr HERBERT** (Eltham) — I am delighted to speak on the 2008 annual statement of government intentions, and I am particularly pleased to do it after some of the disgraceful speeches we have just heard from the opposition.

We have outlined to the opposition what our 60 main bills will be, and one would think opposition members would welcome it and be super pleased, clapping their hands with glee. But instead we get stump speeches! The Leader of the Opposition gave his standard doom-and-gloom, sky-is-falling, Chicken Little speech. The Leader of The Nationals talked about how The Nationals will save the bush. How many times have we heard that? The shadow Treasurer's speech seemed to be last year's budget/address-in-reply speech. And we have just heard the member for Polwarth, humorous though he be at times, give his speech about conspiracy theories, there being reds under the beds and so on.

This is a serious statement that is absolutely welcomed by Victorians. It represents another great milestone in democracy in this state, and very few people would deny that. It offers genuine openness to the legislative process, which is a mystery to most people. Most people do not have a clue as to how this place works — at times some of us in here do not even know either — but this bill offers to the general public genuine scrutiny of the legislative process. For the first time, schools, community groups, businesses, industry and ordinary citizens can have a good look forward to the legislative agenda over the coming years and have their say about that agenda, about the government's intention. They can have their say about the government's policy settings and about the direction in which this state is going not just in an election year but year in, year out, because they are given the detail of that direction.

What needs to be noted — and this is something the opposition fails to recognise — is that this measure is not new. It is a new idea and a first for Victoria, but it comes on top of a raft of democratic reforms introduced by the government since the disgraced previous Liberal government was ousted from power in 1999, and that is important. We have had nearly a decade of continuous reform and of strengthening our democratic process and nearly a decade of enshrining independence in our public watchdogs — the Ombudsman, the Electoral Commissioner, the Director of Public Prosecutions. We have seen improved freedom of information bills and the restoring of powers to the Auditor-General.

There has been nearly a decade of reforms to the Legislative Council, now with elected proportional representation, with the introduction of fixed terms in our houses of Parliament, and with the removal of the

Legislative Council's ability to prevent the passage of government appropriation bills. We have also seen reforms to parliamentary question time and to the standing orders; we have seen the modernisation of the Parliament, reforms to the parliamentary committee system and new legislative committees in the council. There have also been reforms to the ways ordinary people can use the Parliament. They can come in here at weekends, have a wedding, a celebration, use the gardens, or use Queen's Hall, and we have opened up the members dining room to the public during non-sitting weeks.

After nearly 10 years of reforms this statement shows that the government is still fresh and is more committed than ever before to improving the legislative process, and that is a great sign for a new leader of the government — a new leader with fresh ideas, who is even more committed to ensuring that the Parliament meets the demands of ordinary Victorians in the 21st century.

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Mr HERBERT** — 'A one-term Premier', we hear by interjection from the other side. One of the interesting things is that this statement has come with some genuine action in the week it is introduced in this Parliament. We have seen the Arrive Alive 2 strategy, designed to reduce the road toll by a further 30 per cent, and I note that the Minister for Roads and Ports is here at the table. This is no laughing matter. It is a genuine and tough target to meet, and it is something the government is committed to.

Also with this statement come our major reforms to early childhood education to make kindergartens better, more accountable, and more transparent. We see the introduction, with \$4 million attached to it, of transition statements for kinder kids — statements that talk about the ability of a child; about what the child has achieved. These statements are really important in giving kids the best start at school. After hearing some of the appalling contributions today, members of the opposition should be looking at issuing some transition statements themselves to look to the underperformance of their leaders. Perhaps the outgoing leaders could write out lists of whom to trust and not to trust, etcetera!

The statement outlines some 60 pieces of legislation to be introduced this year. Some 60 bills will drive productivity; they will address climate change and make the state more sustainable, livable and fair. I notice the Opposition Whip is now in the chamber, and I can see some more members of the opposition coming in, which is good to see.

This legislation will keep the economy strong. It will create new jobs. There will be legislation to improve public transport, planning and community safety. There will be legislation to implement huge infrastructure projects, to ensure water security. There will be legislation to develop measures to tackle climate change, which is incredibly important, and we have a massive opportunity now, with a federal Labor government, to work together on issues that are important to this state's future, but issues that need to be tackled in a cooperative way in terms of the federal-state arrangements in this country.

Importantly, and certainly importantly to me, is that there is legislation here to drive education and health reform, particularly for the most disadvantaged in our community. In education there have been massive reforms and improvements over recent years. We have seen a whole host of changes to our upper level, with new curricula introduced; we have seen class sizes driven down from the massive sizes under the previous Liberal government, and massive improvements in terms of computer technology in schools.

We have had major capital infrastructure improvements right across the state that have turned some run-down facilities into absolutely state-of-the-art facilities. We recognise that there is a need to make further educational improvements and to start having a look at those sectors and those schools where there is genuine underperformance and where there is underachievement and disadvantage. I certainly look forward to being part of that process, which is outlined in this statement, in order to give those who are most disadvantaged a real opportunity in life to achieve what they can through the education process.

While these bills are important in their own right, equally important is the capacity for ordinary Victorians to have an input into the parliamentary process and to have their say about what happens in this place. It is about their capacity not just to look at 30 seconds on the 6 o'clock news of what happens in the chamber but to get onto the website and look at the content of bills and have their say. It is important that they can log on to the government site and have a say about each piece of legislation. It is important that they can have a look at what public policy is being developed and have a say about what they want to see happen in this state in the future. This is about genuine reform and genuine innovation.

When ministers present bills to the cabinet they will be informing the cabinet about the public consultation that has occurred and about what people are in fact saying

about them. This is a massive innovation for democracy in this state.

We should think about this more broadly. We have hundreds of thousands of young people in our schools studying how democracy and Parliament work and how decisions are taken in the state. This makes it real for them. They can have a look at this statement and see in advance what the legislation is going to do. They can do assignments; they can run mini-campaigns. Students can actually engage as part of their learning process in what is about to come into the Parliament, and they can have their say before legislation even reaches this chamber and the other chamber. This is a fantastic achievement that will help engage young people in the democratic process that everybody in this house considers so close to their heart.

In conclusion, this statement is great for the community. It will enable us to get more smoothly through the legislative process and to allay the fears of people about legislation well before it comes into the house. I think it is another great step for democracy in this state. I commend the government for making the statement.

**Mr WALSH** (Swan Hill) — Before I start the main part of my contribution I would like to take up a comment made by the member for Eltham about kindergartens. Sure there have been some good things done on structural issues, but unless there is more money for kindergartens, the young mums and dads in my electorate will continue to have to raise somewhere between \$5 000 and \$15 000 a year to keep their kindergartens open. That is not a free kindergarten service. There has been some assistance with drought funding, and that has helped. But when that stops, they are going to be out there again, fundraising to try to keep their kindergartens open. The issue with kindergartens has most certainly not been solved.

The majority of people look for certainty in their lives. They look for certainty in having a job, certainty in having a home to live in, certainty in being part of a family and certainty in being part of a community, and they want to be protected against having their assets unjustly taken away from them. It is this sort of certainty that our society is built on. It is this sort of certainty that makes Australia such a great place to live in compared to other parts of the world — and it is about a belief in a fair and honest government. Under the Brumby government, if you live in northern Victoria and, in particular, if you rely on the irrigation industry, you have none of the above. The Brumby government appears to be deliberately doing its best to

create uncertainty for those communities and for the irrigation community.

The size of the Water Act has actually doubled under this government, but there is less certainty for irrigators. The implementation of the 2005 changes to the Water Act, as result of which we have had water shares and the unbundling of land and water, has been farcical. It has created uncertainty for irrigators and has cost them money. Anyone who has wanted to make a land or water transfer since the act took effect on 1 July 2007 has had to go through an absolute minefield of bureaucracy. Lots of people have had to pay penalty interest because land transfers and water transfers have been held up. That has created significant stress and confusion for those people.

Water authority staff were blamed, but the real culprit has been the DSE (Department of Sustainability and Environment). It had two years to design the structure to implement those changes, and it could not get it right. There is a crisis of faith in the industry and in the ability of DSE to provide factual water advice to the government and to implement legislative change successfully.

The people around Lake Mokoan have been put through a torturous process of half-truths and broken promises. No community would be put through that sort of stress if we had an honest and accountable government. We saw the development of the central region water strategy, supposedly a blueprint for certainty around the supply of water in the central region of Victoria. The government promised that it would not take water from north of the Great Dividing Range to Melbourne. It said that Melbourne had other options in its own catchment to supply its future water needs. That promise did not even last six months after the election before it was broken.

We have seen the announcement of the infamous north-south pipe project, and we have seen the food bowl modernisation project announced as part of that. That has all been based on the fact that, supposedly, we lose somewhere between 800 and 900 gegalitres of water out of that system. That is not factually correct, and I am sure the member for Rodney will have more to say about that. If anyone actually challenges it, all the government does is resort to personal abuse. It cannot actually argue using facts. Government members can roll out the mantras, but all they do is resort to personal abuse. Anyone who challenges those things are described as ‘ugly, ugly people’, ‘quasi-terrorists’ and a ‘sorry bunch of people’. All the government can do is resort to personal abuse.

The Nationals will introduce into the upper house a private member's bill — it is being drafted at the moment — for mandatory recycled water targets. I would hope that the government will support that bill, because we believe it is a way of actually driving the changes that are needed to Melbourne's water supply to get a good outcome. It will let the market work to identify the issues. We all know that there are issues around climate change, but my view is that when it comes to water the Brumby government is actually a greater threat to northern Victoria than climate change.

In the statement the government talks about Victoria's economic future. When this government came to power in 1999 it picked up the previous Kennett government's visionary target of having \$12 billion of exports of food and fibre out of this state by 2010. There was a lot said about that at the time. It was said that it was a worthwhile target and that the government would actually work to drive the exports out of this state because we know we are an export-orientated state and it is exports that actually create wealth and jobs for this state. What has happened to that target? We have heard nothing for a few years. It has stalled. It is sitting somewhere around \$7 billion and going nowhere, because there is no leadership by this government and it has no vision to actually help industry.

One of the key issues in driving that economic future is agriculture, and the statement talks about protecting agriculture. But what has the government actually done to protect agriculture from two of its greatest threats — weeds and vermin? Twice we have had a fox bounty from this government, and both times it has been extremely successful in reducing the vermin in this state that affect agriculture and affect our native fauna. Twice the bounty has been there; twice it has been taken away; and twice the ministers have said it was a success, but the government will not fund it again. Where is the true passion to do something about the issue of vermin in this state?

We see the eternal issue of weeds and the impact weeds have both on agricultural production and on our Crown land. We have had some shifting of the deckchairs. We now have the Department of Primary Industries supposedly responsible for the whole issue of weeds, but until we actually have legislation introduced into this place whereby DPI has the power to serve penalty infringement notices on the Department of Sustainability and Environment for its mismanagement of Crown land and until we have those notices enforced, we will not see the changes that we need.

We have seen utter confusion about the Catchment and Land Protection Act and who is responsible for weeds

on roadsides. We need legislative change to that act to clarify that situation. Some legal opinions are saying it is councils that are responsible, but they do not have the money to control the problem; others are saying it is the adjoining land-holders who have responsibility, but they do not have the money. The government is ducking for cover on this issue and needs to actually clarify the Catchment and Land Protection Act so we know who is truly responsible for weeds on roadsides.

I would like to briefly touch on the whole issue of rail freight. It is in a sad and sorry state. Despite the government's allocation of \$96 million in 2001–02 to upgrade and standardise the Mildura railway line, as we stand here — nine years later — we are only now finally seeing a small amount of work being done. It is finally starting. In following budgets we had another \$54 million allocated, but there was so much confusion out there that we never ever knew if that was what was left of the \$96 million that had been misappropriated somewhere else or if it was further money in addition to the \$96 million.

We now have the situation where, fortunately, the government actually took up The Nationals policy and bought back the lease of the tracks so we could get some certainty there, but other operators cannot access the tracks because the government is still having trouble sorting out who actually controls the pathways on the train tracks. We have spent \$138 million of taxpayers money to try to get some access on those tracks, but nothing has happened because there is no real plan as to how we can actually drive the changes that are needed to have an efficient rail system in Victoria.

The last thing I am sure the Minister for Roads and Ports wants to see is hundreds of thousands of truck movements to cart that freight into Melbourne by road instead of by rail. I am sure he would like to see some change. Let us make sure we get the cabinet focusing on this and get it to happen. There does not appear to be any vision, there does not appear to be any plan and there does not appear to be any passion for making sure we have a world-competitive rail system in Victoria.

The last thing I would like to say is that I am bitterly disappointed that we have members of the cabinet on the other side of the table — people who purport to be elected to govern for all of Victoria — resorting to personal abuse whenever anyone challenges what this government is doing. On Tuesday the Leader of the House called country people who are opposed to the water changes that are being put in 'ugly, ugly people'. It is an absolute disgrace that a minister of the Crown would describe people like that when they are exercising their democratic right to demonstrate.

Previously we had the Minister for Water call people who opposed the north–south pipeline ‘quasi-terrorists’ and ‘a sorry bunch of people’. The genuine good citizens of Swan Hill who came into my office and signed a petition against that pipeline believe the minister has called them quasi-terrorists, and they are mortally offended. Finally, we had the Treasurer of Victoria gatecrashing the Municipal Association of Victoria conference and lecturing the councils at that conference, saying that if there was not something in it for Melbourne, this government would not invest in country Victoria. All I can say is: shame, shame, shame!

**Mr HUDSON** (Bentleigh) — It is a great pleasure to speak on this annual statement of government intentions, because this is a first for Victoria and a first for this Victorian Parliament. It is an outline of the government’s legislative program, and it is an outline that will allow the community, interested organisations and indeed the opposition to see what the forward legislative program of this Parliament is going to be for the coming year.

It maps out the legislation that will govern Victorians in coming years. It will give them an opportunity to engage with democracy, it will strengthen our democracy and it will provide Victorians with an opportunity to have their say. It makes it absolutely clear that there will be more exposure drafts of bills and more opportunities for people to feed their views into those exposure drafts, and it will help the opposition to do its job. But what happens when we have this annual statement of government intentions? It should be welcomed by opposition members, because they will know what bills are coming up. They will be able to go out to the community, talk to the interested parties and the interested non-government organisations and find out what their views are in relation to reform in those areas.

It will help them do their job — we are doing them a favour! But what happens? At the first opportunity opposition members have to come in here to talk about this statement, what do they do? They trash it; they trash the statement. The first opportunity they have to actually welcome it as an initiative, they do not take. What they do is run out a whole host of tired old arguments and tired old debates from times past, from matters of public importance, from grievances and from things they have said in the past that have got nothing to do with the legislative program.

Let us have a look at what opposition members have done. They have dragged out the retreads. The Leader of the Opposition came out and gave a tired old

campaign speech from a campaign that finished 14 months ago. The Leader of The Nationals thought it was an opportunity to play to the gallery of supporters who left two days ago. The shadow Treasurer came in here and thought it was an opportunity to give the budget reply speech that he is going to give on 6 May. Then of course we had the member for Polwarth — the shadow minister for transport — who gave an excruciatingly embarrassing speech in which he made it clear that he does not understand that Bicycle Victoria, the Victorian Taxi Association, Connex and Yarra Trams are not in fact government bodies. No, they are not; they are community organisations, they are peak bodies representing industry and they are private companies. But of course the member for Polwarth does not understand that distinction. It was an embarrassing speech, and he will be sorry when he reads that speech and sees that he does not actually understand that distinction.

This is a great statement, and if the opposition had come in here and said, ‘There’s legislation that we require in this area and you haven’t covered these areas’, I would have some respect for that. The member for Swan Hill at least made some start on that. He said we should have legislation about weeds. Okay, that is good; at least he is saying we should be legislating for some other things. But we have not heard that from other opposition members. They have not come in and talked about a legislative program that adds to this or is an alternative to that.

Let us go through our legislative intentions. The budget will deal with the government’s overall priorities. Those opposite surely know that as an opposition. There are some big issues on the agenda in this statement of government intentions. We will reduce harm from alcohol, which is one of the major scourges that we face as a health issue and as a public safety issue in this community.

We will tighten laws in relation to tattooing and body piercing. We will introduce transport legislation to facilitate the delivery of critical road and rail infrastructure. We will introduce new road safety legislation to implement Arrive Alive 2. The newspapers today are full of debate on the question of what we should do with young drivers. Did members opposite contribute to that debate? No, they did not have a word to say about it. We will introduce a new family violence act that will deal with the issue of intervention orders and overhaul the laws about intervention in violent domestic disputes.

Legislation will be introduced to modernise the coronial system. I was really proud to be part of the

parliamentary Law Reform Committee that recommended Parliament overhaul our coronial system for the first time in 20 years.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Mr HUDSON** — Members on the other side say that the government steals the work of parliamentary committees. It is the work of parliamentary committees to report to the Parliament, to come up with ideas for legislative reform that this Parliament and the government can adopt. Members opposite should be welcoming that, not deriding or criticising it — that is why they are on committees; that is why we have parliamentary committees.

The coronial report will lead to significant reforms flagged by the government in this document, such as the overhauling of the system of reporting deaths to the coroner and the deaths investigation system. It will enhance the Coroners Act and enshrine as a key objective safety and prevention, incredibly important elements in reducing unnecessary deaths in the community. It will enshrine as a principal objective of the act support for families who come in touch with the coronial system.

There will be legislation to secure water supplies for all Victorians. Today we have heard speakers criticise the government's \$1 billion investment in the food bowl modernisation project. The project will upgrade the dilapidated, antiquated, leaky infrastructure, which has not been touched for over 70 years. No-one else has committed \$1 billion to it. One-third of the total amount of water in the system is lost through leakage and evaporation. The Nationals and the Liberal Party certainly did not commit any money to recoup those losses when they were in government. The project will supply 375 billion litres of water to Victorians each year.

What did The Nationals say to that? They said, 'We don't want the money. If we want the money, we want Melbourne taxpayers to pay higher water bills and fund the upgrade of the infrastructure, but we don't want to share water we did not have before, which will be produced through the savings'. It is as if The Nationals think Melbourne is another state. You think there is the state of Melbourne and the state of country Victoria. You think we are not all in the same state and that we do not share the resources of the state, using them as effectively as we can. It is just an absurdity, because you know that — —

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Dr Harkness)** — Order! Through the Chair!

**Mr HUDSON** — The opposition knows the farmers in the food bowl will not spend that money to upgrade the infrastructure. I have been on farms in and around Shepparton. I have seen the sandy channels that were constructed in the 1930s. They were lined with clay, but the clay has gone — it has been washed away. The water is seeping through the sand, and an enormous amount of water is being lost. The Nationals and Liberal Party members are going to save that water, get a share in its use and be able to grow the food bowl — that is what they say they want to do — but they do not have a plan to do it, because they know that if they had to fund it from the irrigators, the irrigators would be screaming about the cost of water that would be applied to them as a result of a program like that.

The Leader of The Nationals has claimed that we are putting a spear through the heart of the food bowl. That is absolute nonsense. We are plugging the holes in the heart of the food bowl. We are plugging the multitude of leaks in the thousands of kilometres of channels in the food bowl so that we will have new water to grow the food bowl into the future.

Here we have the first test of democracy for this opposition — the statement of government intentions. Just as it failed the test on the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, just as it failed the test on upper house reform and just as it failed the test this week on the freedom of information legislation, it has failed the test on this statement of government intentions.

**Mr WAKELING** (Ferntree Gully) — Those on this side of the house love to hear the contributions of government backbenchers trying to defend the indefensible. Time after time we have heard those members come into this house and champion the cause of the Bracks government, and now they are championing the cause of the Brumby government. They forget that they have had eight years to fix these problems. They make these announcements as if they have only just been elected to Parliament — as if they have been in Parliament only two weeks — and will now fix the woes of the world.

I was very interested to see how this 'State of the Union' address would go. We had everything except bells and whistles and *Hail to the Chief!* I was expecting a document that would be a blueprint for the state — this state's vision document. I expected it would outline the urgent upgrades to our struggling infrastructure and provide solutions on public transport, roads, health and education. I came in here with an open mind to see what the government would produce, because we were told that this vision statement would provide the solutions to take this state forward. Sadly

we were let down by what we saw on Tuesday. We had to sit there and listen to the spin, the fluff and the bubble.

We got a glossy document with some nice, pretty photos of the leader and his deputy. We got some nice information about bills that the government is seeking to introduce, and more importantly we got information about the website. We could have avoided the speech. Instead the government could simply have issued a press release and we could all have received a copy via email. That way we could have all been told about this new website. We are being told that the solutions for the problems that this state faces are going to be provided by way of a website. What a sham! What a disgrace!

I have read the document, and there is not a lot in it. I looked at it to see what the government was going to do to provide relief for small business. There is nothing in the document about how the government is going to reform workers compensation, occupational health and safety and tax, and there is nothing in here about how it will provide relief for the onerous aspects of equal opportunity legislation. I listened intently to hear what the Premier had to say about those things, but on them he was silent. Small businesses throughout this state rightly hold the government in contempt, because they know it has failed them badly.

I turn to the area of public transport. We have a minister who does not want to take responsibility for public transport. Instead she wants to hand over responsibility to quasi-organisations for which she says she has no responsibility at all. We have been expecting announcements about new rolling stock, but the government's response to relief for the public transport system has been to pull out seats and force people onto trains at 4 o'clock in the morning. That is not a solution for this state.

We have a ticketing system which is an absolute sham and which has cost \$1 billion.

**Mr Hudson** interjected.

**Mr WAKELING** — I am glad the member for Bentleigh is in the house. He may not be remembered for his contributions, but he will be remembered for one thing. Hand on heart he gave a cast-iron guarantee that the new ticketing system was going to work. I hope the Minister for Public Transport was listening, because the member for Bentleigh has put these cards on the table and guaranteed the Victorian community that the system will work. History will be the judge of that statement.

In my community we looked to the document for the provision of the feasibility study for the Rowville rail line, not promised by the Liberal Party but promised by the ALP in 1999. Labor promised my community in 1999 that we would have a feasibility study for the Rowville rail line. What has it done about it? Nothing. This government promised in the same year, 1999, that it would extend the tramline to Knox City. Eight years later what do we have? Nothing. I expected to see that mentioned in the glossy policy document — the plan for the future — but where was it?

**Mr Hudson** interjected.

**Mr WAKELING** — As the member for Bentleigh rightly points out, it is not about policy, it is not about vision and it is not about providing solutions — —

**Mr Hudson** interjected.

**Mr WAKELING** — If it were about providing solutions, I would be able to refer to them in the document, but they are not there. In my community we are looking for upgrades to bus services, we are looking for upgrades to railway stations and we are looking for increases in staffing to stop the assaults that occur at railway stations, but there is nothing in this document that provides solutions in these areas.

With regard to police we want extra members on the beat and extra members on the ground. Back in 1999 this government promised that it would provide my community with a 24-hour police station in Rowville. We expected to see it announced in the document.

**Mr Hudson** interjected.

**Mr WAKELING** — I expected the government to announce that it would deliver on its commitments. Nothing in this document says that it is going to deliver on the commitments it made to my community eight years ago. Eight years later we are still waiting for those promises to be delivered.

With regard to health, nothing in this document talks about waiting lists, yet we have had the minister stand up here and say, 'It is all going to happen'. There is nothing in here that talks about solutions and about upgrades to the Angliss Hospital, the need for which is spelt out in Eastern Health's strategic plan. There is nothing in this document that talks about the delivery of a strategic plan that was developed by the government's health service.

There is nothing in here that talks about how we are going to overcome the dental health crisis. You cannot blame the federal government — —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Mr WAKELING** — It is your job, it is your responsibility. You take control. You take ownership of the issue and fix the problem! The community health service at Knox needs to be upgraded, and it is the government's responsibility to get on with the job and fix the problem.

As for education, this government promised that it would rebuild every school as part of a 10-year plan. My schools do not know when that is going to occur. They do not want to spend money unnecessarily on upgrading outdated infrastructure if a building is going to be replaced next year, but they cannot get a timetable from the government. I would have thought this document would have provided them with the solution and that it would have stated, 'Here is the timetable, here is the plan and here is the vision', but of course there is nothing in it that talks about that.

I would like to remind the member for Melton, who unfortunately is not in the house but who has talked about this government not closing schools, to drive along Dorset Road in Ferntree Gully, past the sites of the former Ferntree Gully Primary School and Ferntree Gully Secondary College. They were both closed on the watch of this government. I remind members opposite that theirs is a government that has closed schools. The federal government did not close them and Knox City Council did not close them, because they do not run school facilities. State schools are run by the state government, and the closure of those state school facilities was done on the watch of this government and on the watch of this minister.

Road infrastructure urgently needs upgrading. I would have thought this document would have been an opportunity for the minister to stand up and say, 'With regard to roads, here is the solution. Here is the vision and here is the plan for improvements to road infrastructure'. My community needs an upgrade to Napoleon Road. My community has been calling on this government to fix Dorset Road. I am sure that if you asked them every other member on this side of the house could stand up and raise road issues in their electorate. We expected vision and outcomes. We expected an outline of a policy that would fix those problems so that I could go back as a local member and say to my community, 'This government knows what it is doing. This government has a plan, this government has a vision and this government has a solution for making improvements to our roads' — but there is nothing in the document about that.

I look at my local sporting facilities. Those facilities need urgent upgrades, and I expected this government to announce a strategy to assist local sporting facilities — but again, there is nothing in it. Finally, I turn to gaming. I expected this government to bite the bullet and recognise that communities want this government to act to reduce gaming and not look at a potential increase in gaming machine numbers, but of course this document is silent on that.

**Mr CARLI** (Brunswick) — I am pleased to rise in support of this historic document, the annual statement of government intentions. The member for Ferntree Gully has misunderstood this document. It has been put out so that the community and the opposition can have an understanding of the legislative program for the next 12 months. It is not about funding levels or police numbers or how much the government intends to spend on bus services. It is about the legislative program for the next 12 months.

Earlier today the Leader of The Nationals would have had us forget about the Kennett era. He said we should no longer speak about the Kennett era because there are so few parliamentarians left in this place who experienced those years. Well, I was one of the parliamentarians who experienced that era, and I know there was no similar document in the Kennett era and no openness of government in that period. In fact the Kennett government treated this Parliament with contempt. Important pieces of legislation were not debated in this house, let alone any invitation given for input from the opposition. Bills were not debated in this house; they were guillotined. There were attacks on the Auditor-General and the Director of Public Prosecutions, and a whole host of antidemocratic and authoritarian measures and ill treatment of this Parliament.

As a government we have taken the opportunity to give a document to the opposition with the intention that opposition members can examine and have input into the legislative program and see what it looks like. There is a whole raft of laws and potential laws, as well as indications of discussion documents — for example, that on early childhood development — which will be made available over the next 12 months. Opposition members will be able to talk to their communities, as we will be to talking to ours, and as we will have input, opposition members will also have input into this legislation. The annual statement of government intentions document improves the legislative process.

I have been scratching my head and asking myself why the opposition is so critical of a document which assists the work of opposition members. During the period

when the Labor Party was in opposition, Labor members were only able to dream of having this sort of document. We would have seen it as an opportunity to have some input, so I support the Premier. It is an historic document and fundamentally improves the openness of the legislative process — and, as a result, improves democracy in this state. That is why I think this statement is an important initiative. It fits with a lot of initiatives we have taken as a government to ensure, for example, that the Auditor-General, the Director of Public Prosecutions and others are protected in the constitution. We have improved the standing orders of this Parliament to allow for greater input. We have learnt the lessons from the period of the 1990s — those seven dark years, as we are so fond of saying!

**Mr K. Smith** interjected.

**Mr CARLI** — They were dark years in the Parliament. The community was denied the chance to have an input into legislation and the then opposition was denied the opportunity to have an input in debates.

What is really important about this statement is that it indicates the priorities of government — the priorities of education and health care — and the livability of our city and our state. Some of the things that impresses me about our legislative program are: the acceleration of public transport projects; the improvement of urban development; ensuring the timely availability of land on the urban fringes of Melbourne; and the modernisation of legislation, particularly the modernisation of planning legislation and strengthening the planning system. There is a whole raft of improvements to legislation, but more importantly the statement is focused, and focused on a number of things.

Fundamentally, the statement is underpinned by an awareness of sustainability issues. We saw that in water, in energy, in transport and in land use. This is clearly an important period in Victoria's history. We have to link a strong economic performance and a strong economy to make sure they are more sustainable — that is, so that our practices, the way we build our infrastructure and connect our city and state, and the way we use our water and generate our energy for our prosperity are more sustainable. That will mean some fundamental shifts and in the future doing things differently to how we did them in the past.

We are a government that is committed to the idea of change. I am pleased that our Premier was present at the United Nations climate change conference in Bali in December so that he could hear the debates about and the importance of the issues around climate change. As a state that is dependent upon brown coal and has a

large carbon footprint, we need to take measures to reduce our footprint on our planet. It is important we recognise that the Brumby Labor government is committed to sustainability, and this document has an emphasis on water, energy, transport and land use. I think that is important.

I want to return briefly to the issue of our democracy. As I said, I was here during the Kennett period, so I know what it was like and how this Parliament was treated. People in the community and in workplaces also know what that period was like. Our government has made some substantial and fundamental reforms, and this document adds to those. It adds to the fact that we have made the Legislative Council more open by introducing proportional representation and allowing smaller political forces and political parties in the state to be represented.

We have introduced fixed-term elections giving governments a four-year term so that no government can take advantage by calling an early election or postponing an election. We have provided greater scrutiny of government. As chair of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee I can say that the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act in this state has put a greater emphasis on rights issues in this state and how they are reflected in legislation and regulations. We have provided protection for the Auditor-General. We have done a lot.

It is also interesting that we are introducing and using discussion papers. I am very pleased that this document mentions the future release of a blueprint for early childhood development and that there has been major consultation on the regulation of children's services. As a local member of Parliament I deal a lot with early child-care services. I know there has been a large amount of activity around that issue, and that is important. In today's networked society there is a lot of information available on the internet, and people expect more from government and to have greater input. That, too, is important.

This document also identifies that we are dealing with substantial issues of conscience. Not all of us will agree on these issues, and some of us will disagree within our political parties. This document presents two major issues. The first issue of conscience the statement identifies is access to assisted reproductive technology. That is obviously as a result of the Victorian Law Reform Commission (VLRC), which found that existing access to reproductive technologies is a breach of the federal Sex Discrimination Act, and that we should deal with it. That is going to raise a number of issues in terms of people's access to those technologies.

The second issue of conscience is the modernisation of the abortion law, which is always a difficult issue to debate. It is an issue of conscience, but it is important. Again, the VLRC is working on a series of options to modernise the law and deal with the issue of abortion in the Crimes Act. I think it is great that we can present a document which says the intention is for this matter to be debated in this Parliament. We will have an opportunity to debate the issue, and the process will come out of a substantial amount of work being done by the VLRC and community input. It is not an easy issue, and we in this Parliament should not run away from it. We need to be warned in advance and to have a process of consultation and debate so that we can make some decisions, and I think this document outlines that.

I am very pleased to support the annual statement of government intentions, and very pleased to support the Premier on the historical presentation of such a statement. It is the first time such a statement has been presented in a Parliament in this country. It fundamentally opens us up to a more democratic process, and I think it fits very well with the democratisation of politics in Victoria, which has been a hallmark of Labor administrations since 1999.

**Mrs FYFFE** (Evelyn) — I am pleased to rise to speak on the annual statement of government intentions, but before I talk about the issues I have in my electorate, I would like to pick up on the previous speaker's comment that we are looking at 'modernisation' of abortion law. That is just a public relations term. There are proposed changes to abortion law — not modernisation.

There are many things in this statement of government intentions, but very little of true value that is going to incite economic activity, that is going to get people interested, that is exciting or that is visionary. I really wanted this government to take a stand on gaming — the government's cash cow. Pokie machines were introduced by Labor. Over the last six months gaming revenues in the shire of Yarra Ranges have increased from \$16.9 million to \$17.5 million. This represents an overall revenue increase of \$600 000, which this government happily skims off the top from those who can least afford it. It is disconcerting to see a greedy government so comfortable with making a profit off the backs of people who are suffering from a gambling addiction. Given that the 2007–08 budget update, released in December, showed the net debt of Victoria's total non-financial public sector will skyrocket from a low of \$3.5 billion in 2001–02 to a massive \$20 billion in 2010–11, it is hardly surprising that the government is making a greedy grab for cash.

I turn to health services, which the government talks about improving. The hospital waiting lists are appalling. Maroondah and Ringwood hospitals are continually cancelling operations at the last minute, because although they have empty beds they do not have the funding for the staff to service them. A super-clinic was promised for Evelyn in 2002. The last completion date that was announced was June 2008, but completion will be more like October 2008. During the reading of the 2004–05 appropriation bill, the super-clinic was touted as being evidence of Labor's commitment to rebuilding Victoria's health system, yet Eastern Health, six months out from the proposed opening, does not know what is going to be included in the building — what services are going to be there and what technology will be installed.

**Sitting suspended 1.00 until 2.03 p.m.**

**Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.**

## QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

### Office of Police Integrity: report

**Mr BAILLIEU** (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to the Office of Police Integrity report tabled this morning, which contains recommendations which mirror information leaked to newspapers on Tuesday, and I ask: now that it is clear that the report into the leaking of information from Victoria Police has itself been leaked to the media, who will investigate the leaking of that report?

**Mr BRUMBY** (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The report of the Office of Police Integrity was tabled in this house this morning. In relation to the member's question, it is obviously a matter for the OPI. I understand that the OPI has released a statement today rejecting claims that the matter was leaked to the media, and in that statement, which the OPI has released, it notes that 'the media outlet that published the report has confirmed that the report was not based on any alleged OPI leak'.

### Economy: performance

**Mr LIM** (Clayton) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to Victoria's recent economic performance and to the ongoing strength of the Victorian economy, and I ask: what benefit will come from the Premier's visit to China, Japan and Dubai?

**Mr BRUMBY** (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for his question and also note the very positive

work the member does in building trade and investment relations between Victoria and Asia more generally. As I have said before in this place, Victoria is enjoying a very strong and resilient economy. I mentioned the Australian Bureau of Statistics data released earlier this week on building approvals, which shows that in the last calendar year, to December 2007, the state that had more building approvals than any other state in Australia was, of course, Victoria, with \$19.1 billion. Queensland had \$18.5 billion, and New South Wales, \$17.3 billion.

I note in today's *Australian Financial Review* that a report from the Property Council of Australia says that over the last three years there has been more new office space built in Melbourne than in any other Australian capital city. Bernard Salt, the KPMG demographer, was reported in the *Herald Sun* as indicating that between 2001 and 2006 Melbourne added 87 000 privately occupied dwellings and Sydney just 57 000. He said that there could be no doubt that the rhythm of Melbourne has quickened in this decade, and largely as a consequence of our faster rate of population growth.

These are all positive things for the state. We are proud of the way in which our state is developing. We are proud of the fact that, despite our state not being a resource state, we are clocking up the sort of economic performance that only the states of Western Australia and Queensland have been able to achieve in the past.

Tomorrow night I leave on an 11-day mission to China, Japan and Dubai. I will be visiting China, which is Victoria's biggest and largest trading partner. I will be visiting Japan to talk to major investors, particularly Toyota in Nagoya. And I will be visiting Dubai to open a new school which has been based on the Victorian model and to address a business luncheon at the Australian Football League promotional match.

It is worth noting that China is now Victoria's largest single trading partner. Two-way trade between Victoria and China is now worth \$11.5 billion. I will be visiting Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai. I will be meeting with senior ministers in the national Chinese government, including the Minister for Water Resources, Chen Lei, and the Vice-Minister of Construction, Huang Wei.

Climate change will also be a key focus of my trip. I have mentioned — —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER** — Order! I ask the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to cease interjecting in that manner. I ask government members to lower the tone of their

conversation, and I ask opposition members generally to cease the interjections.

**Mr BRUMBY** — Climate change is a big issue for all of us — for Australia and for the world. There was a comment from across the chamber about helping China. The point is that Victoria is a leader in carbon capture storage. China is adding two new coal-fired power stations a week. If we can succeed with carbon capture storage in Victoria, it will be a technology and a development which can benefit China and the whole world. I will be having discussions on those matters. I will also be leading the environment and sustainable development mission. There are a number of Victorian companies — Earth Systems, GHD, Metricon and Diesel Test Australia — that are seeking to capitalise on China's economic strength. I think this is a mission to China which will produce significant benefits.

In relation to the United Arab Emirates, we now export more product to the UAE than we do to Great Britain. This is an important market for us. And as I said, I will be opening the junior school that is located in Sharjah. I will also be visiting our sister state, Aichi, and will be undertaking a function there with Governor Kanda. As I have said, I will be visiting a number of Japanese automotive companies, particularly Toyota.

All of this is about sustaining the strong economic performance of this state, an economic performance which is the envy of other states across Australia. I believe this mission will be important in maintaining that performance going forward.

### **Commonwealth-state relations: funding**

**Mr RYAN** (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to comments made by the Premier when he was Treasurer in relation to the GST formula:

This is a rip-off for Victorians, and it is time this antiquated, outmoded, ramshackle and blatantly unfair system was reviewed.

With Mr Rudd now in the Lodge, could the Premier advise the house as to the progress of the review, or is this just more hot air?

**Mr BRUMBY** (Premier) — Speaker — —

**Mr R. Smith** interjected.

**The SPEAKER** — Order! The member for Warrandyte knows not to interject in that manner. The minister who is given the call must be given an opportunity to answer the question.

**Mr BRUMBY** — If my memory is correct, when I made those comments in the house I am not sure that they were supported at the time by the Leader of The Nationals. I do not think they were.

We have an agenda going forward in relation to our relationship with the commonwealth government which is based around cooperative federalism. We have already seen the first Council of Australian Governments meeting held in Melbourne — the first time one has ever been held in Melbourne — last December, and out of that came financial benefits for Victoria. Out of that one single meeting we picked up an extra \$35 million in elective surgery health funding. We backed that with \$25 million of our own, so there is \$60 million extra for elective surgery to treat 10 000 more patients across our state.

We want to see more reform of commonwealth-state relations going forward. We want to see reform of SPPs (special purpose payments). Indeed when the Treasurer — —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Mr BRUMBY** — There had been nothing done in the previous 11 years.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER** — Order! I ask the Premier to resist the temptation to respond to interjections. I also ask the Leader of The Nationals not to interject across the table.

**Mr BRUMBY** — I just want to make sure that *Hansard* is clear: the opposition parties were agreeing that nothing had been done for 11 years — and nothing was done for 11 years.

The treasurers met in Brisbane in January and agreed on a program for reform of SPPs. In just the 10 weeks since the election of the Rudd federal government we have seen more funds flowing to the states in crucial areas like health and elective surgery. We have seen a commitment to the reform of special purpose payments, where we had extraordinary duplication and red tape under the Howard government. I think there will be further benefits flowing to our state in the future, not the least being a fairer share for Victoria of commonwealth finances, not just in health but also in areas like infrastructure and road funding, where prior to the last federal election we received a number of significant commitments from the federal Labor Party, now the federal government.

We are making progress in these areas. As I said, any progress we make will be far superior to the zero rate of progress that was made under the Howard government.

### **Trams: overcrowding**

**Mr CARLI** (Brunswick) — My question is to the Minister for Public Transport. Can the minister tell the house what the government is doing to ease overcrowding on Melbourne's trams?

**Ms KOSKY** (Minister for Public Transport) — I thank the member for Brunswick for his ongoing interest in public transport right across Victoria. As everyone in this house knows, the Brumby government has a very strong vision and plan for meeting our public transport needs. Meeting Our Transport Challenges, which is \$7.5 billion program, is a demonstration of our commitment to meeting our public transport needs.

We have seen unprecedented growth of almost 25 per cent in train patronage in the last two years. Everyone in the house knows that. That is why we have ordered an extra 18 trains for the network, and they will be rolling out late in 2009. But members are probably not as clearly aware that tram patronage is also up. After many years of growth at around 3 to 4 per cent, we are now looking at tram patronage growth of at least 5 per cent over the last 12 months, and it is anticipated that that will increase. Melburnians are voting with their feet and they are using public transport in very large numbers.

That is why I was delighted this morning to announce that we have been able to take advantage of a very unique opportunity to lease an additional five high-capacity, low-floor trams for Melbourne for four years at a cost of almost \$9 million. Meeting Our Transport Challenges has a commitment to the purchase of new trams for our network, but given the increase in patronage growth on our tram network this will allow us to fill the gap and to meet the needs of the travelling public.

The trams were built for the town of Mulhouse in France, but they are not yet ready to put them into service. We are delighted, along with Yarra Trams, to have grabbed this unique opportunity, ahead of a whole lot of other cities around the world, to lease these trams for the next four years. When I was overseas last year I took the opportunity to stress the importance of leasing these trams for Melbourne to both Alstom and Transdev. The first of these trams will arrive in Melbourne next week, and, following modifications to the trams, they will be in the system in March, with all

five trams in the system and on the tram tracks by September this year.

Just to put this into perspective, during the peak-hour period these five new trams will be able to carry up to 1200 passengers. That is the equivalent of 1000 cars being kept off the road. So it not only deals with the overcrowding on our public transport system, it also deals with the congestion on our roads. It will better position the tram network to meet the emerging demands that are being placed on it.

These low-floor trams will be allocated to route 96, which is the network's most popular tram route. It will allow some of the trams that are currently on route 96 to be reallocated to other very high demand routes as well. So the whole of the tram network will benefit from this investment. I am delighted that Melbourne, ahead of a lot of other cities around the world, has been able to grab this unique opportunity for the travelling public in Melbourne.

### Office of Police Integrity: report

**Mr BAILLIEU** (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the Office of Police Integrity report on Victorian police corruption, which was tabled this morning, and to the conclusion by the director, police integrity, that:

... without proper commitment to ensuring personal standards of integrity accord with public trust vested in police and public officials, corruption can occur at any level.

And I ask: now that the director, police integrity has warned Victorians that corruption among public officials is as likely as corruption within the Victorian police force, will the Premier do the right thing and establish an independent, broadbased, anticorruption commission for this state?

**Mr BRUMBY** (Premier) — The Leader of the Opposition has had seven different positions on this issue. I agree with the position which the opposition took to the last state election, and that is:

Matters involving allegations of serious criminal misconduct and corruption by public officers and local government ... remain the responsibility of the state Ombudsman working with Victoria Police.

**Mr Baillieu** — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating this question and not relating his answer to government business. He knows full well that since the last election this Parliament has had cause to debate the issue of corruption on numerous occasions. He is seeking to avoid answering the question.

**The SPEAKER** — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. The Premier was clear in that he was stating a position that he agreed with, which I would believe is responding to the question put to him by the Leader of the Opposition.

**Mr BRUMBY** — Just to make it clear, the position which I support is that matters involving allegations of serious criminal misconduct and corruption by public officers in local government should remain the responsibility of the state Ombudsman working with Victoria Police.

### Energy: efficient households

**Mr HUDSON** (Bentleigh) — My question is to the Minister for Energy and Resources. I congratulate the government on its involvement in the Change the Globe promotion last weekend, and I ask the minister to outline to the house what steps the Brumby government is taking to increase the energy efficiency of Victorian households.

**Mr BATCHELOR** (Minister for Energy and Resources) — I thank the member for Bentleigh for his ongoing interest in energy efficiency and the benefits that will bring to Victorian households and to the Victorian environment. I have said before that the cheapest and cleanest power station is the power station that does not have to be built. All the experts agree that this is where energy efficiency comes into play. Energy efficiency is absolutely essential to both individual household budgets and to supporting the Victorian environment. Eighty per cent of Victoria's greenhouse gases come from the generation and use of energy, and a third of Victoria's energy is used in the home. That is why the Brumby government is taking energy efficiency very seriously, and it is why we are tackling it on several fronts.

For example, our award-winning black balloons campaign has increased awareness in our community and in households about the need for improvement in energy efficiency, but we need to turn awareness into actions, and that is what we are doing. The Change the Globe promotion is just one of the steps in the right direction of improving household energy efficiency.

Yesterday I launched the Resource Smart retail program in the suburb of Chadstone. This project will make it easier to identify energy and water-efficient appliances by providing, in partnership with the retail stores, energy saving advice at the point of sale. At the very time when people are seeking and wanting detailed information our Resource Smart retail program

would be able to provide the right sort of information at this critical point when decisions are made.

Research shows that a typical household could save around \$270 a year on its energy bills if a few relatively steps are undertaken. For example, the Change the Globe promotion, which is changing the old dinosaur light bulbs and installing compact — —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Mr BATCHELOR** — There is a bit of sensitivity here! The Change the Globe promotion is a program to install compact fluorescent light bulbs, and this will save up to 80 per cent on lighting bills over the life of those globes.

People can buy appliances — fridges, dishwashers and washing machines — that have energy ratings of at least four stars, and it is important to note that over the life of those appliances every extra star that you have purchased will save you between 20 per cent and 30 per cent of the running costs. People could install solar or five-star gas hot water systems, and this will save on energy costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. They could adjust their thermostat on home heating and cooling, and it is important to remember that just a 1 degree change can save up to 10 per cent on household running costs. And you can turn off appliances at the wall and save up to 10 per cent on your energy bills.

These current programs will help with our world-leading policy initiative, the Victorian energy efficiency target scheme, which Parliament passed last year and which will be commencing at the beginning of 2009. It is important to remember that energy efficiency is not about reducing our standard of living, it is about doing more with the resources that we already have. This government recognises that energy efficiency can help Victorian families do their bit to tackle the climate change policy. At the same time simple energy efficiency measures will help those householders save money and cope with the impact of rising energy costs now and into the future.

**Police Association: pre-election agreement**

**Mr BAILLIEU** (Leader of the Opposition) — My question again is to the Premier, and I refer again to the Office of Police Integrity report on Victorian police corruption tabled this morning and to the conclusion by the director, police integrity, that:

The unique circumstances of this case demand ... the utmost transparency and public accountability in the way matters are dealt with.

And I ask: in keeping with the need for transparency in the relationship between Victoria Police and the government, will the Premier now release the 30 documents held in his office which relate to the secret pre-election deal with the police union and which the Premier has continually refused to make public?

**Mr BRUMBY** (Premier) — My recollection is that this question has been asked before, and the commitments which were made by the government to the Police Association and contained in the letter have been tabled in this Parliament and released publicly.

**Mr Baillieu** — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question. The Premier is keeping secret 30 documents about his secret pre-election deal with the police union. He should make them public.

**Mr Batchelor** — On the point of order, Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition is clearly putting into practice a predetermined strategy of interrupting question time with frivolous points of order. The Premier can hardly be debating the question when he has finished the answer.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER** — Order! The member for Yuroke and the Minister for Water!

**Mr McIntosh** — Further on the point of order, Speaker, the reality is that the Premier's department of course still has the 30 documents but has failed to release those documents, and he ought to release them.

**The SPEAKER** — Order! The member for Kew knows that that is not a point of order. Has the Premier completed his answer?

**Mr Brumby** — Yes.

**The SPEAKER** — Order! There is no point of order.

**Students: school starter assistance**

**Mr EREN** (Lara) — My question is to the Minister for Education. Can the minister advise the house of what the Brumby government is doing to assist Victorian families as their children start primary and secondary school this year?

**Ms PIKE** (Minister for Education) — I thank the member for Lara for his question. This is a government that really does care about assisting Victoria's families, and particularly in this instance those families with school-aged children. Not only do we provide financial

support to families through the education maintenance allowance — and that allowance in fact assists 200 000 students from low-income families each year, with \$215 for eligible primary school students and \$430 for eligible secondary school students — but we are also supporting Victorian families with students who are starting school in prep or year 7 with the payment of an additional \$300 per child.

This bonus recognises that these times can be expensive for parents with extra children starting both primary and secondary school for the first time. This is a \$182 million initiative by the Brumby government, and it is there to help families purchase additional items for school such as uniforms, books, bags and other equipment. So far 106 571 children have had vouchers redeemed on their behalf by their families, and these children and their families really are benefiting from this very timely support. That is over \$31.9 million that in just the last few weeks has gone directly into the pockets of Victorian families.

Parents can cash in the vouchers which are provided by the schools at their local Australia Post office. Some of the busiest offices that have been receiving these vouchers are in fact in some of our outer metropolitan areas, where we know that sometimes budgets are tight and that, particularly with interest rate rises, there is additional financial stress.

The Werribee Plaza Post Shop has cashed over 1000 vouchers, and other busy outlets are at the Fountain Gate Post Shop and the Watergardens Post Shop and in Rowville, Sunbury, Cranbourne Park, Traralgon, Greensborough and Hampton Park. They are the busiest areas. We wanted to make sure that parents had access to these funds when they needed them most — before their children started school, right at the beginning of the school year.

It has been a very busy start to the school year. More than 538 000 children are enrolled in government schools, and 1300 new teachers started teaching in our schools this year under the graduate recruitment program. I was very pleased, on the first day of school, to go to Pakenham Springs Primary School, which is one of the brand-new schools that this government has built. It has fantastic new facilities, co-located with some early childhood facilities, and the young people in that area are enjoying a great start to a quality education here in Victoria — and of course there is more to come.

The government has committed \$1.9 billion in this term to additional capital projects, whether it be modernisations, renovations or additional brand-new schools. That is part of what has been an ongoing

commitment over many years to our no. 1 priority, and that of course is seeing that our children get the very best start in their lives and have a quality education here in Victoria.

### Public transport: ticketing system

**Mr MULDER** (Polwarth) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the overdue and over-budget transport ticketing fiasco and to the Premier's failure on three occasions on radio on Tuesday to directly endorse the tender as clean and above board, and I ask: does the Premier have full confidence in Victoria's highest paid public servant and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Transport Ticketing Authority, Mr Vivian Miners?

**Mr BRUMBY** (Premier) — As I thought I have made clear over the last few days when I have been asked about this, when major projects come before government and there is a tender process, there is an independent process which is put in place. That involves either an independent board or a selection panel. They assess tenders and they make recommendations to government. In relation to the ticketing system, that process was strictly adhered to and was overseen by probity auditors. The recommendation was made to government, and that recommendation was accepted by government.

It is a complex system. I have said publicly that I would obviously prefer this ticketing system to have been delivered in a way which is fully consistent with the contractual obligations. It is running behind schedule — that is no secret — and if you look around Australia and elsewhere around the world, you find that these new systems are often complex, they are often difficult and they often run over time.

We have seen confirmation of that recently in New South Wales, which I think was running four years behind schedule. Given the significance of this in terms of public transport use in our state, this will be a great new ticketing system. It will give customers increased convenience.

**Mr Mulder** — On a point of order, Speaker, does the Premier have confidence in the chief executive officer? Yes or no?

**The SPEAKER** — Order! There is no point of order.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER** — Order! I suggest to the member for Scoresby, as I did yesterday, that if he wishes to ask

a question, he should stand in his place and be given the call.

**Mr BRUMBY** — With an investment and a ticketing system of this type and complexity, obviously the government wants to make sure that it is right before it is introduced. Obviously we look to the Transport Ticketing Authority and we look to the —

**Mr Wells** interjected.

**The SPEAKER** — Order! The member for Scoresby is warned.

**Mr BRUMBY** — We look to the Transport Ticketing Authority and its staff to effectively and efficiently implement this new ticketing system.

**Mr Mulder** — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier has been able publicly to support the commissioner of police. Why will he not publicly support Vivian Miners, the CEO of the Transport Ticketing Authority?

**The SPEAKER** — Order! The member for Polwarth well knows that that is not the correct form for a point of order. That is two points of order in a row that he has used inappropriately to disrupt the running of question time. I warn him. I also suggest to him that I will cease to hear his points of order if he continues in this vein.

### **Regional and rural Victoria: economic development**

**Mr CRUTCHFIELD** (South Barwon) — My question is to the Minister for Regional and Rural Development. Can the minister update the house on any recent Brumby government initiatives that are building stronger and more innovative regional economies in Victoria?

**Ms ALLAN** (Minister for Regional and Rural Development) — I thank the member for South Barwon for his question. The member for South Barwon's question very much goes to the heart of the Brumby government's commitment to Victoria about creating more jobs and about growing our economy, whether it is through investing in skills and investing in innovation or through key economic infrastructure. As members of the house know very well, we have a particular focus and attention on our regional areas. Recently the Premier, the member for South Barwon, the member for Bellarine and I visited the Geelong technology precinct at Deakin University to announce a \$6 million Regional Infrastructure Development Fund

grant to help establish a new and innovative proof of concept centre at Deakin University.

In thanking the government for this funding the vice-chancellor of Deakin University, Sally Walker, wrote to me and said that 'the grant moves Deakin closer to realising our plan to create an Australian version of Silicon Valley at the Geelong campus at Waurn Ponds'. This new and innovative centre will reinforce Geelong's growing reputation as a place of innovation and excellence.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**Ms ALLAN** — It is great to see that the Geelong members, the Labor members, are interested in this \$6 million investment. We will send the message to Geelong that members opposite are not interested in hearing that this \$6 million initiative will invest —

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER** — Order! I suggest to the member for Bulleen and the member for Kilsyth that if they wish to have a loud discussion, which they are, they might like to leave the chamber.

**Ms ALLAN** — On this side of the house we are proud that we have committed \$6 million to this centre, which is going to create over 400 jobs in the Geelong region and deliver a boost to the local economy of \$48 million. This is great news for Geelong and great news for regional Victoria and the regional economy. And this is not a one-off.

The Brumby government is also leading the way in its support of science, technology and innovation right across regional Victoria. We have invested over \$2 billion in innovation-related industries in areas such as Horsham, Ballarat, Churchill and Warrnambool. Also, through our highly successful Regional Infrastructure Development Fund — the very first piece of legislation that this government introduced into Parliament back in 1999 — we have invested more than \$380 million across 158 projects that have now delivered over \$1 billion in new investment in infrastructure in regional and rural Victoria. Who would think that this kind of fund could be anything but good news for country Victoria? Who labelled this sort of commitment to regional Victoria a sham? It was the Leader of The Nationals and those opposite who had to be dragged, kicking and screaming, to support that legislation.

*Honourable members interjecting.*

**The SPEAKER** — Order! I suggest to the minister that she come back to answering the question.

**Ms ALLAN** — There are now a billion good reasons why the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund was the right legislation, and it has backed the future of regional and rural Victoria. It is no surprise that it was the Leader of The Nationals — then the Kennett National Party — that voted 1150 times to punish country Victoria.

**The SPEAKER** — Order! The minister will conclude her answer.

**Ms ALLAN** — It is the Brumby Labor government which will continue to work hard with our regional communities to build stronger communities.

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Ms ALLAN** — It was 1150 times.

**The SPEAKER** — Order! The minister will conclude her answer, with no debating.

**Ms ALLAN** — It is the Brumby Labor government that is going to continue to work with regional Victorian communities to build stronger communities and help to ensure that Victoria as a whole remains the best place to live, to work, to invest and to raise a family.

**The SPEAKER** — Order! I remind the member for Derrimut and the Premier that banging on the desks and the table makes it very difficult for Hansard. The time set aside for questions has expired.

## ANNUAL STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS

### Debate resumed.

**Mrs FYFFE** (Evelyn) — The unfinished and overdue Lilydale super-clinic is a sad example of a very embarrassing trend for this government, which has a rich history of being unable to finish a single project on time or on budget — for example, the myki smartcard, Southern Cross station and regional rail, and the list goes on. Time and again we see that Labor promises the world but delivers nothing.

In September 2007 we heard from the Minister for Health that the boost in state funding for dental services had reduced times for treatment right across our state. Yarra Ranges community health statistics reveal that 2920 patients are currently waiting for general dental

health treatment and 465 patients are waiting for denture care — a 41 per cent increase in numbers from the previous six months. There is a 17-month wait for general dental care and a 22-month wait for dentures, which is appalling, given that the majority of the patients are senior citizens. The government is out of touch with those living in the Yarra Ranges — or are we too far away for it to care?

The Premier's statement talks about transport. The Lilydale train line, which services thousands of communities in the Evelyn electorate, suffered 879 cancellations last year, putting the Lilydale line at the top of the list for cancellations. Obviously Labor does not see Evelyn communities as being a priority.

At Wandin North speed-zone flashing lights were promised for the Wandin North Primary School two years ago. Do the responsible minister and the Treasurer prefer to put lives at risk by not installing the lights so that they can reap thousands of dollars from the hefty fines imposed on unsuspecting motorists targeted by the speed cameras? We have delays on the project for traffic lights at the Maroondah Highway–Killara Road intersection in Coldstream, which was promised two years ago in 2006 as part of the government's \$30 million program to address congestion. Some \$1.5 million was allocated to that project.

The Coldstream Country Fire Authority brigade has contacted me because it is deeply concerned that its vehicles are held up getting out into the traffic on Melba Highway. In a fire-prone area such as Evelyn, an additional couple of minutes travelling time can mean the difference between life and death. It is absolutely appalling that the lack of installation of these lights is delaying the unit's response by several minutes.

In the area of education infrastructure, during the last election campaign Mount Evelyn Primary School got a firm commitment from Labor for a facility upgrade. It is still waiting. Wandin Yallock Primary School has deplorable old buildings, with holes in outside walls and uneven and unsafe floors. The condition is such that the government should be ashamed. If it were not for the wonderful work of parents, these buildings would be in an even worse situation. The Minister for Education announced in January this year that education will continue to be the government's no. 1 priority; it definitely is not for the Mount Evelyn Primary School or the Wandin Yallock Primary School.

In relation to police and violent crime, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services claimed that Victoria was the safest state in Australia, which flies in the face of comments by the Chief Commissioner of Police,

Christine Nixon, who has said that the level of violence is higher than we have ever seen before. In the September edition of the *Lilydale and Yarra Valley Leader* it was reported that homicides in the Yarra Ranges were up dramatically in 2000 and 2007, bucking the statewide trend. Homicides were up 200 per cent on the previous period. We have a murder rate of 8.4 homicides for every 100 000 people; by comparison, the statewide murder rate fell 11 per cent to 3.8 homicides per 100 000 people. Labor ministers need to stop slapping one another on the back and get more police on the beat in Evelyn. The police need more resources and more support. Their morale is at an all-time low. Public confidence is rapidly diminishing.

Much has been made about the issue of water, and I do commend those good people who demonstrated at Sugarloaf Reservoir on Sunday and outside this building on Tuesday. They are good people who would not normally put themselves out into such a public situation, but they are frustrated beyond belief. The proposal to pipe 75 gegalitres of Goulburn water from an area that is already parched is absolutely ridiculous. It is a wrong decision and must be changed.

Residents in the Yarra Valley are angry that the government has decided to go ahead without an environment effects statement. The Minister for Planning in the other place said the flexible alignment of the pipeline will mean potential environmental effects can be avoided or mitigated. This is ludicrous. The known presence of endangered flora and fauna species in the area negates the planning minister's assertions. The helmeted honeyeater, one of Victoria's faunal emblems, the powerful owl and the striped legless lizard are all known to occupy the anticipated pipeline construction zone.

How is it that the government can override environment effects statement legislation when it expects ordinary citizens to comply? How is taking water from the north of the Great Dividing Range going to satisfy the needs of Melbourne? How is bullying and disregarding marginalised rural communities going to solve the water problems in the long term?

There is no mention in the statement of government intentions of disabled young people who are having to live in senior citizen facilities because there is nowhere else for them to go. There is nothing about the tradesmen who are struggling with red tape and with fees and charges. Every small business person has suffered since this government came in. I must say that in a previous contribution a member talked about almost a decade of Labor government and sounded

very proud that it has been in here for almost a decade, but what has it done and what has it achieved?

It has increased the number of public servants by thousands — 15 000 to 17 000 is the estimated number. The number of public relations officers and the number of media spin merchants have grown and grown, but actual facilities on the ground have not been provided. Small businesses are being buried in red tape and in the increases in fees and charges. Where is the support for councils? Where is the extra funding they need? Rates have been rising to the maximum, but the councils cannot supply the services that a modern society should be getting and expecting.

This statement was very disappointing. I really expected that it would have vision and that it would have an impact for future generations of this state, but it really does not. It is broadbased, it is motherhood stuff, and it does not give anything that can generate excitement in these times that we are now facing.

**Mr HARDMAN** (Seymour) — I rise to contribute to this historic innovation for the Parliament of Victoria. This statement of government intentions is about providing better accountability in consultation with the community so that all Victorians know what intentions the government has in regard to legislation in this state for the year ahead.

This document further improves reforms that this Labor government has made to democracy in this state — actions such as restoring the powers and independence of the Auditor-General and enshrining the independence of the Ombudsman, the Electoral Commissioner and the Director of Public Prosecutions in the Victorian constitution. It must be remembered why these actions had to be taken. It was as a result of the Liberals and the Nationals, who abused their power and mistreated these important watchdogs in our society when they were in government.

I hear opposition members crying foul when we talk about their appalling record when they were in government, but we can only accurately judge the Liberal Party and The Nationals on what they do and not on what they say, and the electorate knows that, too. The arrogance and the born-to-rule attitude of the Liberal Party and The Nationals shows just how out of touch they really are with the local community. It appears from their behaviour over recent weeks that the Liberal Party and The Nationals actually oppose everything and stand for nothing. They do not know what they stand for, but we know they stand for nothing. They oppose everything.

The legislative program which is outlined in this document recognises the challenges facing our state. It also recognises that more will need to be done into the future and that new issues and pressures will emerge throughout this year and into the future. Victoria is a state of great prosperity and opportunity. The Brumby government recognises that it is its role to create the best possible environment to support all people so that they may participate in the opportunities available.

Our no. 1 priority is education, which is reflected in the document. We know that engaging children in education from a very early age and integrating children's services will provide the best foundations for their success in learning in later life. There will always be a lot more to do in education, and it is great to be part of a government that invests in teachers and better facilities and has a plan to continue to improve access to education at all levels — to upgrade schools, support teachers and parents, provide better learning environments for students through lowered class sizes and make education relevant so as to retain students who would have dropped out in the past. These students now have an alternative — the Victorian certificate of applied learning — to keep them in education longer and give them better chances in life.

Demographers are pointing to the challenges we face in regard to the ageing of the state and our country — and indeed the developed nations around the world. That is why we need to ensure that people reach their senior years in as good health as possible and why we need to strengthen our emphasis on preventive health care. The member for Evelyn may not find this exciting, but this is a real challenge that will face us in the future, and it is something we need to deal with as a government. Doing so will improve people's quality of life as they age and ensure that — no matter what their background or socioeconomic status — people will have a better chance of enjoying their senior years. It will also reduce the future burden on our health system and taxation into the future.

It is pretty clear where we on the Labor side of the house come from. There has already been \$3 billion worth of practical initiatives committed under our policy A Fairer Victoria. We will give people more opportunity, and I am pleased to see this mentioned in this important statement of government intentions. Obviously we want everyone to enjoy the lifestyle and opportunities our great state has to offer.

I was also pleased to see in the document an emphasis on improving public transport by accelerating projects that we know are needed. The Brumby government has done much in this area. The kinds of improvements that

have been made are very obvious in the Seymour electorate, and I know they have been replicated around the state. There is always more to be done, and none of us shirks that. One of the things the government has done is provide 100 extra services every week on the Seymour line to Melbourne.

The towns of Kilmore and Wallan now have bus services that connect them to those regular services, with low-floor buses to allow people who are disabled or who have ambulatory problems to access the services. The townships of Healesville and Seymour also have low-floor buses and better bus stops so that people can get around town even if they do not have their own vehicles. I have talked to elderly people who have to make appointments at or near the hospital or visit partners in nursing homes whom they cannot look after any more. They have better access to transport, and they are most appreciative of the Brumby government's investments to make Victoria a fairer place to live.

Those opposite will obviously continue to find fault. We on the Labor side know there is more to do. We do not shy away from the challenges ahead. We see that no matter where you live in the state you deserve to have the best possible services and facilities in education, health, community safety and transport. The government is working to do that. It is great to see that there is a plan and that there is the opportunity for people to respond to it through mechanisms the government has set up, such as the website. The challenges are obviously there. They are listed in the document, which is not exhaustive — I always say that.

Tuesday, when the government put out its statement of intentions for the future, was an important day. This statement recognises the importance of protecting the environment and meeting the challenges that face us as a result of the change. I look forward to the formalisation of our policies to tackle climate change through the climate change bill, which will strengthen the work we have already done on things such as Sustainability Victoria, the Victorian energy efficiency target and the Victorian renewable energy target. All of this has demonstrated our government's commitment to tackling the issue of climate change, but the climate change bill will provide a better foundation for us to plan.

As parliamentary secretary for agriculture, I have had a great opportunity to learn about and gain a greater understanding of the challenges facing the agriculture industry in Victoria. I am pleased that we are moving to protect our livestock and plants from diseases which can impact horrifically on productivity and

profitability — and therefore the viability — of farming businesses, which we know are really important to the rural and regional communities of our state.

The statement of government intentions recognises that the drought and climate change are great challenges in our state. The government has taken a number of actions to secure our water supply, and it has been doing so for a long period of time. The latest figures show that people in Melbourne are now using 28 per cent less water per capita than in the 1990s. That is a significant drop, and it has happened through growing awareness with the installation of dual-flush toilets and the reduction in the use of water through low-flow shower head roses and the \$1000 rebate for the installation of water tanks connected to both the bathroom and the laundry — or \$900 if the water tank is only connected to one of those — which are the main places we use water in the household. These things are obviously important.

We are recommissioning the Tarago Reservoir and have come up with a plan to look at the security of water into the future. The \$300 million eastern treatment plant upgrade will produce 100 gegalitres of class-A recycled water. The desalination plant will produce 150 gegalitres of water in a way that is not reliant on rainfall. The investment in the food bowl will save 225 gegalitres of water and allow the farmers of the food bowl to get better value from their water and, therefore, to survive and keep their communities thriving into the future. They will be able to get better production because of the way their water will be delivered.

The 75 gegalitres from the Sugarloaf Reservoir, which has a great impact on my electorate and is obviously something that people in my area are very passionate about, recognises that the 4 million people in Melbourne also need that water security to be able to survive into the future.

**Mr JASPER** (Murray Valley) — I am pleased to join the debate on the 2008 annual statement of government intentions and indicate that this is the first time that we have seen a presentation like this to the Parliament since I entered the Parliament in 1976. It is an interesting concept, and I listened with a great deal of attention to the Premier's speech on this government document. It is heavy with rhetoric — there is no doubt about that — and there are certainly good intentions, but many would say it is almost a public relations exercise. I note the Premier's comments:

In short, the introduction of an annual statement of government intentions will go a long way towards making our representative democracy more of the kind of

participatory democracy it needs to be to thrive in the 21st century.

I hope we get more consultation and more transparency in what the government is doing, particularly for country Victorians.

I want to refer to one example which highlights the lack of appreciation by the government of the particular problems that we have in country Victoria. We often listen to comments from the Premier and government ministers about how they are listening to country people and eliminating discrimination against country people, but I want to refer to the rainwater tank rebate, which is a matter I mentioned in my 90-second statement this morning. It is quite clear that this rebate discriminates against people in country Victoria who do not have access to a reticulated water supply system. I have been making representations to ministers for a couple of years on this issue, and the ministers to whom I have written have written back on a number of occasions defending this program. However, it discriminates against people who do not have access to a reticulated water supply system.

I think the government has its head in the sand on this matter. It should come out and say, 'We should review this; we think it is good for everyone. Why should farmers and others out in the country areas not have access to that rebate the same as everybody else?'. This issue really highlights the fact that the government often does not listen to the representations made by constituents and the people of Victoria.

I listened with a great deal of interest to the comments made by the member for Seymour. I have to take issue with some of the things he said. He talked about the water situation and the north-south pipeline. If the government were intent on listening to people in country Victoria, I do not think it would support the north-south pipeline. When a government plans for water to be piped from northern Victoria to metropolitan Melbourne, from an area that is distressed as far as water supply is concerned and where irrigators are on small allocations of water, it is clearly not listening to what the majority of people want, and it is opposite to its policy prior to the election, which was that no water would be shifted from northern Victoria to service metropolitan Melbourne. These are the sorts of issues that we, as country Victorians, think the government should be saying, as part of the Premier's statement, 'Yes, we will listen to more of the issues in country Victoria and try to respond to them'.

I am interested to see the Minister for Public Transport in the chamber. I get on very well with the minister, but I have to say that the passenger rail service that is

currently provided for north-eastern Victorians is a huge problem. I have had more representations on this issue than on any other in recent times. The substandard service that is being provided is not acceptable. We need the government to respond quickly to that and overcome the situation.

I heard about one lady who used the train service from Southern Cross station to Wangaratta last Sunday night. At first she could not get on the train because they were clearing the sewage tanks on the carriages, but when she eventually boarded she shifted to another carriage because she could not stand the stench. The sorts of things that are happening include air conditioning not working, no water being available, and trains stopping when they are not supposed to. The train up to northern Victoria on Monday ran out of fuel when it got to Wallan. These sorts of situations need to be addressed immediately. I want to make sure that the Minister for Public Transport understands that whilst I recognise and appreciate the work she has done in education, indeed I have had a close working relationship with her, we need action on that sort of issue. She has to respond to us in north-eastern Victoria.

The government will come back and say to me that the passenger usage is increasing. Of course it is, there is no doubt about that. More people are using the passenger rail services in country Victoria, because they need to travel to Melbourne and they are trying to get off the major roads and highways. There has been a reduction in the fares, and people have responded to that and are using the service. But it is a substandard service that is not acceptable. We must get a response from the minister on what she will do immediately to overcome the dreadful service to north-eastern Victoria. That should be addressed quickly, and I hope the minister does respond to it.

I note the Premier's comments in his statement of intentions document on the transport issue:

In 2008, planned amendments to the Transport Act will provide a stronger, more integrated approach to transport planning and service delivery — with that new approach streamlining the delivery of critical road and rail infrastructure.

We want to see that happen immediately for us in north-eastern Victoria.

I also heard the member for Seymour say that The Nationals opposed everything in the Parliament. I want to correct him, because as far as we are concerned, and as far as the Parliament is concerned, there is general agreement on both sides of the house with most of the legislation that comes before the Parliament. Yes, there

are amendments and critical comment is often made of legislation, but the majority of legislation goes through.

I want to also confirm the comments made by the Leader of The Nationals: we will support anything that is going to make Melbourne a better place, indeed where it will result in improvements for country Victoria where we have our true representation. It is critical for us to make sure we get the best that we can for those people living in country Victoria.

I want to make sure that the member for Bendigo East is under no illusions as to where the National Party stands in this Parliament and on legislation. I also want to take on board comments made by the member for Melton and which have often been made by the Minister for Regional and Rural Development. She made comments about the 1990s. I remind the house that when there was a change of government in 1992 the previous Labor government had left a debt of at least \$32 billion which had to be addressed, and the Kennett government did so during the period of time it was in office. I have to say to the house — and people would be well aware of this — that I was never the white-haired boy as far as the coalition government was concerned at that time, because I opposed some of the things that were going on — for instance, the removal of passenger rail services from country Victoria. Be that as it may, a huge turnaround had to be undertaken. For the member for Melton to say that nothing happened in country Victoria is beyond belief!

Before she became a minister I invited the member for Bendigo East — and the member for Melton — to come up and visit my electorate of Murray Valley. Schools in my electorate were not closed during the Kennett years. Two schools closed that had fewer than 12 students — it was agreed that they should be closed — and no police stations in my electorate were closed. Those members should not get up and say those sorts of things. We developed — even right through the 1990s — and we are still developing. Major developments are taking place in north-eastern Victoria, particularly within my electorate of Murray Valley. We want to make sure that people understand that, while there were difficulties and changes in the 1990s due to clearing the state debt, when the Labor government was elected in 1999 it had a war chest and could spend that money. This government has also had revenue from the goods and services tax and other avenues — huge revenue! — and has been able to respond to the needs of our electorates, including those in north-eastern Victoria, including my electorate of Murray Valley.

I should also mention the issue of dams, which is a big issue as far as I am concerned. I am disappointed with

the responses that I have been getting from ministers on the extension of Big Buffalo dam and of other dams in northern Victoria. I remind the house that the Dartmouth Dam saved the Murray Valley. The Dartmouth Dam, which holds about 4 million megalitres of water, underpinned the supply of water into the Murray system, as did water from the Snowy River scheme, but we need to have dams to underpin the system. I am extremely disappointed that we are still getting strong opposition to extending dams. There is talk of strengthening the wall in the Dartmouth Dam and Lake William Hovell. What they should be doing is raising the walls of those dams so we can hold the water when we get the rains and use it in appropriate places when required.

**Mr INGRAM** (Gippsland East) — It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Murray Valley. The debate on the annual statement of government intentions is very interesting. When it was proposed to be introduced I was the only one on the non-government side who supported the proposal for the debate we are having here today. I notice that members are using the opportunity as the statement was designed to be used — that is, to raise issues within their electorates, and that is what I said in my contribution to the debate at that time. This is a good opportunity for members of Parliament to say, ‘It is good the government is doing those things, but what about some of these other issues?’.

Having looked through the list of legislation included in the statement, I see that there are a number of issues which are going to be reasonably contentious right across the Victorian community. It is a good opportunity for members of Parliament to go out and consult with their local communities and get the feel on a number of those issues. It gives people the opportunity to have input, and that is a good thing. It is a part of democracy that I do not think we do well enough in this place. Legislation is introduced, which is the first time anyone really sees it. Sometimes people do not even know legislation is on the agenda until it is deposited in here late on a Thursday afternoon, and two weeks later we are debating it. The more scrutiny we can give proposals, the better.

I would like to raise a number of issues. I listened to the Leader of The Nationals earlier during his presentation, and I thank him for his support of one of the ideas that I have been pushing — that is, container deposit legislation (CDL). I know that members of The Nationals and the Liberal Party are supporting that proposal. The proposal is to bring in a scheme similar to that in operation in South Australia for beverage containers. It would be good to do that in Victoria, and I

would encourage all members of this place to urge the environment minister and the government to take a positive position to the April meeting of the environment ministers — I think it will be held here in Melbourne — to push forward a national scheme for the introduction of CDL. The benefits are very clear. It would increase recycling, and the proposal is well supported within the community. Within my electorate I have done a number of surveys on CDL, which is supported by 80 per cent to 90 per cent of people within the community. They support deposit schemes on bottles, cans and other beverage containers.

Container deposit legislation would be very positive for community groups. They would use it for fundraisers through sporting clubs and scout groups and so on. Not only that, CDL would have a real environmental benefit, particularly for those recyclable containers which are currently expensive to recycle, like glass and plastics. It is an extended producers’ responsibility scheme which forces businesses to take responsibility and make sure their containers are recycled. I encourage all members of this place to get behind that initiative. With a bit of luck we have an opportunity at a national level to have CDL implemented. To that end I have written to all the state environment ministers. It is good to see that Western Australia has recently announced that it will introduce CDL over there. The Northern Territory has indicated in the past that if it comes in as a national scheme it will support it. If Victoria comes on board, it is something that could be delivered.

I also listened to the Leader of The Nationals speak about his party’s plans for dams, and I have listened to the member for Murray Valley. It is always interesting to hear The Nationals proposals for dams. The Leader of The Nationals finally came out and said that he wants Gippsland’s water to be dammed and sent to Melbourne. The Nationals oppose the north–south pipeline, and I can understand why they oppose it. They oppose the desalination plant, and now they have finally come out and said where they would get water from if they had the opportunity. They would dam one of Gippsland’s rivers. Already a large proportion of Melbourne’s water comes from the Thomson River in the Gippsland Lakes catchment. I will make it very clear: the Gippsland Lakes are far too important to have further large extractions.

The amount of water that is coming out of the Latrobe Valley through power generation and other usages and the amount of water that is coming out of the Thomson catchment area and being used for Melbourne and for other consumptive users within the catchment mean that the health of the Gippsland Lakes as the Southern

Hemisphere's largest inland waterway is too important to have a further reduction in inflow. We have recently seen algal blooms. These are caused partly by nutrients, but they are also caused by lack of water flow. Any further reduction in the inflows to the lake system and any further stress on the Gippsland Lakes would cause more problems. The lakes are our region's most important tourism asset, and it is essential that we go forward to make further improvements to the health of the Gippsland Lakes.

I will make another comment about something I have not seen in the statement — that is, reference to the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's river red gum forests investigation. It is something that is well outside my area, but the VEAC often makes recommendations to Parliament in relation to the establishment of national parks. The Murray red gum inquiry report is one that will be fairly contentious when it comes into the Parliament. Too often we penalise the communities that love and responsibly use our public land areas.

As someone who camps reasonably regularly in some of the red gum areas when I get the opportunity, I know they are very therapeutic areas to visit, including camping by the Ovens River or the Murray River, getting back to nature and doing a bit of fishing. It is important that we penalise those idiots — and they are idiots — who go out there and litter and do the wrong thing in our parks. Instead of saying we are damaging these areas, it is better to put in penalties and regulations for those idiots who go out bugger it up for everyone else. I think we do not do that well enough. We say, 'We have got problems with the management of our parks and management of public lands, so we will declare more national parks and lock them up'. That is a real criticism of what has occurred.

My area has some of the most spectacular and beautiful national parks in this state. Parks such as the Snowy River National Park and the Errinundra National Park have, for example, one park ranger to cover 130 000 hectares of national park. We do not have the resources to manage our public lands anywhere near well enough. We need to make sure adequate resources are put in to manage the parks we have. We need to make sure that they are high-quality areas to visit and that they have the infrastructure that is needed to promote tourism in them so that the people of Victoria value, visit and want to protect those areas. That is something we need to get right — and I do not think we have got that balance quite right yet.

There are a number of issues raised in the statement that I take a particular interest in, such as the water bills,

which are important. However, another issue in the statement that I want to refer to is the capture and storage of carbon and the reforms to the Petroleum (Submerged Lands) Act. These are issues of great concern in Gippsland. Climate change is a real issue, and I think it has taken governments both state and federal too long to grapple with the challenges climate change pose for our community.

One of the issues Gippsland has is the continual extraction of water by both the coal industry and the oil and gas industry. When they extract oil and gas out of the Bass Strait fields they remove water with them; they therefore remove the ability of irrigators and other water users to extract water from the Latrobe aquifer. This is a cause of a large proportion of the increased costs imposed on water users in that area. If we are going to deal with this, we need to make sure we get the recharge systems right so that we are actually putting something back in. Maybe putting gas back in there would be one way of increasing the capacity to use water from those aquifers. If we are going to deal with those petroleum reservoirs, if you like, at some stage we are going to need to make sure that when oil or gas is to be extracted we get the licence conditions for those industries right to make sure they are recharging the groundwater aquifer.

I would like to raise a number of other issues. In East Gippsland at the moment we are dealing with ongoing issues in the timber industry — the changeover to VicForests and the government's policy on old growth forests. All this is causing incredible concern within our community. The impact on the timber industry of the changes that have occurred in recent years is something that the government must deal with properly. It must get protection that is needed for the industry and the community right.

**Mr SEITZ (Keilor)** — It gives me great pleasure to be part of the debate on this historic annual statement of government intentions for the year. For those who are not familiar with the parliamentary process, I point out that we have a new Premier who did not have the opportunity to have the Governor present his legislative program to the Parliament, which is normal government procedure.

In that circumstance I congratulate the Premier for deciding to make a statement of government intentions every year. It is very important, because the only other opportunity the Premier would have had to do such a thing would have been to prorogue Parliament and have the Governor come in and make a speech on what the government would do for the rest of this term. It is a very good thing to have a 12-month program outlined

each year. As we know, even in a 12-month period things can change, but the best part of this is that the people of Victoria — including businesspeople, educators, health planners, road planners and local government planners — will all have a fair idea of what legislation or what changes to legislation it is proposed to introduce.

As I said, there will always have to be some emergency legislation brought in, whether it is a private bill regarding a land issue or some action by a trust or whether it is because some smart lawyers have found loopholes in an act that need closing so that people do not get around the intent of the legislation.

Having said that, I am pleased to be part of this process and to see it accepted by all sides of the house, which is important, because it conveys knowledge to our community. Members sometimes forget that our young people, and particularly our school students, are educated in a more advanced way than we were about the country's governments. In primary schools students have sessions on local governments. They even learn about government through electing their own school council representatives and running their own shows. The same thing happens in secondary schools: their knowledge is further developed than ours was. The whole society wants to know about and be far more involved in how the state government and, I dare say, the commonwealth government are run. So this is a very progressive and innovative step, and a step that should be further developed in future.

I have heard previous opposition speakers saying, 'These are motherhood statements. This document lacks detail', and so on. It was never intended to have a lot of detail in it. It is about a program and about the intentions the government has for the next 12 months. It is an outline that is designed to give people the opportunity to have input into and a say in the program. It is an absolutely new thing for a government to list up front the bills that it intends to present to the house over the next 12 months. Usually this sort of thing only happens at election time, when the Premier or the Leader of the Opposition makes promises to introduce this legislation or that legislation — or, if they are pressed by the media, to initiate a big public campaign.

However, in this case the government has come forward and let the people of Victoria know what its intentions are and, in particular, what the intentions of its new Premier are. We must not forget that this is the new Brumby government; that is what we are on about. This statement is about what its intentions are for the next 12 months, and that is commendable.

When we go into the details and priorities mentioned in the annual statement we find education is an important step. That has gone forward. In my electorate new primary schools have been built since Labor has been in government, and two more primary schools are on the books and planning is being done for their construction in line with new areas in my electorate. That is tremendous for parents of children, because if they want to settle in the area or buy houses in the area services will be available. The first things people look at are child care, kindergarten and primary school. They are the no. 1 priorities for parents.

It is important to lay out these things for the community so people can make decisions. A primary school is an important structure for any family, and primary schools help to build communities. With the changes we have now made with the department of education having control of kindergartens, kindergartens and primary schools are even more important. Having a report sheet going to the primary school teachers when kids start prep is a good step. I saw that with my grandson just two weeks ago. He is in the same school, but he has gone up to a new class and he has had an assessment done for him. There is nothing wrong in having reports prepared, because parents expect more and want to know more about how they can assist in the educational development of their children. So do the professionals, because they want to know what level they are teaching and they want to treat each student as an individual rather than just teaching a group of 25 kids. This is a very important and innovative step forward taken by the government.

As I have pointed out previously, it is a work in progress, and I hope that in future we further develop this process so that in about 2015 it matures to its full extent and people will appreciate it for what it is. I know a lot of people were apprehensive about preparing this document and putting it out into the community. This government has confidence and is showing its trust and faith in the people of Victoria by letting them know what it is about, and especially so for business management, public servants and the people who drive the engines of government. Public transport, as we heard from the minister and from the Premier in talking about securing the economy of Victoria, is vitally important.

The Premier's pending overseas trip is part of the project he has outlined of encouraging investment in the state — visiting overseas countries and encouraging growth in Victoria and Melbourne so we can become the no. 1 state in Australia. In my junior years Sydney was the financial hub of Australia, but now Victoria is coming to be the financial hub and the economic driver

of Australia. That has not just happened; it is happening because people have confidence in the government and work hand in hand with it to make sure that we have a prosperous state.

**Mrs VICTORIA** (Bayswater) — It is 439 days since I was elected as a member of Parliament, and I love my job. I tell everyone I meet how much I love my job and love my electorate and how I am one of the luckiest people alive. I actually get paid to do a job that so many people want to do but do not get the opportunity to. However, some days this job tries my patience. I sit here and watch the cocky strut of those opposite. On some days they are like smug peacocks. I listen to their rhetoric and spin and the gratuitous ramblings of ministers who almost dislocate their shoulders because they are so busy patting themselves on their backs because of all the things they think they collectively do. It is obvious that some Labor members are here for self-elevation and do not represent their constituents well or with passion and pride. That is so obvious in their contributions to the house. I am different. As I said, I love my electorate, I live in my electorate and I breathe my electorate, and I am proud of it.

Let me tell you about the Bayswater electorate and the things its constituents are crying out for. I have talked before about school maintenance. The total state maintenance backlog for schools is over \$200 million. This is a shameful amount of money. The total in Bayswater is over \$1 million. I want to give an example of a school that I saw recently. Some parents on the council of Boronia West Primary School came to me recently. They were given a pitiful amount of money to fix leaks coming through the school's roof. They had buckets on the floor of the prep room where drips were being caught every time it rained. That is what they thought their preps had to put up with. They said, 'We are not getting the money we need'. Guess what, a little bad publicity in the local press and we managed to get them \$145 500 for their maintenance backlog and repairs. Tell me that was not something that should have been done urgently, and why did I have to give them bad press in order to get that sort of attention? This is not what the parents and the students of Bayswater deserve.

Bayswater Secondary College has a beautiful new technical wing; it is one half of two buildings. It cost \$1.9 million to build, and a lot of that money came from the Howard federal government. The second half of the wing, stage 2, has been promised to that school on three occasions. It was promised prior to the election and it has been promised since the election. We are now talking about the 2006 election. It was launched at the

school with a big fanfare, the whole lot, by Minister Allan, who was then the Minister for Education Services, but the piece of paper that came from the department of education said, 'We will build stage 2 of this fantastic information technology wing so needed at the college'. It was published in a flyer with fanfare and pretty pictures and words. Steve Bracks's head was on the banner. It was stated again that they would get the second half of the education technology wing.

Post the election that was restated by Minister Lenders at the opening of stage 1. I was there, and in front of the school principal and the deputy principal and the head of the school council I asked: are we going to get stage 2? The answer from Minister Lenders right there in front of a crowd was, 'If it is in writing, we will honour it'. Since then I have written to the Minister for Education and asked when it is coming. I have a letter from the minister — which I am very happy to submit — which claims that this school now has to be part of an education cluster. That is a red herring. Let me tell you, nowhere on any of the paperwork is it stated that it has to be part of a cluster. Nowhere is there a rider that says: 'Be part of a cluster or you do not get this funding'. Guess what! When this was first promised there were no clusters, and there was nothing called 'Building Futures'.

This is a red herring of the worst kind, and the government is cheating the students of Bayswater Secondary College and the future students of Bayswater Secondary College as well. This is a building that is much needed. It was promised on at least three occasions, and it is immoral that this is not going to happen. It is a little bit like saying you have to be part of the cluster or you do not get the funding. Since when do we do things like that to our schools? It is a bit like non-compulsory unionism. The building sites say, 'It is not absolutely imperative that you are part of a union, but no ticket, no start'. It is illegal; it is immoral, and it is depriving these students. And guess what? Welshing on a deal is highly un-Australian.

So too is not looking after our elderly. I have repeatedly lobbied for a pedestrian crossing outside Waldreas Lodge retirement village in Wantirna Road, Ringwood. Hundreds and hundreds of people have either been at rallies, signed petitions, written to me or rung my office and said they can see what is so inevitable. There will be a death on Wantirna Road outside this village. The only people who cannot see this are VicRoads and the minister. This is so short sighted; it is so myopic. The government cannot see that when it has a surplus of \$800 million plus a few hundred thousand — if that! — could be used to prevent the death of perhaps an elderly citizen or a child crossing the road to go to school. A

death is a death, and no price is high enough to pay for a life. No price should be put on building that crossing. It does not matter what it costs; if it is going to save a life, we need to build it. If the government has got \$800 million to spare, I can give it some good ideas on what to do with it.

This state has record revenue. Whether it is from the taxes derived from gambling or whether it is from stamp duty or land tax or whatever the money is being derived from, there is record revenue, yet this government is cunningly hiding waiting lists in hospitals. There are waiting lists for waiting lists, which are waiting lists for the next waiting lists. And the government is cunning in the way it hides this. We could probably go back into the record and find the Premier giving the promise of world-class health for Victorians. He said that world-class health would be delivered to Victorians wherever and whenever it was needed. I bet no parent of a Labor politician is on a waiting list. I can pretty well guarantee that. I would love somebody to challenge me on that one. No wonder the government needs over 1000 public servants to create the spin and the good public relations. Because otherwise the Brumby bunch would be sitting on the opposition benches right now, and we would have a fiscally responsible Baillieu government in Victoria, which is where we need it right now.

The government does not take crime seriously either, and that is a shame. The people of Bayswater deserve so much better. The government talks about the crime statistics being down. It should have a look at Knox and Maroondah, my other local government areas. My policemen and policewomen are stressed; they are out on stress leave. Those who are still there are stretched to the limit. You know what? We cannot get enough people on the streets. We cannot get enough police out there to help us, but that is okay — bicycle theft is down! I think that is a really good thing. If I were to leave my bike perhaps at the station — which of course would mean I would catch the train, but that would be overcrowded too — my bicycle would probably be safe, but do not talk about rapes, murders and abductions in my electorate.

All I want to say to this government is: stop wasting my taxes on new billion-dollar transport ticketing systems and start delivering the services you promised to the people of Bayswater and to all Victorians. This government has at various times claimed that its no. 1 priority is education — prove it! I have also heard it claim that its no. 1 priority is health. Which is it, education or health? If it is health, it should prove it. What about the claim it made, at the stage when people were in uproar about water, that its no. 1 priority was

water? We saw it not prove that one. I dare those on the Labor side to prove it. The most likely thing that will be proven from this time until the next election is that the people of Victoria are going to come to their senses. They are starting to realise after eight years of this Labor government that it is a spin-driven government with no accountability, no substance and no moral decency.

**Mr PERERA** (Cranbourne) — I am very delighted to speak on this exciting annual statement of government intentions. I am very excited, even though opposition members are not. It is fair to say once again that Victoria is leading not just the nation but the whole world in its move to be up front about the forward legislative program.

This is another measure aimed at strengthening accountability and providing more opportunities for the public to participate in the government's legislative program. Now Victorians have the opportunity to do research a lot more broadly on their particular areas of interest and to participate in the debate later when the bills are introduced to the Parliament.

It provides ample time for the opposition to broadly prepare in the lead-up to the bills and engage in the consultation and discussion process. In the future there will be no excuses to grumble about insufficient time to prepare for debates. If the opposition chooses to organise protesters on a particular issue, now it will have more time to do so. This statement is opposition friendly. Members of the opposition know this well, and they love the concept of the annual statement of government intentions, but this being the negative opposition that it is, its members will like to whinge about it.

This is a plan for the next 12 months to let all Victorians know how the law is going to change in this state and hence how their lives are going to be affected. I am sure that Victorians will appreciate the Brumby government being up front about what it is about. It will also provide an opportunity for the government to give the community feedback well ahead of introducing the bills to the Parliament.

The statement will be a great tool not only for students of politics but for everybody who is keen on the political process. In the statement each bill is summarised into categories: a short description with the background, the main elements of the bill, the proposed process, related documents, the existing legislation in the area and a list of the responsible ministers. This provides sufficient information for any interested party to have knowledge of, firstly, the reason behind the

bringing in of a particular piece of legislation to Parliament; secondly, the main features of a bill and how it will affect all Victorians; thirdly, the process of implementation if it is cumbersome and complex; fourthly, the related documents that can enhance their knowledge and help them participate effectively in the debate; fifthly, the current pieces of legislation related to the new bill; and sixthly, the responsible ministers if Victorians need to communicate with them. The responsible ministers are listed both in the statement and on the website.

This statement answers a lot of questions which have been raised with me by my constituents regarding the pieces of legislation about to go through the Parliament. It will be very handy for a constituent to have the statement to enable them to do a lot of the groundwork before going to their local member's office.

It is amazing that the opposition is talking down this statement. Given it cannot disagree with the concept, the opposition is beating around the bush by talking about individual issues that are not relevant to the statement.

The debate should be about how comprehensive the statement is and whether it is helpful or unhelpful for Victorians to participate extensively in the progress of government legislation and to have the opportunities to participate in important issues such as education and health reforms, securing water, public transport challenges, road safety issues, drug and alcohol reforms, and planning and the environment.

Unfortunately opposition speakers have conveniently avoided debating the statement broadly. I have not heard any opposition member speaking on the statement broadly. There have been no recommendations for improving the statement in the future. Instead they have chosen to speak on everything else under the sun and not about the effects of the statement on the lives of Victorians. They have completely ignored debating the concepts behind the statement of government intentions. Opposition members have sounded like they have been participating in a grievance debate.

This is not the time to debate individual bills and issues or talk up the issue of the protesters behaving in an unruly fashion in the public gallery. This is the time to congratulate the government on the bold move to be up front about the government's plans for the next 12 months. It is the time to argue about how we could improve the statement to attract greater participation by the public in parliamentary debate.

The annual statement of government intentions is not about providing additional police resources or infrastructure projects or putting numbers against health, education or water. It is not a time for talking about the number of nurses, teachers or police recruited by the Bracks and Brumby governments or about the previous Kennett government and how it sacked nurses, teachers and police. This is about the broader concept of the government's intentions and of presenting those intentions 12 months ahead of the program.

This is a groundbreaking document that further strengthens our democratic system. I support the annual statement of government intentions, and I congratulate the Brumby government.

**Ms WOOLDRIDGE** (Doncaster) — I rise to speak on the annual statement of government intentions. What the Premier yesterday described as an historic occasion and a great day for Victorian democracy was about nothing more than empty rhetoric. The government has positioned its new annual statement of government intentions as a measure to increase its accessibility and accountability and as a new way of strengthening the trust the community places in government. It sounds good, but these statements warrant further investigation.

When this government's record is scrutinised it becomes abundantly clear that there is a vast chasm between what it says and what it does. In terms of accountability, question time, questions on notice and freedom of information are systemically abused by the Premier and his ministers — a fact that cannot be obscured by shallow public relations stunts. I will not say any more on this, as I spoke extensively in this chamber on this issue on Tuesday.

In terms of the government's forward agenda, firstly under 'Reducing harm from alcohol', members will be well aware that I have spoken about the elusive Victorian alcohol action plan and the associated document on a number of occasions. I find it interesting that while all the other related documents referred to in the statement of intentions are referenced and actually exist — the Law Reform Committee report refers to its website; the section of public transport issues refers to the Meeting Our Transport Challenges policy; and a media release can even be classified under this report as a related document, as it refers to the flower show — the Victorian alcohol action plan, a related document, remains a phantom. That is because, despite its being listed as a related document, there isn't one!

A Google of the VAAP, as it is called, brings up, as the first response, a Department of Human Services document which says:

The government will release a draft alcohol action plan for consultation in December 2005.

What a joke! It still has not happened. The history of the VAAP sums up Labor's negligence in this area.

In 2002 Labor first announced that it was developing a Victorian alcohol action plan. Since then it has vacillated and wavered and ultimately delivered us nothing. In 2004 the now Minister for Education said there was additional resourcing in that year's budget to develop the plan. Then in 2006 Labor promised that the VAAP was currently being finalised, only to subsequently concede that only a draft would be developed by the end of 2006–07. The Minister for Mental Health's line last year, like that of her predecessor in 2004, is that funds from a recent budget will see the development of the Victorian alcohol action plan.

Labor has failed to meet any of the ever-changing time lines it has set for the completion of this plan. As a result I shall not be holding my breath waiting for the VAAP that is promised, once again, in this statement of intentions.

Interestingly the only legislation planned for the minister is in this area of alcohol and drugs. In all her time as a minister this will be her first piece of legislation, and I suspect it will be one of those bills that the Deputy Premier describes as not to be brought before the Parliament until 2009. I say to the minister and the Labor government: no more excuses! Alcohol is an issue which is killing young Victorians every week, and we need action.

The document lists several policy responses on the issue of alcohol abuse which are all punitive. These measures may well be warranted, but I am concerned that prevention does not appear on Labor's agenda. Rather than simply focusing on dealing with people once there is a crisis or after a serious incident has occurred, all the evidence tells us that the best results are gained by intervening early through education and through timely treatment. Under Labor, treatment facilities are underfunded, leaving them swamped and unable to meet the demand. In fact just this week there have been new reports of burgeoning demand. Sam Biondo, chief executive of the Victorian Drug and Alcohol Association, said:

The waiting lists are already massive, and when people are told to wait they don't have anywhere to go and often don't try again.

As a society we will not be able to seriously tackle alcohol issues and the terrible consequences they bring unless we invest in prevention and treatment services.

But last year Labor cut the alcohol and drug services budget by over 3 per cent. The government commitment in this area is sorely lacking. Another massive area that has obviously fallen off the government's agenda — if, indeed, it was ever on it — is mental health. But since Labor, with great fanfare, appointed the new health minister it has presided over both stagnating investment and reform, and mental health does not even appear in its work plan for 2008.

The statement of government intentions says that over the last three years mental health services have been transformed. The reality is, though, that while under the Kennett government Victoria led the nation in terms of investment and reform in mental health, we have now slipped back to the rest of the pack and the data consistently shows this. Further reform, especially in areas such as child and adolescent services and supported accommodation, is desperately needed. However, if the statement of government intentions is correct, none will be forthcoming in the next year.

Another important area that continues to be neglected is ageing. Over the next 10 years the number of Victorians over 60 will increase by more than 70 per cent, and the numbers are even more significant in country Victoria. On Tuesday the Premier had, as he called it, an 'historic occasion' to outline a long-term plan to tackle the challenges and embrace the opportunities. Yet he utterly failed to propose any current or future investment in our ageing population. There is one mention relating to senior Victorians, where he talked about supporting elderly to be more active in their communities, which is worthwhile. But what about policies for the delivery of hospital and dental care? What about transport, planning, housing, water and community services, all of which should reflect the needs of older Victorians? To quote the Premier's own words in a second-reading speech he gave in 1995:

... we have an ageing population who tend to consume health services more than other people in the community.

More than a decade later, this has become an even greater challenge. People aged over 65 account for almost 50 per cent of the multi-day patient stays in our public hospitals. The disability burden from dementia is set to overtake depression by 2016, and in Victoria alone we have almost a million unpaid carers, many of whom are providing care to the frail elderly.

Amidst all of this we have seen no leadership, only token reform. Despite all the rhetoric and flowery words contained in this statement, the Premier's intentions for 2008 will mean very little to my Doncaster constituents. For instance, while the Premier

crowds that there has been significant progress in developing a transport network that responds to Victoria's future needs, commuters crowding onto buses each day in my electorate will not share those sentiments. Nor will those people who spend hours each day crawling along the Eastern Freeway in traffic snarls. In fact many are fearful that the situation will significantly worsen when EastLink opens later this year.

Doncaster is a government-designated principal activity centre under Melbourne 2030, and yet it has no train or tram services. After months of public agitation the government has reluctantly brought forward a review of bus services. I am pleased that the review will finally give Doncaster residents a chance to directly express their frustrations about government inaction. This government has failed to take the next step and make any major commitment on how it will work to ease the critical transport problems that are being faced now. The improved bus services it promised are still up to two years away. I agree with the government when it says there is still more that needs to be done. Addressing the chronic transport problems in Doncaster should be high on that agenda.

There are major challenges facing Victoria, a few of which I have outlined in my speech this afternoon. Lasting and substantial reform is not about hollow words; it is about action. This holds true for social policy and service provision as much as it does for government accountability. Given this government's record on abusing the freedom of information system and parliamentary procedures, it is hard to take the Premier seriously when he speaks about open and accessible government. Similarly, the remarks contained in the glossy statement of government intentions about reform of social policy and service provision are sharply at odds with reality. The Premier needs to cut the rhetoric and stop spinning. No more excuses, Premier. Now is the time to act.

**Ms MARSHALL** (Forest Hill) — I am pleased to rise and make a contribution to the debate on the 2008 annual statement of government intentions, which has yet again shown the Brumby government's commitment to ensuring that government in Victoria is not only a system of real democracy that reflects the needs, desires and expectations of Victorians but guarantees that our parliamentary system is thoroughly up to date with the fast-paced and rapidly evolving electronic information and communication network. I for one have been surrounded by computers my entire life. Accessing information through the web is my first preference as opposed to the last, as some opposite have clearly shown. That issue aside, this statement

makes the government more accessible and accountable by allowing the media, those in Parliament and, so importantly, the Victorian community to know in advance major issues to be debated.

Transparency is a sticky issue for the Liberal and National parties. Having the mentality that their actions should not be questioned has culminated in a result that political commentators 10 years ago could never have predicted — that is, not only every state and territory represented by Labor governments but as a result of the 2007 federal election, Labor in power throughout Australia.

Over the last week it has been reported in the media that some members of the Victorian Liberal Party felt that Victorians did not know what the Liberal Party stands for. I disagree with this statement entirely. The Victorian public knows exactly what the Liberal Party stands for. As a result, in 1999, 2002 and 2006 it elected the Labor Party with the knowledge that Victoria is continually heading in a positive direction that provides us all with a state that is a great place to live, to work and to raise a family. This statement continues that tradition, that Labor philosophy of ensuring transparency in the decision-making process, by providing Victorians with the opportunity to comment not just once every four years but every step of the way with every piece of legislation.

Some of the reforms this government has introduced were subtle — a more regular sitting schedule, allocation of more time for question time, reform of the parliamentary committee system and the reform of sessional orders. Some reforms have been less subtle — such as, restoring the powers of the Auditor-General and enshrining in the Victorian constitution the independence of the Ombudsman, the Electoral Commissioner and the Director of Public Prosecutions. Accessibility has been addressed by regional parliamentary sittings in Ballarat, Benalla, Bendigo, Colac and Geelong, in addition to the meeting of 80 community cabinets right across the state.

This document creates unprecedented transparency for the Victorian government. We consider transparency to be a means of holding public officials accountable and as a means of fighting corruption. When government meetings are open to the media and the public, when financial statements and budgets are able to be analysed by anyone, and when rules, laws, proposed legislation and decisions are open to discussion, we have a systematic reduction in the capacity of any one person or group to manipulate the system in their own interest.

The definition of Liberal democracy is interesting — that is, where decisions are taken behind locked doors and the people have only a very small possibility, if any, of influencing politics between elections. That is what the Liberal Party stands for.

**Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.**

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella)** — Order! The time set down for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived. I am therefore required to interrupt business.

**CRIMES AMENDMENT (CHILD HOMICIDE) BILL**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed from 6 February; motion of Mr HULLS (Attorney-General).**

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AMENDMENT BILL**

*Second reading*

**Debate resumed from 5 February; motion of Mr HULLS (Attorney-General).**

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read second time.**

*Third reading*

**Motion agreed to.**

**Read third time.**

**ANNUAL STATEMENT OF GOVERNMENT INTENTIONS**

**Debate resumed from earlier this day.**

**Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill)** — I come back to the reason the Liberal Party is an endangered species,

not only here in Victoria but in every part of this country. It is far removed from the philosophy of Labor, which is about participatory democracy and which results in Labor being much more closely connected to the will of the people.

I am proud to represent the beautiful electorate of Forest Hill, an electorate that prior to my arrival was decimated by the closure of schools and a reduction in the number of police locally. In the past few years I have seen the easing of pressure on highly stressed hospital staff as a result of a huge increase, proportionately, in the number of nurses provided. The people who live in Forest Hill have continually contacted me and come to see me to ensure that I am aware of the contrast they see between Liberal and Labor philosophy.

Any member of the opposition who says their philosophy and direction is unclear should make no mistake: this statement of government intentions positions the Labor Party again at the forefront of democratic reform. It reminds Victorians of the stark contrast between the Labor Party and the Liberal Party, which sees transparency, accountability and freedom of information as a direct threat to its ability to rule. My deepest congratulations to every person involved in this document. It makes me very proud to support the Brumby government's statement of intent.

**Debate adjourned on motion of Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen).**

**Debate adjourned until later this day.**

**Remaining business postponed on motion of Mr WYNNE (Minister for Housing).**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Nardella)** — The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

**Disability services: supported accommodation**

**Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster)** — I raise a matter of concern for the Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Community Services. The action I seek is for her to comprehensively investigate and review the state government's provision of supported accommodation for Victorians with a disability or mental illness. This is an issue I have raised previously in this place, but I do so again with this specific request, because supported accommodation for people with

mental illness or a disability is in crisis. An open and comprehensive review is needed, as this government has failed to act, failed to avert the crisis and failed to come up with new ideas.

Time and time again, in the areas of both mental health and disability, individuals, families and community organisations have said the biggest issue is accommodation. It is time to do something about it. Those with a disability are forced to wait over four years on average for a place in a community residential unit, placing an unacceptable burden on families.

The waiting list provided this week by the Department of Human Services shows that there were 1368 people with a significant disability waiting for supported accommodation. The numbers are up from June last year. Under Labor, 46 per cent of inpatient mental health hospital beds are blocked because of chronic shortages due to lack of discharge options. Some 65 per cent of people in secure extended care units and 30 per cent in community care units stay over 300 days because there is simply no supported accommodation available in the community. That there is a need for a review and ultimately for further investment is not just my opinion or even just the opinion of those in the sector; it is also the opinion of the independent watchdog. The community visitors released a series of scathing reports at the end of last year slamming the Brumby government's handling of accommodation for vulnerable Victorians.

The consequences of Labor's failures in this area are grave. For many, homelessness is a result; others are left to languish in privately run low-care facilities that are not set up or staffed to support the 66 per cent of clients who have a mental illness or the increasing numbers of young people who have to reside there.

This is Labor's system of supported accommodation for some of the most vulnerable members of our community, and it is simply not good enough. That is why I am asking the Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Community Services to undertake a full review that really quantifies unmet need and the massive gaps in the current system; that looks at accommodation as a whole, incorporating both people with a disability and people with a mental illness; and that importantly looks at the impact on Victorian families of the current system in crisis. Vulnerable Victorians deserve better from the Brumby government on supported accommodation. New thinking and new ideas which chart a new way forward through such a review are the best way to make sure that they get it.

### Geelong Hospital: equipment

**Mr TREZISE** (Geelong) — I raise an issue for action with the Minister for Health, and it relates to funding for new medical equipment at Barwon Health, or more specifically Geelong Hospital. I can assure you, Acting Speaker, and the house that since the election of the Bracks government — now the Brumby government — in 1999, Barwon Health, including Geelong Hospital and institutions such as the MacKellar Centre, has seen a complete renaissance of infrastructure and service delivery. However, as the minister is well aware, there is always more that can be done, especially in areas such as the upgrade of new technology and medical equipment. Therefore the action I seek is for the minister to ensure the provision of further funding for medical equipment at Geelong Hospital.

As I said, since the election of this government the community of Geelong has witnessed unprecedented rebuilding and refurbishment of its public health sector. As compared to the long, dark years of our predecessors, when half of Geelong Hospital was sold off, nurses were sacked and wards with numerous beds were shut down, this government has continued to fulfil its promise of creating a world-class public health sector in Geelong. Hundreds of extra nursing staff have been employed since 1999; the Andrew Love oncology centre has now reopened, having been extended and completely refurbished to the tune of something like \$26 million; and the MacKellar Centre has been transformed from a 19th century institution to a magnificent 21st century state-of-the-art and world-class rehabilitation and aged-care facility; we are currently in the midst of extending the accident and emergency department to the tune of \$20 million plus; and the list goes on — as you well know, Acting Speaker, because I know you are a regular visitor to our fair city of Geelong.

As I said before, there is always more that can be done, and the ongoing adequate funding of medical equipment is one such example. I can assure the house that the Minister for Health is a regular visitor to Barwon Health, and he is always warmly welcomed. On his regular visits the minister has become well aware of Geelong Hospital and its future requirements. In fact it would be accurate to say that the Minister for Health has established a very good working relationship and a partnership with the executive managers and the board of Geelong Hospital to ensure that it continues to operate effectively and efficiently.

As you are well aware, Acting Speaker, future ongoing funding is important for Geelong Hospital and Barwon

Health in general, and I look forward to the minister's ongoing commitment to our hospital.

### **Clean Up Australia Day**

**Mr WELLER** (Rodney) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports pertaining to Clean Up Australia Day. The action I seek is that the minister shorten the process by which volunteers obtain permission to clean the verges of the state's roads. Every year communities and individuals band together and work to clean up, fix up and conserve our environment on Clean Up Australia Day. Over the past 16 years Australians nationwide have spent more than 8 million hours picking up litter along the sides of our roads and have collected more than 200 000 tonnes of rubbish, yet despite the good work and goodwill of these volunteers in Victoria, their efforts to gain permission from VicRoads to clean the verges of the authority's roads are hampered by reels of red tape.

The current process is such that volunteers spend more time negotiating legal permission through VicRoads than they do actually picking up the rubbish. Not only must they obtain written approval from local government, but they must also obtain approval from Victoria Police and all relevant local authorities, on top of which prior to the event organisers must submit a traffic management plan to VicRoads which complies with the work-site safety traffic management code of practice. Emergency service organisations also need to be informed, along with the public transport authorities that may be affected. Once those requirements are satisfied, organisers are expected to organise road signage and furnish their volunteers with protective clothing.

All things considered, it is no surprise that the head office of Clean Up Australia believes VicRoads to be the most difficult road authority in the nation. Volunteers are understandably bemused by such overzealous bureaucratic control. Whilst they are making a tremendous effort to do a job that is rightly VicRoads' responsibility, VicRoads is doing very little to assist them. The thousands who turn out across the state are evidence of the enthusiasm that exists in the broader community. Thus far their passion for a cleaner and more beautiful Victoria has convinced them to persist, but the passion is measured with equal parts of frustration. I am certain that the lengthy and convoluted process organisers are currently going through can be dramatically reduced without risking the safety of the event's volunteers and the general public.

The government's procedures are in desperate need of reform. We should be implementing policies that

provide strong incentive for our volunteers. Planning processes should be effortless, unlike the military-style operations that we currently see. I ask the minister to review the sanctions as a matter of priority so that volunteers may proceed unhampered with their clean-up next month.

### **Consumer affairs: Hewlett-Packard**

**Mr LIM** (Clayton) — I rise to raise a matter with the Minister for Consumer Affairs, and it concerns the lack of customer support by Hewlett-Packard. I request the minister to ask his department to take up this matter with Hewlett-Packard. I was recently contacted by a longstanding Hewlett-Packard customer who was annoyed that when he needed the support of HP, it was not to be found.

I am sure all members will be aware that Microsoft has released a new operating system, Windows Vista. When consumers upgrade the operating system on an existing computer or buy a new computer with a new operating system it is necessary for them to update the device drivers for peripheral equipment such as printers, scanners and the like. Drivers are pieces of software that allow the computer to use other devices such as printers. With the release of every new operating system, it is routine for companies that manufacture equipment such as printers and scanners to post updated drivers on their websites so that their customers can continue to use their existing equipment.

The HP customer who contacted me had bought a new home computer running Windows Vista. He successfully updated the drivers for his printers. He then turned to his scanner, a HP Scanjet 5370c. To his dismay he found this message on HP's website, which I have confirmed by going to the site myself:

We are sorry to inform you that there will be no Windows Vista support available for your HP product. Therefore your product will not work with Windows Vista. If you are using the Windows Vista operating system on your computer, please consider upgrading to a newer HP product that is supported on Windows Vista.

This is code for 'Bad luck, you can throw your scanner out. You might be a loyal customer but we won't support you. By the way, we would love to flog you a new scanner!'. This customer is so annoyed he says he will be buying anything but a HP.

Hewlett-Packard is failing both consumers and the environment by encouraging the discarding of perfectly good scanners. I urge the company to reconsider its decision, to be less selfish and to be a good corporate citizen. In the meantime I request that the minister

instruct Consumer Affairs Victoria to pursue this issue with Hewlett-Packard.

### **Road safety: traffic lights**

**Mr CLARK** (Box Hill) — I raise with the Minister for Roads and Ports the issue of the manner in which traffic lights are returned to full operation after they have been in flashing light mode and the way in which the return to full operation is coordinated with traffic light cameras. I ask the minister to look at changing these arrangements to ensure that motorists are not incorrectly issued with infringement notices if they happen to be about to enter an intersection when traffic lights return to full operation.

Recently a constituent approached me after she was issued with an infringement notice alleging failure to obey traffic lights. The facts were that a number of traffic lights in the area where she was driving had been on flashing amber at the time and that as my constituent approached a set of flashing lights the lights turned to red just as she reached the intersection, with no time for her to stop.

My constituent's initial application for internal review was rejected, but she persevered and obtained written documentation from VicRoads confirming that the traffic lights in question were out of operation from approximately 11.19 a.m. to 12.18 p.m. on the day in question, apparently due to a power failure, and a letter from CitiPower confirming that there was a power supply interruption to the relevant traffic lights on that day between 11.20 a.m. and 12.19 p.m. The approximate time of offence shown on the infringement notice was 12.19 p.m.

I am pleased to say that Victoria Police accepted this additional evidence and withdrew the infringement notice, and I thank it for that. However, it should not require hours of work and determination by an individual citizen to clear her name. Traffic lights and traffic cameras should not be set up in such a way that the instant a flashing traffic light returns to normal the light goes to red and a traffic camera is triggered on an unsuspecting motorist. There would seem to be several ways in which the problem could be solved. Lights could be set to return to a period of steady amber before they change to red, or traffic cameras could be set either to not trigger on the first red light or else to record that the red light in question was the first red displayed after lights returned to normal operation.

Whatever the best solution, a solution should be readily available, and I ask the minister to take up this issue and act to have the manner of operation of traffic lights

and/or traffic cameras altered so that other innocent citizens are not put in the unfortunate and distressing circumstances that my constituent faced of being unjustly issued with an infringement notice when she had been driving sensibly, responsibly and in accordance with the law.

### **Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative: children's services**

**Mr EREN** (Lara) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. I would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate the minister on her commitment to providing high-quality children's services in my electorate.

The issue I wish to raise is in relation to the Wathaurong Aboriginal Cooperative, which is an Aboriginal community-controlled health organisation based in my electorate that is providing vital services to the local indigenous community. Wathaurong provides a wide range of programs and services including health, family and community services, education, cultural heritage and the Milla Milla playgroup. The playgroup has operated very successfully for over 25 years. It is coordinated by two very energetic and enthusiastic young mums, who are great role models for the community and who run the playgroup four days a week. These young mums are currently undertaking a child-care course to become qualified to work in licensed children's services programs.

Wathaurong secured \$1.5 million funding from the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health to construct a multipurpose health facility, which was completed in July 2006. As part of this project, the cooperative has sought to relocate the playgroup from the premises in which the service is currently provided to a purpose-built facility on the same site as the health facility and extend the children's services they provide to include occasional care.

In late 2005 Wathaurong was successful in its application to the City of Greater Geelong for funding, and subsequently \$200 000 was secured towards the construction of the children's services centre. This funding has enabled the cooperative to get the centre to the lock-up stage. Unfortunately Wathaurong has been unable to secure funding to complete the construction and fit-out of this vital facility. The action I am seeking is support from the minister for this important project and funding towards the completion of the children's centre.

### Police: country residences

**Mr McINTOSH (Kew)** — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The matter I raise is the recently discovered plan to close some 45 police houses in country Victoria. The action I seek from the minister is for him to intervene in the process to stop this sinister plan from proceeding. The proposal might see the end of the local copper in some 45 country towns like Heywood, Timboon, Daylesford, Dimboola, Woodend, Rochester, Euroa, Rutherglen, Tallangatta, Myrtleford, Orbost, Foster and Cowes, to name but a few.

The member for South-West Coast has already raised in a public forum the possible demise of the police residence in Heywood, north of Portland in his electorate. The recent departure of its local copper has seen the Heywood police residence earmarked for closure and sale. Peter Hunt of the *Weekly Times* has recently exposed a far broader and more sinister plot to sell some 45 residences and — worse! — to apply the proceeds of the sales of these various homes not locally but elsewhere in country Victoria. This robbing-Peter-to-pay-Paul mentality not only sees the demise of the local copper but, as I said, sees the money applied elsewhere.

Having a senior police officer reside in a town has worked extremely well in many communities for many years. The local copper is seen to have a stake in the community, is part of the community and in many cases is looked to for leadership. The mere presence of a local copper can deter crime and provide a first response at many times of emergency or when the community needs protection.

Over the last 12 months I have had the opportunity to visit many police residences, including Heywood, and in particular I have seen the dilapidated condition of that home. It is disgraceful that the government has allowed police residences to run down so that many are old, dilapidated and unfit for families to live in. The occupational health and safety issues created would be completely unacceptable in Melbourne, so why are they acceptable in country Victoria? It makes attracting senior police officers to country Victoria even more difficult. Worse, the government is using getting around its responsibility to provide adequate housing as a justification for getting rid of a local copper.

It is incumbent upon the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to ensure that police residences are maintained in an appropriate, habitable condition and are not flogged off. I call upon the minister to intervene in this process to ensure that the proposal that has been

put forward by Victoria Police to close some 45 police residences is immediately scotched in order to put an end to the concern and give comfort to those 45 communities around country Victoria that they are not going to lose their local copper.

### YMCA Bridge Project: funding

**Mr NOONAN (Williamstown)** — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation. The action I seek from the minister is that she consider favourably an application from the YMCA Bridge Project for further funding under the Workforce Participation Partnerships (WPP) program. As the minister may recall, in my inaugural speech last year I made reference to my role as the foundation chair of the bridge project, a role which I held in a voluntary and unpaid capacity.

By way of background, the bridge project was launched in 2005 to improve the life outcomes of young offenders transitioning from custody to community. Almost two-thirds of the young men in custody are reoffenders, with the highest risk period for reoffending in the first year of release, when reoffending rates are three to four times higher than during the second year. Through previous funding from the WPP program and support from community and business, the bridge project has been able to offer a range of innovative programs which have delivered meaningful outcomes in the areas of self-esteem, personal development and industry appreciation training for young offenders.

In 2007 the bridge project provided training in the transport and motor vehicle industries for 20 young men in custody. More importantly the project delivered job placements for a further 30 young men leaving custody. Jobs have been sourced in industries as diverse as motoring, engineering, landscaping, bricklaying, and sport and recreation. The feedback from employers has been terrific, as many of the young men embrace the opportunity to become valued members of the community again. These training and job opportunities are already changing lives, because statistically, without the support of the bridge project, we could have expected that up to 20 of these young people may have reoffended by now. However, I am extremely pleased to report that not one young person who commenced a work placement through the bridge project in 2007 has reoffended, which is a truly remarkable achievement for the entire Victorian community.

In a positive development I note the Victorian government announced in late 2007 that it would allocate a further \$2.5 million into WPP for the 2008 year and that organisations such as the YMCA were

welcome to apply for further funding to support people with significant barriers to employment. I think I can speak from personal experience when I say that juvenile offenders with little work or life experience face enormous barriers to employment and need all the support from government and the community to transition from custody to becoming valued members of our society again.

In closing, I thank the minister for her strong support for such initiatives and would encourage her to consider favourably the funding application from the bridge project so that this unprecedented success that the bridge project is bringing to our state can continue and flourish.

### **Ambulance services: mental health patients**

**Mr DELAHUNTY** (Lowan) — It is with a sad heart and some frustration that I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health, and I am pleased to see he is in the chamber. The issue concerns the transport and accommodation of mental health patients in western Victoria. The action I request is that the minister provide resources and timely transport for mental health patients from the Wimmera Base Hospital in Horsham.

The background of this issue is that a nurse brought to my attention her concern for the safety of staff and the need for optimum care for mental health patients at the Wimmera Base Hospital. This hospital has the only 24-hour accident and emergency department ranging from Ballarat to the South Australian border. In the past mental health patients, after assessment, if need be, were transported by ambulance to Ballarat, which is the nearest location. Now they are held overnight because Rural Ambulance Victoria only has one paramedic crew servicing the Horsham district and the wider community ranging from Ararat to the border. It now refuses to take mental health patients overnight.

Mental health patients who have been assessed and await transfer, usually to Ballarat, now have to wait in the emergency department, placing at risk themselves, other users of the service and the nurses and the doctors. Mental health patients now wait for up to 16½ hours. The average time over nine months from January to September last year was 8½ hours. This means that health staff, police and security are called in to watch these patients for their own safety and that of others. I am also informed that over the last 12 months there have been 175 nights when no ambulance service has been available to transfer mental health patients or emergency work covering that wide region.

I have arranged deputations for Wimmera Health Care Group to meet with the minister. Unfortunately both of those have been postponed. Yesterday I attended a briefing from Department of Human Services staff and Rural Ambulance Victoria. I think I told them more about what was happening in my region than they were telling me.

I suggested solutions. Firstly, the easiest solution is to provide a second paramedic crew to service the Wimmera region from, as I said, the South Australian border to Ararat. The crew could service not only mental health patients but also the wider community. As I also said, on 175 nights there was no service. The second solution is to have one of the Ballarat crews — there are three down there — come up and collect the mental health patients if need be, but this is not ideal. A third solution would be to fund more mental health staff, training and facilities for the optimum care of these mental health patients. I raise this matter again with a deeply sad heart that it has taken so long to resolve.

My understanding is that discussions and workshops have been going on for two years, but we do not seem to get any action. I call on the minister to take action on this very important matter.

### **Housing: large family accommodation**

**Ms THOMSON** (Footscray) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing. The action I seek from the minister is to ensure that social housing funded by the state government also caters for people with larger families. I know that the minister is very committed and passionate about providing a mix of public housing that meets the needs of those who rely on it.

Last Tuesday I was fortunate enough to be with the minister during a visit to a \$1.5 million social housing development funded by the Brumby government. The government's record commitment in this area is certainly obvious and well known. The homes we looked at — the development of which was supported by Melbourne Affordable Housing and the Baptist Union of Victoria — are four-bedroom homes which have been built to cater to larger families. This is very important in my electorate of Footscray, which has an African community, the members of which have moved into the area as refugees and have large families. The issue is also important for families who are looking after elderly parents or members of their extended family. They also have to be supported in larger homes so that their needs are taken into account.

The Minister for Housing and I had a chance to look at one of the new houses that was tenanted at Christmas. It was beautifully furnished with obvious love and appreciation by the new tenants, who are a newly arrived family from Africa, including four children. It certainly was a pleasure to see the excitement on their faces because they had adequate and appropriate accommodation in the place in which they want to live.

There are many such families in my electorate and throughout Victoria who would benefit from a mix of housing that includes large four-bedroom homes. While I understand the priority for single accommodation, I ask the minister to direct the Office of Housing to look at supplying larger homes with more bedrooms.

**Debate interrupted.**

## RULINGS BY THE CHAIR

### Freedom of information: report 2006–07

**The SPEAKER** — Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition raised a point of order earlier today regarding the tabling of the freedom of information annual report 2006–07. I can report to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition that the Secretary of the Department of Justice will be writing today to the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of The Nationals outlining the correction of a number of errors contained in the version of the annual report that was tabled on 6 December 2007.

**Debate resumed.**

### Responses

**Mr ANDREWS** (Minister for Health) — I am very pleased to respond to an important matter raised by the member for Geelong. I think it is fair to say that he is a very passionate advocate on behalf of his local community and someone who takes a great interest in the very best health care not only for residents of Geelong but for residents of the broader Barwon and south-west region.

I am very pleased to inform the member that tomorrow I will journey to Barwon Health for an important visit. I have been a frequent visitor to that fine, first-class health service, both in my previous role as the parliamentary secretary and since becoming Minister for Health. It is very good to be able to go back there. Barwon Health does a great job. Obviously the service has been assisted by a 100 per cent funding boost since we came to government in 1999, together with other very important supports in relation to capital funding.

The member raised specifically the issue of upgrades to medical equipment. We know that in order to support the dedicated clinicians and other staff who work at Barwon Health and other services to treat more patients and provide better care and to meet the health challenges of the future, we need to continue to support them with the best medical equipment possible.

I am very pleased to inform the member for Geelong that as part of my visit tomorrow, which will involve meetings with senior management and inspecting progress on the new emergency department, which I believe is a \$26 million commitment in terms of funding, I will also make announcements about \$763 000 worth of medical equipment as part of the government's record — —

**Mr Eren** — How much?

**Mr ANDREWS** — I should not forget the member for Lara, who is in the chamber and who is also a passionate advocate on behalf of his local community.

**Mr Wynne** — How much is it again?

**Mr ANDREWS** — Some \$763 000 — a very substantial investment. It is the most recent example of this government's commitment to providing the best possible health care for Geelong families.

I mentioned a 100 per cent funding increase — from \$114 million in recurrent funding in 1999, the last year of the former government, to some \$228 million this year. It is a very substantial funding increase in every way and will give the dedicated staff and those who work so hard to run the first-class health services at Barwon Health the resources they need. In a practical sense, it will mean 369 extra nurses. That is one-third more than were employed across Barwon Health in 1999. Again it is a very practical demonstration of our government's record support for families in that growing and very important part of our state.

The member for Geelong and his colleagues — most notably the member for Lara, who is in the chamber at the moment — can rest assured that this government will continue to support families in their local community by giving Geelong Hospital and the other facilities in that region, organised under the banner of Barwon Health, the ongoing support they need. Whether it is medical equipment, ongoing capital works projects or record ongoing funding, the government is in every way supporting the best health care for families in that local community. There is more to be done, but tomorrow will provide yet another example of our commitment to continuing to invest to deliver the best health care in the Geelong community.

The member for Lowan also raised an important matter, which has been the subject of some discussion between him and me and, as I understand it, staff from my private office, together with representatives from the relevant branch within the Department of Human Services and officers of Rural Ambulance Victoria. I met with the member for Lowan yesterday and sought to brief him on a range of matters, issues and strategies and other developments in relation to the query that he raised. I acknowledge his interest in these matters and his longstanding commitment to delivering better outcomes in his local area. He and I have spoken many times, and I think we have an acknowledged shared and long-term interest — if I can be so immodest as to categorise myself — in these matters.

I am very pleased to inform the member for Lowan that the Wimmera Health Care Group, in partnership with Rural Ambulance Victoria, psychiatric services at Ballarat Health Services and the Department of Human Services — regionally and at a Melbourne level — have been working closely on these particular issues. It is important to acknowledge that there are issues to be dealt with, and challenges. We need to meet those and better provide for mental health clients so that they can get the care they need. Where transport is an issue we can work hard to better provide for those needs.

The dignity and the quality of care afforded those clients is important to me, important to the Wimmera Health Care Group and important to the member for Lowan. We will build on some very impressive work that has been done in relation to, for instance, making available a dedicated psychiatrist to provide assistance to staff at Wimmera Health Care Service. The service has access to that particular clinician in relation to assisting in the management of mental health clients. Some work has been done to develop guidelines to assist staff at Wimmera health care in relation to the appropriate medication of mental health clients who may come through that health service.

There has been an expansion of videoconferencing services, again assisted by IT upgrades and other innovations supported by our government. Most recently, in December last year, I think, the member was informed that Rural Ambulance Victoria was working on a range of options which may include over time — and there is some work to be done on this — increases in resources in that particular part of the state and obviously further opportunities for RAV, the Wimmera Health Care Group, Ballarat Health Services psychiatric services and the Department of Human Services to better manage that demand and try to provide even better services on the ground.

These are important matters, as acknowledged by me, as the Minister for Health, and by those who are on the ground providing the service. I am committed — I am sure in concert with the Minister for Mental Health — to continuing to deliver better services to families in the local community, particularly to mental health clients who may get initial care in the local community but who will then require transport to a specialist service some distance away. I am not in a position to make financial commitments tonight, but the member for Lowan can be assured that I take these matters seriously, and we will move to progress the quality of service offered to those who are often some of the most vulnerable members of his local area.

**Mr ROBINSON** (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — The member for Clayton raised a very interesting issue, and I thank him for that. It pertains to customer support that is provided — or not provided, which I think is more accurate — by Hewlett-Packard, particularly in relation to the operating system Vista, which raises, when it is loaded on to computers, some compatibility issues for users in relation to other software components.

This raises both compatibility issues for people buying systems which in the member's opinion they are entitled to believe will be compatible but which are not and the interesting issue of consequential selling. I think in his contribution the member was perhaps suggesting that Hewlett-Packard ought to know that people who buy this product will in all probability need to purchase other packages from the company to make the original purchase work properly. This is a very interesting issue, and I can well appreciate that it causes great frustration for consumers — in particular, the consumer to whom the member alluded.

As a general statement I can say that IT-related complaints make up the fourth or fifth most common complaint category to Consumer Affairs Victoria. We published a list just recently, and that category is rising in importance each year. That is no great surprise, because each year more and more Victorians — and as a general statement that is a good thing — are able to access the internet and engage in the benefits that computer technology brings. However, it is important to ensure that they have fair and reasonable access to products and that the people offering those products, of whom there are more and more every year, do the right thing by those consumers.

Consumer Affairs Victoria has various powers under the Fair Trading Act. It certainly has powers in relation to misleading and deceptive conduct, and it has powers in relation to what it construes to be unfair contract

terms. It is not possible for me to provide immediate advice to the member as to whether the conduct which he outlined to the house in itself represents a breach of the Fair Trading Act or any other legislation, but I will ensure that the matter is passed on to Consumer Affairs Victoria for investigation. I appreciate the member's raising the issue. I think it is an issue that deserves immediate investigation, and I will ensure that the investigation is commenced and that the member in due course receives advice.

**Mr WYNNE** (Minister for Housing) — I am pleased to respond to the member for Footscray, because earlier this week, as the member indicated, we paid a site visit to four properties in Footscray which are part of a project of Melbourne Affordable Housing, one of our housing associations. Melbourne Affordable Housing is doing some really fantastic work in partnership, in this instance, with the Baptist Union, to develop housing options for people in need. Indeed I can indicate to the member that tomorrow I am going to Clifton Hill, in my own electorate, to open another facility which is also a project of Melbourne Affordable Housing and the Baptist Union and which will provide much-needed accommodation for people with a psychiatric disability. It is an excellent partnership between Melbourne Affordable and the Baptist Union.

In this case the four properties constitute a \$1.5 million project to cater for the needs of larger families. As members of the house would be aware, the waiting list for public housing is by and large made up of single people and people with one or two children. But we do, of course, have a strong demand for larger forms of accommodation, and since 1999 the government has increased the number of dwellings with four or more bedrooms by 32 per cent. The challenge for us is to ensure that we have stock that is flexible and is able to meet the needs of the community more generally. We are concerned to ensure that in all of our new developments we provide a mix of stock, from single-bedroom accommodation through to larger stock.

I would point to developments such as the one in Carlton, which is currently out to tender, where we have indicated to the short-listed tenderers that we will be seeking from them expressions of interest in relation to properties that cross the spectrum from one bedroom through to four bedrooms. We have emerging communities of people, particularly from the Horn of Africa, who have made Victoria their home and who in many instances have larger families and include unaccompanied minors in the family constellation.

It is in that context that we need to provide a level of accommodation to meet the needs of those families. Indeed it was a delight to visit the residents and see the real pleasure they had in working with Melbourne Affordable in providing such high-quality accommodation of a very substantial size. They have four bedrooms with a large common area, a common lounge room area and appropriate kitchen facilities. We will be doing more of this work. The record investment of this government — \$500 million — is the biggest investment by any state government ever in public and social housing. These are the sorts of outcomes you get, and these are outcomes that are reflective of the needs of communities.

I thank the member for Footscray for her extraordinary advocacy on behalf of public and social housing in her area. I think I have been out there now two or three times — I am advised I have been out there four times in the last six months — to launch some fantastic projects. We launched a wonderful single-person accommodation in Footscray, this new four-bedroom accommodation, and another one at Sunshine. We will be taking up every opportunity we have to work in partnership with housing associations and in our own right to pursue very vigorously the redevelopment of our large public housing estates. Gordon Street estate is one where we will be doing some work in the next six months. I thank the member for her continued support for the provision of public housing in the western suburbs of Melbourne.

The member for Doncaster raised a matter for the Minister for Mental Health about supported accommodation for people with mental health and disability issues, and I will ensure the minister is advised of that matter.

The member for Rodney raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports regarding difficult bureaucratic issues about the Clean Up Australia Day. I will ensure the minister is made aware of that.

The member for Box Hill also raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports in relation to traffic light operations. I will ensure the minister is aware of that.

The member for Lara raised a matter for the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development in relation to further funding of the Wathaurong cooperative child-care centre, which he said was much needed, and I will ensure the minister is aware of that.

The member for Kew raised a matter for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in relation to the closure of police houses in regional Victoria, and I will

make sure that matter is brought to the minister's attention.

The member for Williamstown raised a matter for the Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation relating to the excellent YMCA Bridge Project for young offenders and the further funding of that excellent project. I will ensure this matter is brought to the minister's attention.

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

**House adjourned 4.48 p.m. until Tuesday,  
26 February.**

