

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Thursday, 4 June 2009

(Extract from book 6)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

Professor DAVID de KRETZER, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

The ministry

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Deputy Premier, Attorney-General and Minister for Racing	The Hon. R. J. Hulls, MP
Treasurer, Minister for Information and Communication Technology, and Minister for Financial Services	The Hon. J. Lenders, MLC
Minister for Regional and Rural Development, and Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation	The Hon. J. M. Allan, MP
Minister for Health	The Hon. D. M. Andrews, MP
Minister for Community Development and Minister for Energy and Resources	The Hon. P. Batchelor, MP
Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and Minister for Corrections	The Hon. R. G. Cameron, MP
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Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs	The Hon. J. A. Merlino, MP
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Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Community Services and Minister for Senior Victorians	The Hon. L. M. Neville, MP
Minister for Industry and Trade, and Minister for Industrial Relations	The Hon. M. P. Pakula, MLC
Minister for Roads and Ports, and Minister for Major Projects	The Hon. T. H. Pallas, MP
Minister for Education	The Hon. B. J. Pike, MP
Minister for Gaming, Minister for Consumer Affairs and Minister Assisting the Premier on Veterans' Affairs	The Hon. A. G. Robinson, MP
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 Lupton, Mr McIntosh and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): Mr D. Davis, Mr Hall, Mr Jennings, Mr Lenders and Ms Pennicuik.

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

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

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 P. Davis 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*): Ms Kairouz, Mr Noonan, Mr Perera, Mrs Powell and Ms Wooldridge. (*Council*): Mr Finn and Mr Scheffer.

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, Mr Foley and Mrs Victoria. (*Council*): Mrs Kronberg 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 Munt, Mr Noonan, Mr Scott, Mr Stensholt, Dr Sykes and Mr Wells. (*Council*): Mr Dalla-Riva, Ms Huppert, Ms Pennicuik and Mr Rich-Phillips.

Road Safety Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Eren, Mr Langdon, Mr Tilley, 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

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

Speaker: The Hon. JENNY LINDELL

Deputy Speaker: Ms A. P. BARKER

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

Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Premier:

The Hon. J. M. BRUMBY

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:

The Hon. R. J. HULLS

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
Andrews, Mr Daniel Michael	Mulgrave	ALP	Lobato, Ms Tamara Louise	Gembrook	ALP
Asher, Ms Louise	Brighton	LP	Lupton, Mr Anthony Gerard	Prahran	ALP
Baillieu, Mr Edward Norman	Hawthorn	LP	McIntosh, Mr Andrew John	Kew	LP
Barker, Ms Ann Patricia	Oakleigh	ALP	Maddigan, Mrs Judith Marilyn	Essendon	ALP
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 ¹	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 ⁵	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
Dixon, Mr Martin Francis	Nepean	LP	Perera, Mr Jude	Cranbourne	ALP
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 ²	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 ³	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 ⁶	Albert Park	ALP
Hudson, Mr Robert John	Bentleigh	ALP	Tilley, Mr William John	Benambra	LP
Hulls, Mr Rob Justin	Niddrie	ALP	Trezise, 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
Kairouz, Ms Marlene ⁴	Kororoit	ALP	Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay	Swan Hill	Nats
Kosky, Ms Lynne Janice	Altona	ALP	Weller, Mr Paul	Rodney	Nats
Kotsiras, Mr Nicholas	Bulleen	LP	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Scoresby	LP
Langdon, Mr Craig Anthony Cuffe	Ivanhoe	ALP	Wooldridge, Ms Mary Louise Newling	Doncaster	LP
Languiller, Mr Telmo Ramon	Derrimut	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP
Lim, Mr Muy Hong	Clayton	ALP			

¹ Resigned 6 August 2007

² Elected 15 September 2007

³ Resigned 2 June 2008

⁴ Elected 28 June 2008

⁵ Elected 15 September 2007

⁶ Resigned 6 August 2007

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Thursday, 4 June 2009

The SPEAKER (Hon. Jenny Lindell) took the chair at 9.34 a.m. and read the prayer.

ACTING DIRECTOR, POLICE INTEGRITY

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to advise the house that on 3 June 2009 I administered to Graham Leonard Ashton the acting director, police integrity, the oath required under section 16 of the Police Integrity Act 2008.

NOTICES OF MOTION

Notices of motion given.

Mr BLACKWOOD having given notice of motion:

The SPEAKER — Order! I advise the member for Narracan that there will be some editing done to his notice of motion.

Further notices of motion given.

Mr McIntosh — On a point of order, Speaker, yesterday in the house you indicated you would review the point of order I made on the previous day in relation to the Primary Industries Legislation Amendment Bill, on which a number of members made a contribution. Originally that point of order was withdrawn, based upon an arrangement between the parties across the table. As a result of events yesterday I resurrected that point of order, and I noted that the Chair still considered it to be a live point of order for ruling at some stage. Of course the parties wish to preserve that position. If the Chair would be assisted by further debate, the opposition parties are more than happy to provide discussion and illumination on that notice of motion and on the Constitution Act. The offer should be made, because in the opposition's view it would be of benefit to the Speaker to hear those submissions.

Mr Clark — On the point of order, Speaker, further to what the member for Kew has said, the arrangement between the parties to which he referred was to the effect that the issue would be brought back on and that all members who wished to make representations to you as the Speaker would have the opportunity to do so. The Leader of The Nationals also made that point previously. If the Chair is still considering that point of order, I for one would welcome the opportunity to put a number of points in relation to it.

The SPEAKER — Order! The motion and the issues it raises are very serious, and I have read the points of order from both Tuesday and Wednesday. Either the matter will have to come back to the house or there will need to be further discussions across all parties. I appreciate the gravity of the situation, and I will not be acting without considered advice from all parties.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Students: youth allowance

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the proposal to change the independence test for youth allowance by the federal government.

The petitioners register their opposition to the changes on the basis that the youth allowance changes proposed in the federal budget place another barrier to university participation for students in regional areas; unfairly discriminates against students currently undertaking a 'gap' year; and contradict other efforts to increase university participation by students from rural and regional Australia.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria reject the proposal and calls on the state government to vigorously lobby the federal government to ensure that a tertiary education is accessible to regional students.

By Dr SYKES (Benalla) (20 signatures).

Eastern Freeway, Doncaster: noise barriers

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the residents of Manningham and environs draws to the attention of the house that the quality of life for residents whose homes adjoin the Eastern Freeway is being detrimentally affected by traffic noise.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria direct additional noise abatement measures be implemented without delay. This will allow residents to sleep at night without being disturbed and will allow them to enjoy their homes without intrusive traffic noise levels.

By Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) (10 signatures).

King Street, Doncaster: traffic lights

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the residents of the Roseville retirement village and environs draws to the attention of the house the dangerous situation they face outside their village attempting to cross busy King Street in Doncaster East to access bus

stops and medical facilities with thousands of vehicles passing by each day.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria direct VicRoads to install pedestrian operated traffic signals outside the village on King Street so that the residents can safely cross the road.

By Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) (6 signatures).

Police: Red Cliffs

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of residents of Red Cliffs and surrounding communities in Victoria draws to the attention of the house the need to increase police presence in our district.

The petitioners register their dismay after a weekend of vandalism with damage estimated to be in excess of \$60 000 to the local bowling club and private and public property.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria take action to increase staff levels at the Red Cliffs police station as a proactive step in ensuring that this criminal activity is not repeated.

By Mr CRISP (Mildura) (16 signatures).

Rail: Mildura line

To the Honourable the Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

This petition of the citizens of the region known as Sunraysia, primarily in the state of Victoria but including cross-border citizens of New South Wales centred on the city of Mildura, brings to the attention of the house the many promises to return the Melbourne–Mildura passenger train, without delivery.

The undersigned petitioners therefore ask the Legislative Assembly to bring forward the reinstatement of the Melbourne–Mildura passenger train, especially in view of:

1. the many undelivered promises;
2. the urgent need to promote public transport in a global warming context;
3. the pressing need to connect remote Mildura to both Melbourne and the national rail network; and
4. the geographic distance now requiring a rapid service (very fast train) to be competitive

By Mr CRISP (Mildura) (134 signatures).

Ordered that petitions presented by honourable member for Doncaster be considered next day on motion of Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster).

Ordered that petitions presented by the honourable member for Mildura be considered next day on motion of Mr CRISP (Mildura).

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

PRIVILEGES COMMITTEE

Right of reply: Mr Dennis MacKinlay

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) presented report on right of reply, together with appendix.

Tabled.

Ordered to be printed.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

New directions in accountability — Victoria's public finance practices and legislation

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) presented report, together with appendices.

Tabled.

Ordered to be printed.

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Police Integrity, Office of — Offers of gifts and benefits to Victoria Police employees — Ordered to be printed

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Rail Safety Act 2006 — SR 59

State Superannuation Act 1988 — SR 57

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — SR 58

Supreme Court Act 1986 — SR 60

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Minister's exception certificate in relation to Statutory Rule 60

Ministers' exemption certificates in relation to Statutory Rules 48, 59.

PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES

Membership

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — By leave, I move the following motions for the appointment of members to joint investigatory committees:

Road Safety Committee

That Mr Tilley be a member of the Road Safety Committee.

Law Reform Committee

That Mrs Victoria be a member of the Law Reform Committee.

Motions agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Auditor-General: *Withdrawal of Infringement Notices*

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — The Attorney-General talks a lot about justice and fairness, but yesterday’s Auditor-General’s report on the infringement system shows yet again the huge gap between his rhetoric and the reality. The report shows that under the Attorney-General’s auspices Victorian motorists and citizens are being targeted by Labor with an unfair infringement notice system that is plagued with inconsistent decision making and run by agencies which can get away with gross unfairness because of a toothless oversight system.

The *Withdrawal of Infringement Notices* report shows the Attorney-General’s much-trumpeted Infringements Act 2006 has failed in its aim of making the infringement notices system fairer for Victorians. With 4.2 million infringement notices issued each year and more than 209 000 withdrawn last year, this is a very serious issue, especially for motorists, who account for 93 per cent of infringement notices. Three years after the government claimed the laws would make the system fairer the Auditor-General found there was inconsistent decision making by government agencies, which means that Victorians were treated differently when they applied to have an infringement notice withdrawn. The Auditor-General’s report criticises agencies for poor records, inadequate procedures, failure to verify claims and inaccurate classification of data. He found there were repeated instances of agencies not complying with either the legislation or their own guidelines. The Auditor-General states:

Consistency is a hallmark of a fairer system, and its absence casts doubt over the fairness of the whole system.

This report shows a litany of incompetence by the Attorney-General in actually delivering on his empty words.

Adrian Mannix community services award

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Mental Health) — I am pleased to speak about this year’s Adrian Mannix community services award. Adrian Mannix was an outstanding person who made a significant contribution to the Bellarine community. As the member for Bellarine, I was delighted to once again be invited by the Rotary and Lions clubs and the Springdale neighbourhood centre to present the Adrian Mannix community services award that commemorates his life and work. The event was held at the Portarlington Golf Club and was a wonderful celebration of Adrian’s involvement in and contribution to the community. It was also an opportunity to acknowledge the dedicated work of so many local people who give of their time, energy and skills to assist others in the community.

I was delighted to present this year’s award to Andrew Cook, who certainly fulfils all the requirements of this important award. Andrew is a long-serving and highly valued member of the Bellarine State Emergency Service unit. He has undertaken many roles. He currently maintains the unit’s equipment and vehicles and volunteers to assist with the training of new members. He is renowned for being one of the first members to respond to a call-out no matter what the circumstances, time or conditions. Andrew has been a loyal, dedicated and courageous member, and I was delighted to present him with this important award.

I would like to acknowledge the Rotary and Lions clubs of Drysdale and Portarlington and also the Springdale neighbourhood centre for continuing to support this award to ensure that we have opportunities each year to recognise important volunteers in our community.

City of Brimbank: Ombudsman’s report

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — On 31 July last year in my role as shadow Minister for Local Government I wrote to the Victorian Ombudsman requesting that he investigate allegations of serious misconduct at the Brimbank council as a matter of urgency. It had become obvious to the coalition that the Brumby government was aware of complaints from the community and local MPs about years of bullying and corrupt practices by Labor councillors and members of the Labor Party and did nothing.

Yesterday the Victorian upper house found that the planning minister, Justin Madden, knew of the blatant, inappropriate interference by his electorate officer, Mr Hakki Suleyman, turned a blind eye and misled Parliament about his knowledge, and the house passed a no-confidence vote in the minister. Sadly, as legal investigations continue, more evidence will emerge about Labor's involvement in the Brimbank council affairs. What the Ombudsman found after nine months of intense investigation was damning evidence of a dysfunctional council, bullying and intimidation, conflicts of interest and other breaches of the Local Government Act, decisions made for personal gain, evidence that the ruling Labor faction was willing to place Brimbank council at financial risk for a personal vendetta and the improper use of electoral information.

The most damning evidence of all was the undue interference and influence of members of the Labor Party. The Brumby government has been shamed into adopting the Ombudsman's recommendations including appointing a municipal inspector to oversee the council for three years and sacking councillors who are employed in ministerial or members of Parliament's electorate offices across Victoria. This will affect about 35 councillors, who will be sacked or forced to resign. This will include councillors who have done nothing wrong.

Australasian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association: annual conference

Mr LANGUILLER (Derrimut) — I was proud to represent the Minister for Health to officially open the Australasian Acupuncture and Chinese Medicine Association's annual conference. Acupuncture and Chinese medicine have increasingly grown in popularity, as many consumers are choosing to use conventional and complementary health care to achieve better health. This demand has meant that in 2000, Victoria became the first state of any Western country to regulate the practice of Chinese medicine, with now nearly 1000 practitioners registered in Victoria.

As many of you will be aware, 1 July 2010 will be an auspicious day for regulation, with the commencement of the national registration and accreditation scheme for health professions. I am delighted to confirm that at the last Australian Health Ministers Conference a decision was made that from 1 July 2012 Chinese medicine practitioners will also be regulated under the national scheme.

I wish to acknowledge the role played by a former member for Malvern, Robert Doyle, who was the parliamentary secretary for health and especially to

acknowledge the role played by the Minister for Health. I am proud to put on record that the minister received a standing ovation for his stewardship and the role he played in these matters.

On the day I was joined by Mr Shen Weilian, consul general of the People's Republic of China, and Professor Vivian Lin, president of the Chinese Medicine Registration Board of Victoria.

EastLink: noise barriers

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — The lives of many residents in my electorate have been virtually intolerable due to traffic noise along EastLink. Families are suffering from sleep deprivation. They are often woken during the night by noise as vehicles travel along the freeway and prepare to enter the Mullum Mullum Tunnel. Residents are resorting to paying up to \$10 000 for double glazing, and they are unable to sleep with their windows open or to enjoy their gardens. In short, their lives have been turned upside down by the building of the new road.

Residents believe that the noise walls that have been erected do not work well enough to diminish the traffic sounds. ConnectEast has conducted noise testing, and the results show the levels are within government guidelines for noise levels. But the testing also reveals noise readings with spikes of up to 82 decibels overnight. That equates to having a symphony orchestra playing inside your house, or having your ear alongside an operating vacuum cleaner. It is certainly not conducive to a good night's sleep!

Donvale residents have petitioned Parliament asking for additional noise abatement measures to be implemented. This government has failed to respond to those requests. The recent budget includes some funding to retrofit sections of freeways and arterial roads with sound barriers. In light of this funding I ask that some funds are immediately allocated for the erection of new and enhanced noise walls along the freeway which abuts my Doncaster electorate. This will significantly improve the quality of life for residents in those areas.

Sir John Holland

Ms WOOLDRIDGE — On another matter, I would like to note the passing of Sir John Holland, who was an amazing businessman, an amazing philanthropist and an example to all of us in the community with his good works.

Mental Illness Fellowship: photographic exhibition

Ms RICHARDSON (Northcote) — Parliament House is currently host to *ilikeyou*, which is a very special exhibition of photographs organised by the Mental Illness Fellowship. Twenty-five students from five schools, including Thornbury High, took photographs of 23 people who bravely agreed to be their subjects. Their courage has been vindicated. The photos are not about mental illness. The photos present them in a thoughtful, engaging and, above all, sympathetic manner.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Mental Illness Fellowship's ongoing commitment to helping those suffering from a mental illness and, in particular, its important work in getting the wider community to understand that mental illness is not uncommon, that the ill person is not alone and, most of all, is one of us. This project has been a great way to fulfil those goals.

Ruby Dowling

Ms RICHARDSON — Eleven-year-old Ruby Dowling, recently diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, is one of the most extraordinary people I have met. Being a type 1 diabetic means having two to six injections every day and up to 12 finger pricks, as well as watching absolutely everything you eat. Unlike type 2 diabetes, type 1 is not caused or affected by lifestyle choices, nor is there a cure. Not letting this illness hold her back, Ruby is now an enthusiastic advocate for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. She is raising funds but, most importantly, she is raising awareness about the need to cure this disease.

On 28 July, Ruby, among 40 young people with type 1 diabetes, will be at Parliament House to raise awareness. I ask members to come along and meet Ruby and be inspired — and they should not forget to bring their chequebooks.

Ambulance services: staffing

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — I raise the issue of promised paramedic numbers for our ambulance services, particularly those in country Victoria. The Brumby government continues to make grand promises with enormous fanfare and hype. It even exaggerates the outcome of its promises.

In January 2008 it announced it would recruit 100 additional paramedics for what was Rural Ambulance Victoria. That was the number needed to fill the holes of unfilled shifts and exhausted

paramedics. While it was announced that recruitment would start immediately in January 2008, the answer I received this week to my question on notice admits the recruitment started only in April of that year and that only 42 positions of the promised 100 have been filled. The answer goes on to regale the further promised 258 paramedics in May 2008 and claims that the recent budget delivered a \$185.7 million boost to ambulance services. Whoever wrote the answer to this question — which was signed by the minister — must have been living in la-la land, as the recent budget contained no such allocation.

Additionally the Minister for Health recently claimed that of the total 358 promised paramedics, 223 have been delivered. I cannot find anyone who agrees with him. I guess we know that he is not too good at getting figures right, or even recognising when they have been fiddled. All the evidence that can be gathered finds only a total of 172 new paramedics — not the 223 claimed.

Alex Harris

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — I would like to bring to the attention of the house an amazing and inspirational constituent of mine who proves that when the going gets tough, the tough get going. Highton resident Mr Alex Harris, aged 79, suffered a heart attack and a minor stroke just over two years ago. Many would say that after such a health episode it was time to sit back and limp through the health concerns and try to enjoy retirement. Not Mr Harris. Instead, he has grabbed life with both hands and given it a good, solid shake after his recovery from surgery.

The 79-year-old former professional runner has turned his back on getting old. Instead he has rediscovered his passion for athletics. He claimed 24 medals in major competitions over the summer season. He won gold in the javelin and pentathlon at the Australian Masters athletics championships held in Adelaide and took out silver in the men's over-75 high jump at the Oceania Masters championships last year. He trains about 15 hours per week both on the track and in the gym.

Mr Harris is most definitely an inspiration to anyone who has said it is too tough. He was recently quoted as saying, 'One of my beliefs is that too many seniors just resign to being inactive. Almost all of them could do something, a little bit extra, without necessarily aspiring to do what I do. That just happens to suit me'.

I am sure such a story inspires many within this house, and I congratulate Mr Harris on his sporting achievements and, more importantly, for proving that

retirement does not have to mean locking yourself away.

Modewarre Football and Netball Club

Mr CRUTCHFIELD — On another issue, I congratulate the Modewarre Football and Netball Club chair, Stephen Whitworth, on a very enjoyable sponsors day at the club grounds last Saturday. It was the most professionally run and well-attended sponsors day I have been to for many years. I congratulate the club and look forward to working with it on improving its facilities at Modewarre.

Water: stormwater harvesting

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — I rise to congratulate the previous Minister for Water, John Thwaites, on having his ‘road to Damascus’ moment. He has now said that Melbourne should be harvesting stormwater. He says that stormwater is a cheap, green water source and has been underutilised — surprise, surprise, surprise!

An article in yesterday’s *West Australian* stated:

Almost two years after quitting politics, Mr Thwaites, who is now chair of Monash University’s Sustainability Institute, has implied that the government may have got it wrong.

The former minister has finally admitted that he got it wrong when he proposed to build the north–south pipeline and destroy country communities in northern Victoria by taking their water away to Melbourne when Melbourne has in excess of 500 000 megalitres of stormwater that runs into the bay every year. The article goes on to quote the former minister:

Stormwater is a new source of water —

‘new water’, as the current minister keeps saying —

that has been underutilised to date ...

Stormwater harvesting systems can function with very low energy use and provide relatively low-cost water.

Mr Thwaites said that in the government’s green paper on climate change.

I ask the previous Minister for Water, John Thwaites, to join with those on this side of the house and tell the current minister to plug the pipe.

City of Casey: volunteer awards

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) — On Friday, 8 May 2009, I had the pleasure of attending the Casey volunteer awards. Volunteers provide an invaluable service to their own local organisations and to the

broader community. During the aftermath of Black Saturday, we saw the care and devotion that volunteers show to our Victorian community. It was inspirational.

We are fortunate in the city of Casey to have the volunteer awards because they pay tribute to our volunteers and encourage others, including young people, to get involved in their communities.

I congratulate all the nominees and particularly those from the fantastic Narre Warren South electorate: Graham Newberry; Belinda Savage; Allan Stewart; Dianna Polimeni, whom I admire greatly as for 10 years she has led an after-breast cancer hydrotherapy program; Robert Bruin; Paul Quinn; Tony Quixley; Janice and John Pesic, long-serving Meals on Wheels volunteers; Graeme Cann; Spencer Wanklyn; Riga Ashori of the Afghan Australian Women and Youth Association; Lena Licata; Linda Tomich; Stephen Ward; Patricia Wingrave from the Narre Warren guides; George and Lorna Hooton for their work with the Hampton Park Scout Association; and Wendy Saunders, who, along with the indefatigable Vanessa Gerdes, is a keen contributor to the Hampton Park renewal project.

I would like to pay particular tribute to Linda Tomich. Linda was not only active in raising funds for those affected by the recent fires in Narre Warren South, she also organised support and relief, assisting people through the process of seeking help from support agencies. Well done, Linda, and congratulations to all of the nominees. Our community says a big thankyou to all of them. I would urge all community members to follow their lead and take up volunteering.

City of Brimbank: Ombudsman’s report

Mr O’BRIEN (Malvern) — The Brimbank corruption scandal makes clear that the Brumby government has reached the point of terminal ethical decay. Just one example of many involves the Minister for Gaming; Theo Theophanous, a member for Northern Metropolitan Region in the Legislative Council; and Cr Costas Socratous, a former Brimbank councillor and employee of Mr Theophanous. Cr Socratous opposed the Brumby government’s introduction of TAB TV, which was a grab for cash by pushing gambling into the lounge rooms of Victorian families without adequate safeguards to protect children. Cr Socratous moved a motion at council condemning the government’s decision, but for daring to stand up for his community and do his duty, Cr Socratous was bullied, intimidated and eventually sacked by Labor.

He gave evidence to the Ombudsman that:

... the Minister for Gaming spoke to Mr T. Theophanous about the notice of motion ...

and that he was given the following warning by Mr Theophanous:

You have to remove your motion, it's no good being against the minister You work for me, you should follow orders.

Following this intimidation, Costas Socratous withdrew his motion, but for daring to tell the truth about the corruption running through the Labor Party like a river, he was sacked by Mr Theophanous who cited that there had been a complete breakdown of trust and confidence. In other words, once Mr Theophanous could no longer trust his staffer to cover up for his improper and corrupt conduct, the staffer had to go. That is what is wrong with the Brumby government, and that is why, for Victoria's sake, the Brumby government has to go.

Asian Multimedia Group: 13th anniversary

Mr STENSCHOLT (Burwood) — On behalf of the community, and particularly the Chinese community here in Victoria and in my local area, I congratulate the Asian Multimedia Group on its 13th anniversary as one of Victoria's most influential Chinese media organisations, and congratulate particularly Philip Chui, JP, the managing director.

On 25 May I was privileged to represent the Premier, as well as to be present as the local MP, at the cocktail party to both honour Philip Chui and Asian Multimedia and to celebrate the hosting of the Melbourne final of the 2009 international Chinese new talent singing championship for the Melbourne region which was held in the Box Hill town hall. The championship was organised in Melbourne by Jadeworld with the winner going on to Hong Kong's TVB8 to compete against finalists from around the world.

Philip Chui's Asian Multimedia Group was established originally with a fortnightly paper, but now has grown over the 13 years to include weekly papers, websites, yearly magazines and other multimedia promotional services.

I congratulate Philip and the team of hardworking people in his organisation. Like the Premier, I also congratulate Asian Multimedia for its continuous and strong commitment over many years to multiculturalism and cultural harmony in our area and throughout Victoria. Well done on 13 good years, and I wish Asian Multimedia many more successful years of

service to the Chinese community and the community in Victoria overall.

Crime: street violence

Mr R. SMITH (Warrandyte) — I would like to start with the following quote:

Melburnians are sick to death of the violence sweeping the city and it is a really good opportunity for Mr Brumby and the powers that be to give police more power to apprehend and arrest people who choose to be violent. They need to take responsibility for this as leaders of the community.

These are the words of Shane Mitchell, brother of Luke Mitchell who was callously stabbed to death in Brunswick on 24 May. These sentiments echo my own, as I have stood in this place on many occasions imploring the government to take some effective action to curb the increasing violence in our streets.

Luke Mitchell, Brendan Keilar and Matthew McEvoy are some of those who have lost their lives in violent encounters on the streets of Melbourne. They are surrounded by countless others who have been bashed and stabbed as violent crime escalates, with little being done to prevent it.

It made my blood boil to listen to our Minister for Police and Emergency Services on the ABC news last week. He said:

When we have a look at the issues around violence, this is something we're very keen to tackle. This is why we're doing more things around nightclubs.

More things around nightclubs — at a time when Victorians are begging for some leadership, our police minister offers us this meaningless statement, superseded only by the Premier's proposition that we tackle this violence by all joining together for a walk.

The Brumby government has a history of reacting only when the political heat becomes too high or when the public outcry becomes too loud. Let us hope that both of these are now at a level where our Premier will be forced to take the necessary steps to stem the violence in our streets.

Norris Bank Primary School, Bundoora: centenary

Mr BROOKS (Bundoora) — I would like to congratulate Bundoora's Norris Bank Primary School community on its celebration of the school's centenary just over a week ago on Sunday, 24 May. The school held a number of events to mark the centenary, including a day when students wore period clothing and held a community dinner dance. On 24 May the school

community gathered in the school's community hall to hear from past students, principals and other supporters and then opened the school facilities up to the wider community for the whole day to highlight the excellent facilities and learning environment on offer at Norris Bank.

The school was originally opened in 1909 to educate the children of local small allotment farmers in the area and was known as the Thomastown Small Holding State School and later the Darebin State School. Over the past century the school has faced a number of challenges from low enrolments prior to urbanisation of the area in the 1960s with as few as five students at one stage. When the nearby Darebin Creek flooded, prior to the construction of modern bridges and roads, it also prevented many children from getting across to school.

Today Norris Bank is a vibrant and exciting place to learn with over 200 students and a committed teaching staff led by principal, Mrs Marise Boff. The school places a strong emphasis not only on giving students a quality education but also on each student's wellbeing. The recent allocation of \$2 million as part of the federal government's Building the Education Revolution investment in schools will further enhance the school's facilities.

I congratulate Norris Bank Primary School on its centenary, for the way in which it celebrated the occasion and, importantly, for the great work that is done at the school.

Students: youth allowance

Mr TILLEY (Benambra) — Education has again become a privilege and not a right. With the stroke of a pen regional students have been hung out to dry, their dreams and ambitions for a better future through tertiary education annihilated, shattered, destroyed. The most popular option for regional students is to take a gap year and work to become eligible for the youth allowance, as by necessity they have to live away from home. Students who worked hard to gain a university placement and deferred in 2009 will lose their placement if they choose to take an extra year off in order to qualify for independent status, as the new legislation does not fit in with the current deferment allowance. Many students are now questioning whether they will go to university at all, as they cannot afford to do so. In an environment of rising unemployment, the expectation of students securing 30 hours a week of work to fit the new criteria will become increasingly difficult to fulfil.

My office has been inundated with calls from students and parents in regional areas battling with the effects of drought, lower wages and the economic downturn. Parents have not accounted for the extra burden of sustaining a student away from home, which exceeds \$15 000 per year. By doing nothing and saying nothing the Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation has wiped her hands of all responsibility to regional Victorian students and their dreams of a better future. Young people have a right to aspire to and achieve greater heights. Education should be accessible to all. This servile state Labor government needs to put up a fight and — —

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

Mental health: prevention and recovery care

Ms KAIROUZ (Kororoit) — Yesterday I had the pleasure of attending the official opening of Victoria's newest prevention and recovery care (PARC) service in Deer Park with the Minister for Mental Health, the member for Derrimut, three local mayors from the cities of Brimbank and Maribyrnong and the shire of Melton and councillors from the cities of Wyndham and Hobsons Bay. This new and exciting service will treat people with a mental illness and assist in their recovery. The PARC facilities will be supported by a \$4.1 million funding boost. They will be operated by Melbourne Health and the Norwood Association, and by Mercy Health and the Western Region Health Centre. The Labor government is providing a world-class mental health system, which offers residential support and clinical treatment to people with a mental illness as early as possible to help to prevent a lifetime of chronic illness.

The two new 10-bed PARC facilities have been established at the site of a former aged-care home. Services to be undertaken in the supportive environment of the Deer Park facilities include managing medication and symptom control; assisting clients to understand their mental illness and its management; practising living skills, budgeting and financial management; conducting relaxation, sleep, hygiene and grief workshops; and linking clients to a range of services. This new facility is of great benefit to local residents and those with a mental illness.

I commend the Brumby government — and particularly the Minister for Mental Health for her leadership — on achieving better health and economic outcomes for people with a mental illness, for their families, for their carers and for their friends. I congratulate the local

residents who supported this facility, and I am sure that — —

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

Students: youth allowance

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — Prime Minister Rudd's education revolution has taken on its real meaning as hundreds of country Victorian students take to the streets to protest against his ill-considered changes to the youth allowance. The proposed changes will make it even more difficult for country students to bridge the ever-widening education gap between them and their city counterparts. This will further exacerbate the serious social disadvantage experienced by country students because their families choose to live on a farm to produce food and fibre for the benefit of all Victorians or to live in rural communities that service industries for the benefit of all Victorians. This social disadvantage has been further exacerbated by 12 tough years, which have drained the emotional and financial reserves of even the most robust country people.

It therefore comes as no surprise that over 500 young people recently took to the streets in Shepparton and over 800 people met in Warrnambool last night. Many more rallies are being planned, and thousands of people have signed petitions calling for a stop to the callous changes to the youth allowance. The failure of the Brumby government to stand up for country students is disgraceful. Even more disgraceful are the ongoing attempts by Brumby government ministers to conceal the gap in year 12 completion rates and higher education uptake rates between country students and their city counterparts.

I call on the Brumby government to cease the deceitful cover-up of the failures of its education policies and to immediately get the federal government to withdraw all changes to the youth allowance which may further disadvantage country students.

Ballarat East electorate: neighbourhood houses

Mr HOWARD (Ballarat East) — I have been pleased to visit the majority of neighbourhood houses in my electorate over the past month. While at these centres at Ballan, Meredith, Creswick, Daylesford and Kyneton I have conducted community consultations and talked with the coordinators and other staff about the great programs they run for the residents of their communities. I have also listened to their plans and aspirations for further developments to their houses.

I have been pleased that our government has provided additional support to our neighbourhood houses over recent years, increasing base funding for coordination and providing significant funding for capital works and equipment purchases. It was especially pleasing for me to attend the opening of the extensions to the Meredith neighbourhood house recently. These extensions provide a much bigger and much brighter meeting space within the centre, which is used, among other things, for child care and playgroups three days a week, and clearly provide a great benefit to the people of the Meredith community.

I was also recently welcomed to the Kyneton community and learning centre, where I was able to talk with the coordinator and committee members about a grant of just over \$51 000 which will allow for a significant upgrade of the building and enable the purchase of computer equipment. I am also pleased that the Ballan and district community house and adult education centre will receive \$7500 and the Ballarat East community house \$16 410. It is great news for these neighbourhood houses.

Students: youth allowance

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — The ruthless changes to the youth allowance by the Rudd Labor government are disgraceful. What is even more disgraceful is the sycophantic silence of the Brumby Labor government, whose members would not come out and advocate on behalf of Victorian students. The Rudd Labor government was supposed to be giving us an education revolution; it neglected to say what type of revolution. What we now find is that the ruthless changes to the youth allowance implemented by the Rudd Labor government will force school leavers from low-income families and from country areas, and even a number of students in my own electorate of Kew, to take a two-year gap and work full time for 18 months before being eligible to access the youth allowance.

The changes also require university entrants to work for at least 30 hours per week for a minimum of 18 months before they qualify. This is disingenuous, because gap years are for a year and the likelihood of being employed continuously for 18 months in a downturn is becoming increasingly lower. Country students have no choice but to live away from home. They need the youth allowance to pay basic living expenses such as rent, food, bills and transport.

The Premier has said that his priority is education, but apparently not the education of country and low-income people who cannot manage without the youth allowance. Fresh from giving away \$40 billion,

including millions to overseas workers, expatriates and even the dead, the Rudd Labor government is now short-changing low-income families and particularly country students.

Dr Martand Joshi

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — Today I would like to pay tribute to one of my constituents, Dr Martand Joshi. A number of members would have met Martand, as he was the honorary consul-general for India for a number of years in Victoria and a great supporter of the Indian people. He was a tower of strength to the Indian community in Victoria.

I, together with a very large number of people, attended a memorial service for him at the Clocktower Centre in Moonee Ponds on Monday. He died a couple of days before. The tributes to him were quite significant and came from a wide range of communities and organisations, including the Central Queensland University, with which he was associated. Martand, his wife, Zofia, and his daughter, Suman, were great community people and have made a wonderful contribution to the community of Moonee Valley. Martand was very much liked; he was a very genial man. He was also very careful that while he was Indian consul-general he kept his political views to himself. However, his daughter, Suman, did tell us at his memorial service that when she was about six he taught her to say, ‘Labor good, Liberal bad’. So you can see what a well-brought-up child she was.

I extend my sympathies to Zofia and Suman, who had to fly back from America for the funeral. Martand will be remembered very well. It was a great shock to me that he died. Only two days before, he and I had attended a meeting with Moonee Valley council. He was assisting us with the organisation of the Diwali festival, an Indian festival of lights that will be held in Moonee Valley later this year. He still showed then that great enthusiasm to support his community. He will be greatly missed.

APPROPRIATION (2009/2010) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 3 June; motion of Mr BRUMBY (Premier).

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I shall continue where I was up to last night when debate concluded. I was in fact talking about the arts funding that is included in this year’s budget, particularly in relation to the State Library of Victoria, which as members may

know is a particular interest of mine, and I was mentioning the \$1 million included in the arts budget for further planning to restore the library’s Queen’s Hall, which as I was telling members last night is the original Queen’s Hall and was opened in 1856. It was the library’s main reading room until the domed reading room opened in 1913. From 1915 Queen’s Hall served as a museum space until it was closed for renovation in 1973, when the new museum was built. In 1975 it reopened as the library’s art music and performing arts library. It is now vacant because it is not really in a state that is suitable for people to use. It is a beautiful hall, and I am sure that those who have had the opportunity to go inside and have a look at it would have been most impressed and would see the benefit of restoring the hall. It has a wonderful mural in it that was acquired by the library in 1924 to commemorate Australian soldiers in World War I, and that in itself is worth restoring. I look forward to the progress with that project for the State Library of Victoria over a number of years.

Also included in the money for the library was a significant amount to improve its digital database, which makes using the state library even easier for people who cannot actually get to the building. The library now has a number of projects online, including an extension of its newspaper program, which is a program I know many residents like. If you go into the library at the weekend, you will just be amazed at how many people are using it. It is so great to see the library going ahead in leaps and bounds.

There is also significant funding in the budget for a number of other facilities, including St Martins Youth Theatre, the Malthouse Theatre, the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art and the Heide Museum of Modern Art. There is also \$90 million over three years for operational maintenance of the Arts Centre buildings and theatre technology. These projects will increase jobs in the arts community as well. When the economy is not as healthy as it could be, jobs in the arts community are a great boost. I know the arts community will be very pleased with that.

Coming back to my own electorate, I wanted to pay particular tribute to a service which runs in my electorate and which received funding as part of a \$10 million program this year, and that is Essendon BreastScreen. The breast-screening program, which was established by David White when he was Minister for Health some years back, has proved to be a significant force in the early detection of breast cancer for women, ensuring that the death rate has dropped significantly in Victoria over that period of time. Essendon BreastScreen has terrific staff. It operates

now in Maribyrnong Road in Moonee Ponds. I am always impressed by the excellent staff down there and the great job they do, especially perhaps with older women or women who are not used to the process. That \$10 million for BreastScreen Victoria's digital technology rollout is great, and we look forward to some of that money going towards Essendon.

As with a number of other electorates, the State Emergency Service unit in Essendon has a new heavy-rescue Hino, and I know its members will be very pleased about that. There is also significant funding in the budget for improved bus services. The SmartBus, which was introduced into Essendon last month, has proved to be extremely popular, and that service goes from Mordialloc right round to Altona. I know a number of my constituents have already taken the opportunity to use it. It has put in a link which was missing and for which a number of residents had been agitating: a link to the direct factory outlet complex at Essendon Airport.

There is also money for improving cycling facilities. Essendon is one of those electorates that is close enough to the city for people to be able to ride their bikes to work, and the allocation will enable the continuation of the Mount Alexander Road bike path in the area near Shamrock Street and Grice Crescent, which is where the trams go up near the palms — so that people can understand where we are — and I know that will be very much appreciated by cyclists in my area.

Schools in Essendon have done extremely well also from the joint federal and state funding, and although most of that funding is here, it has meant that schools on our priority list have been able to move up several years, including Aberfeldie Primary School, Essendon Primary School, Strathmore North Primary School, Strathmore Primary School and St Mary's Primary School in Ascot Vale. I know those schools are very keen to see that money spent, working on the models that the state government has provided for them. Once again that will increase jobs in the Essendon area.

Primary schools in Essendon have always had a terrific reputation. They do wonderful projects. I was recently out at Aberfeldie Primary School for the opening of an updated facility for their library students, which the students are enjoying very much. I had the pleasure of seeing the newsletters that the students did afterwards to celebrate the occasion, and I was most impressed. The primary schools in my electorate are all very different, but they all run excellent programs — and that is one of the strengths of Essendon. We have 13 schools, so there is a great amount of choice, but

they are all uniformly good. This budget achieves the aims the state government has put forward so clearly: it stimulates the economy; it will stimulate jobs; and it will deliver services to people in the community who need them most. I am very pleased to support the state budget, and I look forward to the continuation of the new projects in my electorate.

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — It is a pleasure to stand to speak on the Appropriation (2009/2010) Bill, but I have to say that once again this Labor government has failed the people of Victoria. It is interesting to note that back in 1996, when the Premier was the Leader of the Opposition, he issued a press release that says:

Mr Brumby said each of these commitments was founded on the principles of Labor's financial management plan, including substantial budget surpluses, no borrowing for recurrent expenditure, financial accountability to the public, a cap on debt and fairer taxes and charges.

Now let us see which of those commitments he has actually succeeded in achieving. A substantial budget surplus: he has failed because we have gone into debt. No borrowing for recurrent expenditure: yes, but it is because he has used the money from the federal government for infrastructure grants and is thereby taking the money he had set aside for building and infrastructure into recurrent expenditure. Financial accountability to the public: I have never seen a government so secret as the current Labor government. A cap on debt: there is no cap, and debt will go up to \$20 billion, \$25 billion and \$30 billion over the next few years. Fairer taxes and charges: there are no fairer taxes or charges in Victoria. As everyone knows, the cost of getting a licence from VicRoads, for instance, increases every year without the government having to come into Parliament to explain why the increases are warranted.

The Premier has failed to deliver the promises that he made back in 1996. Members of the Victorian government have become masters of spin and misinformation. This Labor government has given a new meaning to the acronym PPP (public-private partnership). It is politically inept, politically bereft of any new ideas and politically corrupt. This budget highlights this government's ability to turn alarming facts and bad news into good news for the government. It tends to bring forward estimates to deliver a balanced budget then attempts to portray itself as a wise financial manager. It used the federal government's cash bonuses for infrastructure projects and claims to be using its own money. Then it redirects its own money into recurrent expenditure. The current government has had 10 long years to do something. This budget proves that it is incompetent and unable to deliver what is needed

for the people of Victoria. The Labor Party in government has wasted the good times and wasted surpluses and has failed to act on the economic crisis.

I wish to go briefly to my two shadow portfolio areas and my electorate of Bulleen, which I will speak about first. The Labor Party has had two upper house members in my electorate for the last three years, and you would think that some money would be put into my electorate. Unfortunately in this budget there is no money for Bulleen. It has provided no funding for schools. In fact it forced one of the primary schools to close. The government likes to refer to what happened as a merger, but it is closure because the site that this school is on at the moment will not be used by the two schools which have been amalgamated.

The government has forced the hand of the principal, it has forced the hands of the parents and it has forced the hands of the teachers and it has closed a school in my electorate. This is coming from a government that was critical of the Kennett government. It is guilty of school closures in 2009, and it is hypocritical. I hope the site where Manningham Park Primary School used to be is not sold off to developers. The government has promised the site will be given over to Bulleen Special School. I hope that is the case, and that the site is not given to developers so that the government can receive some money.

The other example is Templestowe College. Templestowe College is the only secondary government school in my electorate. The walls of the college were falling apart. Students were sitting next to a wall which was cracked, and there was a danger that bricks would fall on the students and injure them. The school asked the department to provide the funds needed to fix the wall. The government provided about two-thirds of those funds, and the school put in the other third. I wrote to the Parliamentary Secretary for Education, and I received a response which I can only say was very disappointing. In his letter the parliamentary secretary said:

Maintenance works were carried out on building walls at the school in 2007. The cost of this work was met from two sources of maintenance funding provided to the school:

\$30 000 was met from the school's student resource package maintenance allocation; and

\$89 680 was funded through a supplementary maintenance grant.

This is consistent with departmental policy for the use of supplementary grants.

I would have thought the school could have used that money for educational outcomes. The school could

have purchased an electronic whiteboard or sports equipment; instead it was forced to use those funds to prevent a wall falling on students.

There were a number of other projects that the government could have funded in my electorate of Bulleen. If only the government had cut back on political advertising, it could have found that money for these projects. If only ministers cut back on their ministerial staff, the government could find the money for these projects. I have mentioned in this chamber many times the upgrade of Templestowe Road and King Street. Traffic lights are needed at the intersection of Fitzsimmons Lane, Anderson Street and Porter Street. This has to be one of the most dangerous and confusing intersections in Manningham. I have also raised the issue of traffic lights at the T-intersection of Golden Way and Bulleen Road. Unfortunately after 10 years this government has not provided a single cent for roads in my electorate.

I now wish to turn to innovation. If we look at the budget for innovation, I have to say there is nothing there. There is plenty of rhetoric or spin, but there is no new money and there are no new major initiatives or changes. Most of the announcements have already been made or money has been redirected. In fact there has been a decrease in funding from \$33.1 million to \$20.2 million — a 63.8 per cent decrease.

I will give two examples of how this government is lazy, inept and incompetent. The first is one I have already raised in this chamber. On 10 April 2007 the Brumby government paid Deloitte to prepare a report entitled *Science and Technology Innovation Achievements*. The summary consists of 30 pages, and it took about two months to complete. In a media release on 20 May 2008 the Minister for Innovation said that according to the report Victorians are benefiting from the Brumby government's investment in innovation. Through FOI it was found that the total cost of this worthless document was \$68 500, which equates to \$8562 per week, or \$5269 per page. Given that the minister is paying a consultant to write his report, what does he expect? Does he expect the consultant to write a negative report? Given fact that the minister's office had the last word and made changes to the report, what type of report do you think the government would publish?

The second example is that on 4 May 2009 the minister issued a press release stating that the results support the Brumby government's longstanding commitment to the development of Victoria's life sciences sector. Again the government managed to publish a progress report, but who wrote this report? It was prepared for the

Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development. If my son were asked to write his own school report, I am pretty sure I would not get a true indication of what he was doing at school. It is misleading for the government to write its own reports and put them out as though they are done by third parties.

I will now turn to multicultural affairs. It is good to see that the Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs is in the chamber as well. Again the funding has decreased, from \$14 million to \$12.9 million, which is a decrease of 8.5 per cent. According to the budget papers, \$2 million has been allocated to the refugee action program. In 2008–09 the government promised \$17.7 million for the refugee support strategy, which has now become the refugee action plan. The question is: how much of that \$17.7 million promised last year has been spent, and is the current \$2 million that has been announced on top of the \$17.7 million or is it part of the \$17.7 million? I hope that when the minister gets up to talk on the budget he will explain whether the \$2 million is on top of the \$17.7 million that the government promised in 2008–09.

Again, the government promised \$2 million for the Multicultural Advantage program. In 2006 it made an announcement of \$4.1 million to promote Victoria's multifaith and multicultural diversity. Last year it allocated \$2 million for community harmony. I am not sure whether this was part of the \$4.1 million that it promised in 2006. I ask the minister to tell me how much has been spent to date and whether the \$2 million that was promised in this year's budget is new money. The one alarming fact is that a large number of Victorians consider that our cultural diversity is not an asset. If you look at the budget papers, you see they say that 80 per cent of Melburnians and 65 per cent of country Victorians think that cultural diversity is an asset today, whereas in 2001 the figures were 90 per cent of Melburnians and 80 per cent of country Victorians. Despite all the rhetoric and despite all the good news that the government wants to put out in colour brochures, today fewer people than in 2001 think that our cultural diversity is one of our greatest assets.

What has happened? The government claimed in 2002 and 2006 that it would spend 5 per cent of its advertising budget on multicultural media. The Premier said at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing that that has been achieved. However, he was not able to tell us which departments have actually spent the 5 per cent and which spent under 5 per cent. He spoke about an average of 5 per cent. It has been 10 years of promises and this government saying that it

has spent 5 per cent in every department on multicultural media.

I challenge the minister to tell me that in actual fact 5 per cent has been spent across the board in every department.

With regard to achievement awards, a large number of people in Victoria have worked hard and deserve such awards. I have no problem with the many people who deserve them having received the awards. However, in 2007–08 Cr Natalie Suleyman received an award for service delivery to Multicultural Victoria. In 2006–07 Mr Hakki Suleyman also received an award for services to the community. I think those cases are an insult to others who have worked hard and have received awards; to be put in the same group as the two people I have named is a complete insult to them. The awards were approved by the Premier, because he is Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The Premier knew that Hakki Suleyman was receiving an award, yet he still approved it. He sat back and said, 'He deserves it'. I find that insulting and unfair to the others who have received similar awards.

With regard to board appointments, who was appointed to the Standing Committee on Local Government and Cultural Diversity? It was none other than Cr Natalie Suleyman, who is giving advice to the government on local government. With regard to self-promotion, the Victorian Multicultural Commission publishes *Multicultural Victoria* and other coloured brochures and booklets which contain statements by the minister. How much do those publications cost the Victorian taxpayer? The government paid \$37 191 in one month to Midnightsky for design work. At least I assume it was for design work. If that is not the case, I hope the minister will advise me how the money was spent.

This government has failed to act on issues affecting international students. I know the Leader of the Opposition raised this issue some time ago. I have also raised it, and it has been in the media, yet the Premier and the Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs have sat on their hands for the last few years and done nothing. Even now they tend to not react. They have promised a Harmony Walk. That is fantastic, but does the government realise that it also promised a Harmony Walk from the MCG to the CBD (central business district) in 1999? It has taken the government 10 years to hold the walk, which is part of the government's policy.

The government has failed to deliver yet again. Only when the government knows it will get bad publicity does it try to do something to show that it cares. The

government has failed in multicultural affairs. It has had the Premier, who is also Minister for Multicultural Affairs, the Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs and the Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs dealing with multicultural affairs. There are three people looking after this important area, yet the government has failed.

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Mental Health) — I am really pleased today to rise and speak in support of the Appropriation (2009/2010) Bill. It has been a tough year for many Victorians. We have had bushfires that have affected so many and have touched all of us. We have the global economic crisis, which is creating uncertainty for many Victorian families. This budget is designed to ensure that Victoria is well placed to respond to these challenges and, importantly, to provide critical support for vulnerable communities and families. The investments in this budget will enable us to secure 35 000 jobs as well as provide a safety net for many Victorian families through the expansion of the number of services we provide. In this budget we are investing in our physical structure by investing in infrastructure, but equally we are investing in the social structure — in our people and in our community.

Today I want firstly to touch on a number of new investments in services in my portfolio areas of responsibility. Right across my portfolios and across a number of other portfolios in government, the non-government sector plays a very critical role in partnership with the government in providing essential services and support to some of Victoria's most vulnerable families. I am very pleased that in this budget we were able to deliver on a new three-year agreement with community sector organisations. This agreement will deliver a 3.14 per cent funding boost for the next three years plus a \$2 million a year capacity-building payment to community service organisations. This agreement, which was reached with the full range of key peak bodies in the non-government sector, has been overwhelmingly welcomed and will provide an extra \$31.5 million to the non-government sector to continue to deliver these critical new services to vulnerable families and communities.

One of the most important investments in this budget is our additional support for our most vulnerable children. We are investing over \$160 million over the next four years to continue our reforms in the child protection area. We have a particular focus in this budget on our out-of-home care system — \$135 million will be invested over the next four years. This money is targeted at, firstly, how we ensure we have the right services to reduce the number of children who need to

come into care by providing better support for families — there will always be children who need to come into care — and secondly, how we improve the quality of our care system to better support those children's needs. For example, some of this money will go to the recruitment of 100 in-home carers who are specially trained to provide intensive assistance to children with complex needs, to securing more foster and kinship care places, and to a new program we are calling Family Mentors, through which mentors can provide intensive in-home support to families in the hope that with intensive parenting assistance we may be able to reduce the need for children to be removed from their families.

Following that budget I was also pleased to release *New Directions on Out-of-Home Care*, a paper which outlines a reform agenda for the out-of-home-care system. This will provide not only the basis of reform over this year and going forward but also the basis for further consultation with our partners in the non-government system. The budget also provides increases in services for children who have been sexually abused to enable us to bring down waiting lists for children who need counselling services and also to provide improvements to our after-hours child protection response.

The budget also continues our strong commitment to supporting people with a disability and their families. It provides \$86.9 million over four years, bringing our total investment in disability services to \$1.3 billion. The house may remember that last year we put the biggest ever single investment of \$233 million into disability services. This money, combined with the new money in this budget and the money under the disability agreement with the commonwealth government, will see us invest \$77 million in the 2009–10 budget. This will enable additional individual support packages, which are absolutely critical to giving people with a disability and their families real choice about respite, about activities and about accommodation options.

The budget also continues to deliver on our commitment in the My Future My Choice program, with \$13.8 million to provide more accommodation options for younger people who are in a residential aged-care facility or are at risk of entering a residential aged-care facility. This will deliver 58 new accommodation places, and that is on top of the 46 places that are currently being developed. There is funding to continue our transition from school to employment program for young people with a disability, \$12.5 million to assist community sector organisations to transition to more individualised

systems and activities and also \$4 million in 2008–09 to assist services to meet some of their cost pressures.

Under our ageing carers agreement with the commonwealth, over this period we are also going to be delivering an additional 145 accommodation places for people with a disability. For the first time in a long time we have seen numbers on the disability support register on a downward trend. These new investments will continue that trend and ensure that people with a disability and their families can have real choice over which support and activity systems they believe will provide them with the best assistance as well as options for a range of accommodation, whether in community residential units or in community-based accommodation.

One of the exciting things in this budget was the investment in autism. A couple of weeks ago I was very pleased to launch the Victorian autism state plan. In fact this autism state plan is the first of its kind in Australia. I will quote from one of the several personal messages I received after that launch. This one is from the mother of a young teenager:

The autism state plan has given us hope of a better future, so from the bottom of my heart I thank you.

This plan is being backed up by \$8.3 million to kick-start its reforms and initiatives. This plan was made in partnership with Autism Victoria. That partnership is also unique, and I thank the staff of Autism Victoria for its significant contribution to the development of that plan.

In my senior Victorians portfolio we are maintaining our commitment to supporting the health, wellbeing and independence of senior Victorians. We are investing \$61.6 million in seniors initiatives — for example, extending our home and community care program by investing \$49.8 million in it over four years. This will allow us to leverage the additional commonwealth money on top of that, enabling us to deliver over 158 000 extra hours of HACC (home and community care) services to Victorians in 2009–10. There is also additional funding for the Personal Alert Victoria service, giving us an additional 1000 units to put in place. That brings our number of units to 22 000. We are continuing our investment in Land bank, bringing our total investments there to \$14.8 million. This will ensure we can assist non-government organisations to build residential aged-care facilities in the inner parts of Melbourne, where we know we have some gaps but where land prices are very high. We have expanded our Men's Shed program with an additional \$2 million. We are also continuing our other programs, which will roll out this year, around

dentures, spectacles, dementia programs, mobile eye care and our elder abuse prevention strategy.

Making sure that Victorians have access to the best mental health care and treatment is a top priority for the Brumby government. Since we were elected we have increased spending on mental health by 108 per cent, and we now treat an extra 9000 people a year. In this area we have been undertaking significant consultation, and we now have an outline of the new direction and new focus for mental health services in Victoria. That was outlined in the landmark mental health strategy *Because Mental Health Matters*. This strategy has been overwhelmingly endorsed right across our system by families, consumers, carers, clinicians and schools. People from right across our system have participated in the development of that strategy and have also supported its directions.

This budget continues our investment — last year we invested \$128 million and this year we will invest \$182 million — with a particular focus on the mental health area of children and youth, delivering the new *Early in Life* program and the new youth prevention and recovery care services. There is also now a capacity to deliver the reforms that we see as critical in our education system to ensure good links between schools, students, teachers and our specialist mental health services, which are all focused on delivering better care to children and young people who have a mental illness or are at risk of developing one. The budget also continues our capital investment, with our redevelopment of the Dandenong Hospital, money for more beds at the Geelong Hospital and our continuation of PARC, our prevention and recovery care rollout.

Unfortunately I have been able to touch briefly on only some of my portfolio areas and not on all of them. However, these investments have been welcomed across the board. Anglicare welcomes our investments in child protection, mental health, social housing, water and sewage concessions. In its media release under the heading 'Victorian budget boost for seniors in employment, health', National Seniors said that it welcomed 'several initiatives in the Victorian budget'. The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare issued a media release entitled 'Timely help for Victoria's most vulnerable children'.

A Victorian Council of Social Service media release says the investment for vulnerable children is a welcome step and that the budget has decent spending in tough times. Right across the board we have positive comments, including from the director of Catholic Social Services. People have acknowledged that this is a tough economic situation but this government has

continued its focus on supporting vulnerable families and children in our communities. Perhaps at no more important time have we seen almost another billion dollars invested in A Fairer Victoria.

I want to speak briefly on some of the initiatives in my electorate, because this budget has continued our commitment to support, grow and invest in the regions. In Geelong this budget invests another \$100 million, building on our record of rebuilding schools, rebuilding the Geelong hospital, building roads, aged-care facilities and sporting and community facilities. For example, we are continuing our investment in Barwon Health, building on the Andrew Love Cancer Centre and Grace McKellar Centre redevelopments. We are spending almost \$100 million on aged-care facilities that were almost privatised under the former government. We are funding a new emergency department for the Geelong Hospital, and this budget delivers \$30 million for more mental health beds, a surgical ward and theatre capacity.

We are also continuing to invest in our cultural precinct development, with funding of \$3 million for the Geelong Performing Arts Centre. In my electorate there are important investments in new bus services. Before the creation of the bus interchange in Geelong it was very difficult for Bellarine residents to use buses because the bus stops were spread right across the City of Greater Geelong area. The new interchange will ensure that the new buses coming online will deliver more services and that there will be a better timetabling arrangement.

There is funding for 300 car parking spaces at the Marshall railway station, where a lot of Bellarine residents park their cars when they catch a train. We are extending the community renewal program in Whittington for another three years. It is a fantastic program that is delivering for that very disadvantaged community in my electorate.

There is funding for my local State Emergency Service and Country Fire Authority groups. The Leopold and Portarlington CFA groups have done a fantastic job this year on a number of issues in Bellarine. They also participated in the recent bushfires by supporting their colleagues in the bushfire-affected regions. They will receive funding for new equipment, as will the Bellarine SES. There is also funding for the rebuilding of St Leonards Primary School, which will be fantastic for that small but important local community.

This budget is a story about investment, jobs and building further infrastructure and, critically, it is about delivering services and supporting our regions. We are

making sure that Victoria is well placed — and all Victorians are well placed — to meet the challenge of the difficult economic times and that Victoria continues to be the best place to live.

Ms WOOLDRIDGE (Doncaster) — I am pleased to rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Appropriation (2009/2010) Bill. Each year for the last 10 years millions of Victorians have waited with bated breath for a budget that will deliver the services they desperately need, services such as public transport, health, education and community services, and each year they continue to be disappointed.

I was thinking about this budget when I was playing with my three-year-old recently. It struck me that the game he and I were playing is the same game that the Premier and the ministers play week in, week out. It is called blindman's buff, a simple game that requires a person to be blindfolded. In this the Premier and the ministers are all too willing to volunteer — in fact some say that some of the ministers are permanently blindfolded — and once blindfolded they withdraw into a world of their own. They are blind to the failing health-care system, blind to the crumbling public transport network and blind to the breakdown in our education system.

The next rule of the game is that you must spin, and this is where the enthusiasm of government members really shows. Let us take this budget. The first spin occurs when the Premier promises that a \$31 billion state debt and more than \$2 billion a year in annual interest repayments are good news for Victoria. The government spins again when the Premier promises that having 200 000 Victorians set to be jobless by the end of the year is a positive outcome. Then there is more spin when the Premier and the Treasurer pretend that the debts our children and grandchildren will be lumped with will not actually be all that bad. Blinded by their own spin, members of this government teeter on the edge, out of balance and out of control. If it were not for their mates in Canberra temporarily propping them up, over they would fall.

The final step of the game is tagging someone, which is a much-relished opportunity for these blind men. This Premier tries to tag anyone and anything other than himself with the blame — the global financial crisis, the Kennett government, the opposition, El Niño, the community, the young and the old. He blames everyone but himself for his poor economic management.

The reality is that this budget is no childhood amusement game. Sadly, however, it is a game that is played out all too often in my shadow portfolio areas.

From vulnerable Victorians the response to this budget ranges from disappointment to outrage. I have to say that I am very disappointed that the Minister for Mental Health, who spoke before me, has left and is not hearing the messages on her portfolio areas that the community wants to convey as a result of this budget.

I turn first to disability services. The peak bodies of national disability services say that this budget undermines the survival and future sustainability of disability organisations. VCOSS (Victorian Council of Social Service) says that 7 in 10 organisations are turning away clients due to lack of funding. Rising inflation and wage increases have placed considerable pressure on the community sector organisations to attract and maintain staff as well as meet the increasing costs of delivering services. This Labor government has indexed funding at 3.14 per cent, which is 25 per cent less than the funding identified by the Allen Consulting Group as needed for these groups to provide appropriate services to vulnerable Victorians. The minister says this 3.14 per cent was welcomed overwhelmingly.

Let me tell you, Acting Speaker, who is underwhelmed. The entire disability sector is underwhelmed by this budget and this indexation and what the government has delivered. Yes, we do need some additional dollars for individuals, but we also need to ensure that we have a strong sector that can deliver the services to individuals and families with disability. The government's lower indexation rate will make it even more difficult for organisations to meet demand and will make it impossible to improve service delivery. Many organisations will continue to struggle to deliver vital supported accommodation respite and day services.

This budget also fails to address the base price for disability services, adding further pressure on an already struggling sector. The government's disability pricing review, which was undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers — and which has not been released and which should be; I call on the minister to release it — says that the sector is underfunded by more than \$50 million. The 2009–10 budget will not reduce the financial strain experienced by disability organisations and their staff, but it will reduce the quality and availability of services for people with a disability and their families.

I would like to talk briefly on supported accommodation. For families and carers of people with a disability, supported accommodation is absolutely critical. Describing this budget as a colossal disappointment does not even come close to reality.

Carers Victoria says that carers have been ignored in this budget. A critical area for carers is supported accommodation. Individuals and families eagerly awaiting access to supported accommodation have been forgotten. This is the seventh consecutive year that the Brumby government has failed to provide any additional supported accommodation places for Victorians with a disability. A comparison of last year's funding with next year's funding for residential accommodation support shows a decrease of over 7 per cent. In handing down this bad-news budget the Treasurer claimed that he would deliver a fairer Victoria. For many carers who are crying out for help, frustrated with an inefficient system that does not meet even current demand, let alone plan for the future, this budget is anything but fair.

I turn to drug and alcohol services. Just last year the Premier declared alcohol abuse the biggest social issue facing Victoria. Now, 12 months later, alcohol abuse continues to remain a major social issue, but apparently the Premier no longer thinks it is important. Victorians in desperate need of alcohol and drug services are waiting months, and sometimes even years, for treatment and rehabilitation services. This budget does not provide even one additional drug treatment bed to meet the growing need. Real adjusted funding for drug treatment and rehabilitation services has declined by 1.6 per cent. The peak body for drug and alcohol services in Victoria is VAADA (Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association). It says that the state budget offers little to Victorians with alcohol and drug problems and the services that support them.

It is not surprising that the Minister for Mental Health, who has direct responsibility for drug and alcohol services, did not even mention this area in her reply to the budget. That is because she has nothing to say. People in the drug and alcohol sector are disappointed and outraged about her lack of support and the lack of a champion for this area.

In April this year the Brumby government released its much-anticipated amphetamine-type stimulant and related drug strategy. Members may be forgiven for not having realised that this important document was released. When I first came across the document I was astonished. Where was the photo opportunity? Where was the press statement? How very out of character for a government, which for 20 months had been sponsoring the hype around this strategy, to then release it with no fanfare.

But when I read the strategy the mystery was solved. There was no photo opportunity because the strategy contained no commitments, only a wish list of ideas.

There was no press statement because the strategy contained no money, not even a hint of anything forthcoming. Without any commitments and without any funding, it comes as little surprise that the strategy also failed to include any time lines for implementation. What a sham! Many groups spent months, and in some cases years, trying to come up with a solution to support the 114 000 Victorians who use methamphetamines every year. The Premier should come clean and admit that he and his ministers have no interest in tackling these serious issues and the growing impact of alcohol and drugs on Victorian families and communities.

In terms of mental health, when this Labor government came to office Victoria spent more on mental health per capita than any other state, but it has since fallen to sixth place. I am going to say that again: we spent the most in 1999; it has now fallen to sixth. Labor has also spent a decade promising to reform Victoria's mental health system. Each time the promises are made, we have an overabundance of reports. Finally, in March this year, the much-anticipated reform strategy was released. While this budget provides some welcome additional but urgently needed funding for mental health services, it still does not solve our crisis-driven mental health system.

The budget has been talked about as the jobs budget, and there are additional mental health jobs, but the government first identified a critical shortage in Victoria's mental health workforce in 2002, which is seven years ago. It has taken seven years and an increasingly dire situation before the government has finally flagged the need to take some genuine action.

While additional funding for mental health jobs is welcome, the sad reality is that the supply of new graduates is low and the availability of a specialised workforce is limited. The government can fund all the positions it likes, but it has no idea if there are enough people qualified and willing to fill those positions.

In 2005 the government's own public mental health workforce strategy 2003–12 found that staff retention was just as important as recruitment. It stated:

Further action is needed to address current and emerging workforce concerns. These issues are linked to ... the system's growing difficulties in attracting and retaining appropriately skilled professionals.

We need accompanying workforce measures which will increase the training of mental health workers, introduce retention initiatives and ensure that the working conditions they all face are sustainable.

We see the Minister for Senior Victorians twice a year: once on budget day and then again during Seniors Week. She spends the rest of the time in hibernation. Seniors are missing out because of the Brumby government's failure to plan for our ageing population.

Aged and Community Care Victoria, which is the peak aged-care organisation, in its budget submission called for additional state funding to strengthen residential aged care, with a particular focus on rural and regional Victoria, where the government owns 40 per cent of all places. This has not been not delivered.

Earlier this year when the minister was presented with an opportunity to improve services in cooperation with the commonwealth, both she and her department failed to attend the Melbourne hearing of a Senate inquiry into residential and community aged care and neglected to even make a submission. At a time when the aged-care sector is under considerable pressure, this government has not done anything to improve planning and funding and better delivery of services. Instead Victorians are stuck with a minister who is simply not interested and a government that simply cannot be bothered.

W affairs is an area that has clearly been forgotten in the budget. Not only has the funding for women's affairs declined, but the government's own minister forgot to put out a press release, which is very unusual for this government, but it is indicative of the fact that there was obviously nothing noteworthy for women in the budget.

This government is often heard trumpeting the line that Victoria is the best place to live, work and raise a family. But I say to the Premier that for women this is not the case. The Premier says Victoria is the best place to live, but the government's own data shows that violent crime is increasing at alarming rates, and women are now twice as likely to be assaulted as they were 10 years ago. The Premier says that Victoria is a great place to work, but women continue to face barriers to accessing flexible employment opportunities and struggle to juggle the demands of work and family life. And when compared to parts of the developed world, Victorian women have a lower participation rate in paid employment.

The Premier also says that Victoria is a better place to raise a family, but Labor's failure to appropriately invest in support services has meant that primary carers — largely women and forgotten in this budget — have among the lowest levels of general health and wellbeing, and are more financially stressed with no opportunity to accumulate superannuation savings.

Overall the significant gaps in the government's social policy mean that its enthusiastically developed strategies will remain unfunded, that accommodation places will not materialise, that access to services will remain complex and that jobs created will remain unfilled.

I want to spend a few minutes talking about the Doncaster electorate, because for residents in my electorate this budget is bittersweet. While increased bus services will be welcomed by commuters, Doncaster residents will still have to wait nearly two more years for the services to begin. Even then the services will not match the recommendations made by Sir Rod Eddington to the government. He recommended peak-hour frequencies of about 5 minutes to achieve a high-quality, rail-like service. However, we have no real rail services in my electorate, only buses, and the government will only fund services at half that frequency.

Another disappointment has been the government's failure again to fund the much-awaited and long-promised redevelopment of Box Hill Hospital. Although the upgrade was promised during the whirl of pre-election promises in 2006, the government has still provided no money to improve this vital health facility. It keeps saying it will honour its commitment, but when? People in Manningham and Whitehorse deserve a high-quality facility that meets their health needs.

I hope this budget will, however, provide some relief for long-suffering Doncaster and Donvale residents whose lives have been turned upside down with traffic noise since the opening of EastLink. Funding has been provided to retrofit sound barriers along sections of freeways and arterial roads to protect neighbouring homes from noise created by passing vehicles. Donvale and Doncaster residents who have had their lives drastically affected by the noise of vehicles travelling on EastLink are keen to be included on the list of areas funded through the new budget funding.

This government has spent a decade playing a game with Victorians. While the Premier and ministers may choose to remain blind to failing services, Victorian families and individuals feel the effects of it every day. They cannot ignore it; it is their life, and they deal with it day in and day out. While the government's message is spun around and around by the Labor media machine, Victorians continue to be worse off. Unfortunately the rhetoric of self-congratulation and self-promotion from this government is not matched by the realities that Victorian families face day in and day out, and the most vulnerable are at risk and are failing to get the support and services they need.

My constituents deserve better, Victorians deserve better, and we need a genuine commitment to delivering the services that vulnerable Victorians need and deserve.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — I am delighted to rise in support of the Appropriation (2009/10) Bill. There has not been a more difficult time for governments around the world to draft budgets since well before the Second World War. It has been incredibly difficult. But the 2009–10 state budget delivered by the Treasurer delivers on a number of fronts and has been well received in the community.

This is a budget for jobs and a budget for families; it is a budget that secures 35 000 jobs. This is a AAA budget; it is a budget that maintains our operating surplus, which has been a focus of the government. Handing down a budget in operating deficit is difficult, and it is painful for the community while the government works itself out of an operating deficit. It requires cuts in spending or increases in taxes. This is a AAA budget that maintains our operating surplus.

The other highlight of this budget is that it is a partnership budget, with the state government working shoulder to shoulder with the commonwealth government. There are historic levels of infrastructure in roads, in schools and in community facilities, and I will talk about one or two of those later on in my contribution.

This is a budget for families. On the Thursday following the handing down of the budget the Premier released the latest version of *A Fairer Victoria*, which contains a number of important initiatives.

This is a budget for recovery. Governments around the world are investing in infrastructure in a time of global recession. The private sector reduces its level of investment in the community, and governments fill that space of infrastructure investment for a number of reasons. It keeps the economy moving forward, it secures jobs, and as the recovery kicks in we will have a more productive and innovative economy to take advantage of that recovery.

I would like to spend some time talking about a number of initiatives in my portfolio responsibility areas of sport, recreation and youth affairs and assisting the Premier on multicultural affairs.

This budget delivers for community sport, with just under \$21 million for facilities, grounds and equipment. It is a boost that will deliver jobs in maintenance and construction and will create stronger clubs in the face of

a decade-long drought, the recent bushfires and extremely tough global economic times.

There are two highlights in particular in the sports portfolio around basketball and soccer. The government announced a \$7 million grant for the State Basketball Centre. This is something that not only I and many people in the basketball community have been working on for the last couple of years while I have been sports minister but something which, as I have heard from Lindsay Gaze, the basketball community has been working on for decades and decades.

The State Basketball Centre will be located on the corner of EastLink and High Street. The EastLink corridor has the most amazing concentration of basketball players in the nation. If you think about it, you will note that all the basketball associations in the EastLink corridor — Frankston, Dandenong, Knox, Kilsyth, Nunawading — represent the greatest concentration of registered basketballers in the nation. It is quite fitting that the State Basketball Centre will be located in Knox.

It will not only be the State Basketball Centre; it will also be the Knox regional sports complex. In addition to the six high-ball courts that are to be built as part of stage 1 of this development, the centre will be home to a couple of synthetic soccer pitches and will be a major regional facility for Football Federation Victoria. The FFV has a strategic plan to have a number of centres in both regional Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne, and this will be the home of the FFV for the south-east.

Lindsay Gaze was at the announcement, which was made a few days before we handed down the budget, and Lindsay spoke passionately about the State Basketball Centre and about how after a period of 50 years this dream is finally being realised. We have the State Netball Hockey Centre, the State Volleyball Centre and the home of the Australian Football League and the FFV, but there has never been a state basketball centre. He said the basketball community came extremely close under the Bolte government, extremely close under the Cain government and extremely close under the Kennett government to securing a state basketball centre and that finally achieving it is fantastic and most welcome.

Like many things in this state budget, it is about partnership. A week after we handed down our budget, the federal government announced funding of \$7 million to match the state contribution. The Knox City Council is also heavily investing in the centre, and I want to thank the Knox City Council, the Knox

Basketball Association, Basketball Victoria and the FFV for their work.

Another very positive thing to come out of the budget is just under \$6 million for our Strengthening the World Game program for soccer. As members in this chamber would know, participation in soccer is going through the roof, and it is a challenge that we need to meet at both a local and a state level. It is important to note that this is in addition to the record funding in community facilities. It is in addition to the \$76 million Community Facility Funding program and in addition to the \$28 million drought assistance program which has a large component of funding for synthetic grounds. This will be a great resource for local clubs and communities.

One of my focuses will be on promoting the participation of girls and women in the sport of soccer. I imagine many of the applications will be about female change rooms to provide for the increased participation by girls and women. Anecdotally — and I am sure the Acting Speaker hears this as well — one of the difficulties is providing the adequate facilities to cater for the increased demand, particularly by girls and women.

There are a couple of other highlights. There is a \$1.2 million extension to the Country Football and Netball program. This has been one of the great initiatives of the state government, in partnership in the beginning with the Australian Football League. It has made a real difference in regional communities right across Victoria. I was in Shepparton for the Collingwood-Hawthorn practice match, and the upgrades at that facility in Shepparton that allowed that match were through the Country Football and Netball program. It is about improving facilities in regional Victoria. A lot of it is focused on netball, on providing change rooms and courts for the netball part of the club, but it is also focused on providing upgrades to allow for elite sport in regional Victoria.

There is \$1.6 million for sports uniforms. Members would be aware that from the savings out of the Commonwealth Games, \$1 million was set aside for sports uniform grants of up to \$1000. They were completely oversubscribed with well over 1500 clubs across Victoria getting those grants. We are reinstating that program. I encourage members to contact their local clubs. We will probably make announcements in June or July about opening up not only the soccer program but also the sports uniform grants.

There is also \$5 million for the next stage of the redevelopment of Melbourne Park. Members would

recall that this year at the Australian Open tennis championships the Premier announced the funding of \$5 million and released the vision for Melbourne Park to secure the Australian Open into the future. This is the major event in the world for the month of January — it is that big and important for our state and our city. Over the last two Australia Opens more than 600 000 people attended the major event. We always need to look at ways that we can improve — —

Mr Delahunty interjected.

Mr MERLINO — Indeed, Sam Stosur is through to the semis in the French Open, and we wish her all the best. It is important that we continue to invest in the Melbourne and Olympic Parks precinct. This is the jewel in the crown of sporting and major events infrastructure. It really is one of the best precincts in the world. Not only are we looking at the redevelopment of Melbourne Park but we are building the iconic rectangular stadium, which is nearing completion. It will be up and ready to go early next year. That will be a revelation to fans of rectangular sports — soccer, Rugby League and Rugby Union.

In terms of multicultural affairs, we are an incredibly diverse and harmonious society. We come from 200 countries. We speak more than 230 languages and dialects. We follow almost 130 faiths, and this budget enhances our reputation as a harmonious, vibrant and cohesive society. The Brumby Labor government will invest \$4.6 million in this year's budget to strengthen Victoria's cultural diversity and help support refugees in Victorian communities. There is \$2 million for the new Refugee Action program to assist more than 50 refugee and humanitarian communities across Melbourne and regional Victoria, linking services at the local level to support refugees, their families and communities. There is \$2 million for the Boosting our Multicultural Advantage program, which promotes harmony and social cohesion in the Victorian community. A further \$600 000 will be provided for water safety initiatives that will help to reduce the number of drownings among people from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

All the programs that were set to conclude at the end of the 2008–09 financial year have been continued. The Brumby government will provide approximately the same level of funding and resources as it did in that financial year. There are a number of other projects that I am extremely excited about. We have provided additional funding for the Cultural Precincts program. It is now a \$10 million program, funded in partnership with the City of Melbourne, for improvements in Lonsdale, Little Bourke and Lygon streets for the

Greek, Chinese and Italian communities respectively. During Cultural Diversity Week this year the Premier launched our new multicultural policy, All of Us. In December this city will host the Parliament of the World's Religions. About 10 000 people from overseas will be attending this multifaith conference.

The member for Bulleen referred to recent initiatives, and I just want to say that the Brumby government's decision to amend the Sentencing Act reflects our absolute rejection and condemnation of all hate-based crime. These amendments will require judges to take into account hatred for or prejudice against a particular group as an aggravating factor when sentencing. These amendments send a clear message that attacks based on race, religion, gender or sexual orientation will not be tolerated in Victoria.

I would like to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge and thank the Jewish community, in particular John Searle of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria and Menachem Vorchheimer for their hard work and strong advocacy in relation to this issue. It is important to note that their advocacy was for all Victorians, not just the Jewish community. Over a significant period of time the government has been in dialogue with John Searle from the JCCV, with Menachem and with other community groups, such as the Indian community. This is a very important initiative. The next step is that the government will be getting advice on the broader issue of whether there need to be hate-crime offences. Members of the Brumby government believe all Victorians are entitled to feel safe in their community, and we are looking at a range of reforms that send a clear message that attacks against any Victorian based on race, religion, gender or sexual orientation will not be tolerated.

In the last minute of my contribution I really want to encourage members of Parliament and multicultural communities right across Victoria to be involved in the harmony walk on 12 July to reaffirm Victoria's strong support for multiculturalism and acknowledge the enormous contribution of ethnic, cultural and religious communities to this state.

I am sorry I do not have enough time to talk about it, but in relation to young people there is so much happening. There is \$274 million worth of investment for vulnerable young people just through this budget alone — \$134 million for out-of-home care, \$36 million for homelessness prevention and early intervention and \$52 million for expanding the homelessness services. Mental health is another strong focus of this year's budget. We are funding the Respect

agenda, which is promoting volunteering in our community. It is a great budget — —

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

Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) — On 5 May the Treasurer presented the Victorian government's budget for 2009–10. Sadly this is not a budget to benefit country Victoria. There is very little in this budget to give hope in these tough economic times. This is despite the government having been in power for 10 years and receiving over \$300 billion of revenue.

In my electorate of the Shepparton district we are finding it particularly hard. We have had 10 years of drought as well as other disadvantages. Over that time we have had the worst frost on record and the worst hail on record, and the people in agriculture are finding it really hard. The lack of water is a really big disadvantage to my community. Even though the lack of water is a disadvantage, the government is continuing to lay pipes from the north-east to Melbourne. Although it says it is going to get this water from savings, it has not been able to come up with the savings, and the community is now outraged at the fact that the government is still trying to take water from the food bowl of Australia to Melbourne. Nobody minds pipes being laid to benefit the country areas and the Murray-Darling Basin and the environment, but where people get really angry is when the water and the money put into building these pipes are for the benefit of Melbourne, because Melbourne has other alternatives from which to source water.

All of this is in spite of the fact that I have actually asked the minister to put a pipeline in place in the Goulburn Valley to benefit the people of the Goulburn Valley. A pressurised pipeline is needed for landowners in the Cosgrove, Cosgrove South and Pine Lodge district to help the people of that area, and also to keep those water savings in the region. For the first time in 112 years those people have had zero allocation. The 100 land-holders in the Shepparton stock and domestic community water supply system are left with no stock and domestic water and with empty dams. They have been forced to sell or agist elsewhere their thousands of sheep and hundreds of cattle.

I have previously asked the Minister for Water to provide the \$4.3 million for the new pipeline system. That investment is in return for 630 megalitres of water which will be returned annually to the Murray-Darling Basin system. In effect it would be an investment for this government to put the money into this pipeline to help farmers to continue their agricultural pursuits and,

in return for that, the Murray-Darling Basin would receive extra water annually. That would be better for the environment and it would meet much-needed critical human requirements, allowing farmers to again make money from their farms, but sadly there is no funding in the budget.

One of the other matters I am sad is not in the budget is the upgrade of the Benalla Road, which is part of the Midland Highway. Two years ago now I raised with the Minister for Roads and Ports the fact that a section on the Midland Highway between Florence Street and the Doyles Road roundabout was becoming much more dangerous and confusing. There is a lot of development in the area and a lot of businesses are encroaching on it. There are a lot of entrances and exits off that highway, and motorists are now finding it very difficult to move into or exit those businesses and go into the flow of traffic in what is a very congested area. With the mix of traffic, with trucks and cars, caravans and buses, it is only a matter of time before there is a really big accident there. When the minister wrote back to me, his response was that they will consider it only when it is prioritised on a statewide basis. I would be urging the minister to prioritise and fund an upgrade of this dangerous road before a tragic accident occurs.

The only specific allocation for my electorate is for a new building at Toolamba Primary School. This is great because the school certainly needs that new building. What the government failed to say was that about 85 per cent of that funding will come from the commonwealth.

There is no funding for the upgrade of a new police station at Mooropna or for any extra police, which I have been calling for for many years.

In my portfolio as shadow Minister for Local Government, I have to say that the 79 Victorian councils, particularly country councils, would have to be disappointed with this budget. A lot of financial stress has been put on councils because of the continual cost shifting by this state government onto local government, giving them extra responsibilities but not providing the appropriate funding.

If we look at libraries, library funding has decreased over the years. There is no extra funding in this budget although the need for libraries is growing.

If we look at roadside weed and pest control that is now being given to local government to manage, there is \$20 million over four years, which is \$5 million a year. That is for councils to look after roadside weeds and pests and animals. That money is to be divided between

the Department of Primary Industries and the councils, so it is not for just the councils.

The councils in the drought-affected areas are in need of drought relief subsidies, which this government is stopping. They are also in need of drought counsellors. The drought counsellors' contracts finish at the end of July. What they need to know is whether the funding will be there to allow them to continue their much-needed work. Because we have had some rain, that does not mean that the drought has ended. In fact, the drought and the effects of the drought continue, and the impact on farmers, farming families and the whole community continues because of the impacts of the drought and the lack of support from this government.

During the recent tragic bushfires councils have also been badly affected. In this time of recuperation a lot of responsibilities are going to end up with councils which will have to fund a lot of the works. I know that councils have been calling on the government, as has the opposition, to provide more funding to those councils to allow them to do the work, including the clean-up, that they need to do.

It was interesting that on 2 April, after the coalition called for support for local government, the Premier announced a \$9 million bushfire relief package for local government — but that funding is to come from the bushfire appeal fund. When people in my electorate and right around the state heard that that money was coming from there, they were outraged. It was to be used to pay for the increased demand on rubbish removal, on tree clearing from roads and public areas, and the purchase of vegetation and flora. While we understand that in some instances some money needs to come out of the bushfire relief fund, I am sure that members of the community, who were very generous and put that money into that fund, would not consider that state government responsibilities should be paid for with money in that fund and that a lot of people are very angry that the Premier has his fingers in that bucket of money and is using it for what should be state-funded state responsibilities.

Mr Weller interjected.

Mrs POWELL — As the member for Rodney states, it is a shame. The community is quite outraged that the Premier is making announcements on funding that is to come out of that bushfire appeal fund to which, as I said earlier, the community rightly gave money for the benefit of those people who have lost everything and are trying to rebuild their lives.

There are huge implications in this budget because of the recent Ombudsman's report which found improper conduct among councillors of the Brimbank City Council. Concerns were expressed by the Ombudsman about the way Local Government Victoria discharged its statutory responsibility to investigate potential breaches of the Local Government Act at Brimbank. The Ombudsman said that Local Government Victoria's response to complaints about Brimbank did not deal adequately with them. You may wonder what that has to do with the budget, but what the Ombudsman said was that measures need to be taken to ensure that Local Government Victoria is sufficiently resourced to meet its statutory requirements to enable it to investigate any breaches of the Local Government Act.

When you talk to people in councils around the state, they say that this is why it takes Local Government Victoria so long to investigate matters and why it sometimes does not deal with matters — because of the lack of resources. The Premier must immediately increase funding so that Local Government Victoria can do the job it was set up to do.

There are other implications in the budget because of the corruption findings about Brimbank. The government will be amending the Local Government Act to prohibit elected councillors from being employed by federal and state members of Parliament during their terms of office. I understand that as many as 35 staff in the offices of members of Parliament will be sacked or forced to resign from their positions as electorate officers or ministerial staff. This will trigger costly by-elections. We need to know how many. We have not heard yet how many by-elections will be needed. We need to know whether those councillors who are involved have been told that they will be removed from their elected positions, and whether the minister has started talking to them yet, because it would cause huge discomfort in electorate offices at the moment where councillors do not know whether they will be able to keep their jobs and, if not, when they have to resign or will be sacked. It brings up some huge issues of their human rights, so again we need to know that. We also need to know who will pay for these by-elections. The countback system, with figures from the last election, will be used. Again, at what cost will that be to ratepayers or will it be a cost to the council? This is all to happen because the Labor government has done nothing about the corruption at Brimbank, and many councillors who have done nothing wrong will lose their jobs.

I think the saddest thing about this whole sorry saga following the Ombudsman's report — and I

congratulate him on the investigation he did — is that a number of councillors right across Victoria who have been elected to represent their communities and are doing so in the correct way will be tarnished by being associated with the same bad behaviour of the Brimbank councillors.

We need to know also what will be the cost of employing the municipal inspector who is going to monitor Brimbank for three years, and who will pay for that. What is the true cost to the ratepayers of Victoria just because the government did not stamp out corruption at the Brimbank council?

One of my other responsibilities is as shadow Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. After being in government for 10 years with \$300 billion in revenue, the government has failed to improve the lives of indigenous Victorians. The Auditor-General's indigenous affairs annual report which was tabled in December last year gave a scathing account of the government's response across all its departments. Unemployment figures for indigenous Victorians are still triple those of the rest of Victorians. There are many other failures in the budget. The life expectancy of indigenous Victorians is 17½ years less than that of non-indigenous Victorians. There are many other failures about crime prevention initiatives to support Aboriginal communities. The 2008–09 budget target was underspent by \$1 million, and the funding in the future estimates for 2009–10 has not increased. In his report on indigenous affairs which was tabled recently the Auditor-General said that the government has failed in four of its five objectives to improve indigenous justice outcomes. So it should not be underspending; it should be adding more.

I think it is appalling the way the minister and the government have dealt with Reconciliation Victoria, which is the peak body for reconciliation in the state. Mr Frank Hytton, the chief executive officer of Reconciliation Victoria, advised me that funding for the body had ceased. Due to the lobbying of the coalition, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs was forced to say the government would continue to keep the much-needed organisation going. The minister has said the government will provide \$150 000 for the remainder of this year and continuing into next year, but only on the proviso that the organisation merges with Stolen Generations Victoria.

If the minister had spoken to either of those organisations, they would have told him they do not want to merge. They are entirely separate organisations. Reconciliation Victoria has now rejected that offer for two reasons: firstly, because it has been advised by the minister that the money is to come from the Aboriginal

Affairs Victoria budget, and secondly, because it does not want to merge with Stolen Generations Victoria. Eighty per cent of the organisation's work is with non-Aboriginal groups and organisations, sporting clubs and schools. Its staff goes to these organisations and educates non-indigenous people about the need for and importance of reconciliation and the history of Aboriginal culture.

We need to know where that funding will come from, as it is not in the budget — or is the government really going to abolish Reconciliation Victoria? The government needs to come clean about what it will do with the organisation. It also needs to come clean about what it will do to improve the health of Aboriginal people. At the end of the day the government must understand that more money needs to go into Aboriginal affairs. There also needs to be a lot more clarity and transparency about what departments are doing, where the money is going and what the positive outcomes for Aboriginal communities are.

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — I rise to support the Appropriation (2009/2010) Bill. This budget comes at a tough economic time, not just for Victoria and Australia but also globally. The Victorian budget has been recognised by the New South Wales Liberal opposition as a template for other states, but of course it has been scorned by the Victorian Liberal Party and The Nationals, who are always Liberals and Nationals first and Victorians last. The Brumby government has stepped up to the plate and developed a budget that will help stimulate the economy while positioning Victoria to take advantage of the global economic upturn when it occurs. We have kept recurrent expenditure in surplus and maintained Victoria's AAA credit rating through careful management and good advice. I commend the Treasurer and the government on bringing down this budget.

The state of Victoria — particularly my electorate of Seymour — was dealt a great blow by the bushfires earlier this year. For me that was much worse than any global financial crisis. The Victorian government, with great assistance from the federal government, has worked tirelessly to ensure that bushfire-impacted communities can recover and rebuild. As it always has to be said, there is so much more to be done — and in this case that is obvious every day. I am pleased to see that the budget commits \$968 million over five years to respond to the needs of bushfire-impacted communities. Importantly this includes funding to rebuild the Strathewen, Marysville and Middle Kinglake primary schools. All those schools are doing a fantastic job to assist their students and their families to go through the recovery process.

This commitment is in addition to other state government funding for infrastructure. Some of this has been announced, especially assistance for community sporting clubs, but many other community and state government buildings need to be replaced. There is a real commitment by the whole of government to investigate and discuss with the community how to rebuild these buildings in a better form and then deliver that rebuilding. This budget is so important to the people of the Seymour electorate and other communities that need their confidence boosted. The government is committed to rebuilding, and I would like to focus on that in particular and thank the government for realising that an extra effort is required despite the tough financial times.

Further to that, I am very pleased the government has recognised that many towns and rural communities surrounding the bushfire-impacted areas had other plans in place and has continued to invest in those rural communities. I would like to give a few examples. The Alexandra District Hospital redevelopment has been on the cards for some time — it was an election commitment in 2006 — and has been totally funded in this budget. Money has come from Ambulance Victoria and from funding the hospital has been able to put towards the project through careful management. I think it is putting in about \$2.5 million. The total provided for the redevelopment in this budget is \$15.3 million, but there was also \$1 million in the last budget to help with planning and other issues. The Alexandra District Hospital and the Alexandra ambulance station will be totally rebuilt on a site that is owned by the hospital.

I commend the staff, chief executive officer and board of the hospital for taking what was an original Brumby government promise of \$15 million to redevelop its hospital and turning it into a project to build a new hospital and a new ambulance station to meet the needs of the local community. The Minister for Health has taken a lot of time and paid a lot of attention to detail to ensure a great outcome for the Alexandra district. I thank the Minister for Health and all those people who have worked so hard over a long period of time to get the best possible outcome for the Alexandra community. I thank the ambulance service and the hospital for the major part they played in helping people in the immediate and aftermath of the Black Saturday bushfires and for their ongoing role in that regard.

Something else in the budget which I think is very important, especially for women and their families in our communities, is the BreastScreen digital technology rollout, which includes the mobile BreastScreen vans.

Broadford and Seymour will be upgraded with that technology. The lives of people who utilise that service will be made that bit easier because they are not going to have to travel to get better and more timely advice. Having known people who have gone through the breast cancer process, I am sure this service will help provide some comfort, even if it is just in that worrying earlier period.

In the area of police and emergency services, this budget has also delivered for the Seymour electorate and the rural towns within it. In Pyalong we are rebuilding the police station. That comes after a brand-new police station at Kinglake, which we promised in 1999 and had built to provide a service in that community. New 24-hour police stations will be built at Kilmore and Wallan. Those communities have previously not had stations with that kind of capacity. There will be a rebuilt 24-hour police station at Seymour, and there will also be a new police station in Broadford. This shows us that the Brumby government is continuing its commitment to improve the resourcing of police in country Victoria.

The importance of equipment for the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the State Emergency Service (SES) has also been recognised in this budget. Brigades in the Seymour electorate have been provided with some new assets. In Seymour the SES is receiving a new heavy-rescue Hino, as well as a new rescue boat. I know that is going to help the unit and its dedicated volunteers do their job better. The unit in Healesville will be receiving a new road crash rescue kit, and I know the controller there is really pleased about that. The Kilmore unit will also be receiving a new heavy-rescue Hino, which is fantastic. As you can imagine, the Kilmore SES would have been flat out, like all the others, during the recovery phase of the bushfires. I know members of that brigade have been directly impacted upon by the fires, like many others across the electorate. This funding does not include the new heavy-rescue Hinos we replaced in Marysville and Kinglake after they lost their equipment in the fires.

With regard to the CFA, there will be a new heavy tanker at Healesville, a new heavy tanker at Wandong and a new light pumper in the Yea area, and I thank the Minister for Police and Emergency Services for foreseeing these great needs. These SES and CFA brigades are looking after growing and needy communities. Upgraded equipment will help the volunteers do their jobs in a bit more comfort and with a bit more confidence.

Turning to education, this budget was welcomed broadly across the electorate. Healesville High School

had previously received some funding for a science and technology centre, but the rest of the school was pretty run down and members of the school community were very keen to be able to provide their students with up-to-date, modern facilities. They have lobbied me for quite some time to be able to bring that about. In this budget there was a \$10 million announcement for that school's rebuild. I am sure people who visited that school would see why the rebuild is needed. When it is done, it will be a project that I and the whole of the Healesville community will be very proud of. I congratulate the Healesville High School community on the work it did in making sure that the students and staff enjoy the best possible learning conditions.

Pyalong Primary School was also funded in this budget for a rebuild. The school community there had lobbied for a long time about the school's conditions. This funding will enable that community to provide more permanent facilities that better meet the needs of education in this current time, and I congratulate it on achieving that project.

There was also funding for education in the federal budget under the Building Education Revolution program, which is going to be fantastic. Kilmore Primary School is receiving \$3 million for a project to build a 21st-century multipurpose centre. That is fantastic because the school had been lobbying me about finishing its project. The \$3 million from the federal government to build this multipurpose centre, which the school has space for and which is all ready to go, will mean that it will be done much sooner. The federal government has seen fit to invest in school communities.

As well as that, Badger Creek Primary School — a beautiful primary school near the Healesville Sanctuary, which was extremely well built at the time — will be receiving \$2 million for a 21st-century library and learning neighbourhood centre. Broadford Primary School will also be receiving \$2.5 million for a 21st-century library and learning neighbourhood centre. Wallan Primary School will be receiving \$3 million from the federal government for a project as well.

I commend the federal government for providing this funding, because these facilities are very much needed and there is only a bucket of money of a certain size that the state can dip into to improve facilities. What the federal government has done is ensure that the needs of schools have been brought forward. Children are going to benefit greatly from that expenditure now and in the future.

I commend the budget to the house. It should certainly be seen as a glass half full rather than a glass half empty, which is how the opposition would like to describe it. The Bracks and Brumby governments have continued to reinvest and rebuild country Victorian communities. What has been quite amazing as I have looked around my electorate of Seymour is that, despite 10 or 12 years of drought and the global financial crisis, there still seems to be some confidence, with people investing in new and creative tourism businesses. Townships are certainly looking like they have had a fresh paint job. They have certainly freshened up and improved themselves over the time that the government has been in office. That is about our careful investment in those communities. I wish this bill a very speedy passage.

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2009/2010) Bill. It is said that a house built of cards will not stand the test of time, and that is what applies to this budget. That is particularly so with respect to the fundamentals of the health portfolio, where there is the risk of failing to meet future demand because of an underlying failure to forecast and plan. One has only to go back to look at the 2003 metropolitan health strategy to understand the failure to plan for the future revealed in that document.

To my mind the health budget is a budget of lost opportunities. Some critics have called it underwhelming. I call it disappointing, to say the least. The Brumby government budget speech amounted to nothing more than a waffling attempt to justify the ineptitude, with a very large side dish of reheated servings of the usual buffet of promises. Major capital works projects have gone unfunded, and there are promises of eventual funding with commonwealth money — if those opposite me are to be believed; hopefully, fingers crossed! — which will probably be drip fed, as every other single major health infrastructure project promised by this government has so far been funded.

As a framework for the way forward, in my view the health budget has failed miserably to address the major issues facing our growing and ageing population. Victorians are tired of half measures, reannouncements, empty promises and bandaid solutions which do not work in health. They know that Victoria ranks lowest in Australia for per capita state government health expenditure, based on figures from the Productivity Commission and on the number of beds provided per thousand of population. The government knows that the \$45 million elective surgery blitz is only a temporary policy which will have only a temporary effect. The health minister may mistakenly believe a waiting list is

a backlog of patients which can be eliminated through one-off, temporary, dedicated funding, but what he fails to realise is that such a perspective completely ignores the dynamic nature of waiting list times and the continuous nature of technological change.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development has found that the waiting time is affected by the number of patients on the list at any point in time but also by the number of patients who are continually added to the list. A temporary increase in supply may, at most, slow down the growth in waiting times, but it will not fix the problem. What is needed is long-term planning based on reliable and accurate forecasting, not the incorrect rubbish that was in the 2003 metropolitan health strategy. We need proper planning to provide the health system with the capacity to sustain a level of activity which is commensurate with the increased level of demand that has emerged in Victoria as a result of our growing and ageing population. Clearly the Minister for Health and the Brumby government have failed in this endeavour.

All the health minister has to do is read the report of Access Economics commissioned by the Victorian Healthcare Association. That document reports details of worn infrastructure, crowded and underfunded emergency departments and ancient IT systems. Those responsible for running our hospitals with what the Brumby government hands out are frustrated. They are sick of the drip feed of small amounts of capital handed out, particularly near election times. As was reported, this is 'ad hoc and inefficient and open to the perception of political bias'. I think 'perception' is the kindest word that could have been used to describe the level of political manipulation that drives decisions about hospital funding and infrastructure upgrades.

The report also points to a hospital system that is under significant financial stress. Half of our hospitals are in the red financially, with chronic shortages of cash to pay the bills. The report also paints a picture of Victorian hospitals with falling productivity as the government continues to demand efficiency dividends despite the more complex needs of an ageing and growing population, underfunded emergency departments, a failure to plan for major hospital upgrades and a failure to fund hospital maintenance and depreciation and the replacement of medical equipment. Guess what? This report also conveys a level of dissatisfaction with the statewide IT upgrade — the well-known HealthSMART program.

Now that the opportunity provided for by the good economic times has passed and the rainy day has not been saved for, the lack of planning, the lack of vision

and the policy of drip-feeding the redevelopment of our hospitals has left a long list of major metropolitan and rural hospitals without much-needed funding for their redevelopment. Now that the bad times are here, despite all the backslapping and self-congratulations, the Brumby government has been forced to rely on the largesse of the federal government. In fact the only hope for what has been described as Victoria's crumbling health infrastructure is that the federal government will tip in the cash to bring major projects to reality and leave it to future generations of Australian taxpayers to pick up the bill.

We can look at the big projects like the cancer centre, which relies on a very large amount of funding from the federal government. We can look at the Box Hill Hospital redevelopment, which remains unfunded but which this government claims that it still has the commitment to. The member for Mitcham, who has just left the chamber, made a very interesting promise in relation to that project — that the money will be forthcoming within 12 months. We will wait with bated breath for that announcement.

Finally, after all the hype, all the promises, all the stringing along, all the bad news about fed-up doctors leading to the appalling conditions at Bendigo hospital, in response to the enormous pressure applied by the coalition members in the Bendigo region and by the local community, we have got some money. An amount of \$55 million over four years has been allocated to this long-suffering hospital and this long-suffering community. The people of Bendigo are too scared to not say thank you in case they do not get a similar allocation next year to get this project happening. They are going to need a similar allocation next year to get the Bendigo hospital project off the ground.

I now turn to the Minister for Health's misleading press release headline regarding the funding of dental services. It is '\$52.8 million to boost Victoria's dental services and prevention programs'. Talk about misleading hype and spin! When you read further you find out that this money is to cover dental services and breast cancer screening technology, which is finally being delivered after three years with federal government money. The real amount promised for dental programs is \$21.1 million, which is to cover dental clinics, chairs and services, with absolutely no detail about the split between recurrent and capital expenditure.

The reality is delivered on page 100 of budget paper 3, which shows that the number of additional patients to be treated in 2009–10 compared to 2008–09 is only 9700,

which roughly equates to an increase in the eligible population — about a 3 per cent increase. Importantly the target for 2009–10 is 6000 fewer patients to be treated than the number treated in 2007–08. The outcome for 2008–09 is 15 000 fewer than the year before. How can this be an improvement? This is going backwards; this is a sham!

In fact according to the figures provided to me under FOI last year, there are a staggering 117 000 patients waiting for dental treatment in Victoria, with the longest wait up to 5 years for treatment — and 50 per cent of patients, because of the long wait, finish up needing emergency dental care. This is the truth that the minister will not tell Victorians. By all reports there has also been a flood of older patients with chronic dental disease lining up for the federal Medicare dental funding before it is abolished by the Rudd federal government. What a tragedy that is. I am hopeful the coalition in Canberra actually stops that bit of legislation going through, because it will mean a lot of older Victorians will miss out on much-needed dental care.

I now turn to the issues surrounding the provision of the integrated solution for hospital IT systems. The government's HealthSMART program has already been judged by the Auditor-General as running under time and over budget, with major concerns raised about the functionality of key program components. Aside from the failure by the Minister for Health to manage this much-needed major project to provide our public hospitals and community health centres with reliable, functioning IT systems which are capable of managing the vast amounts of information relating to patient records, medication, and hospital financing et cetera, other major problems have been raised by the very people charged with the responsibility of rolling out the systems.

An anonymous letter from health sector employees claims that the all-important clinical systems program, which is intended to cut down on mistakes regarding doses or combinations of medicines, is being rushed into hospitals with none of the medication functions working so that the government will not be embarrassed before the next election. The letter says:

The whole reason for this system was to introduce electronic medication ... But next year is an election year and we must hit the agreed dates. This means the system will be almost useless when first live.

Major issues have also been found with the financial software system to run hospital budgets and the patient and client management system which tracks patient

records, books operating theatres and warns of patients with allergies.

I will move on because I can see I am running out of time. In summary, it is vital that Victoria's hospitals have a modern, usable and integrated IT system. But not only is the health minister failing to deliver one, the whole thing is costing a fortune and being driven by political expediency and the timing of the next election rather than by what is in the best interests of Victorian patients and the highest quality of clinical care.

The final issue I wish to raise is the important area of performance and the delivery of timely levels of care for the Victorian community. The government claims that Victoria is a great place to live, work and raise a family. I only wish it were true. The Auditor-General in his report described data collection in the state's hospitals as fundamentally flawed and open to abuse. Dr Richard Cathie claimed:

... political interference is part of the reason hospitals change their data ...

He worked at Monash and Dandenong.

Budget papers confirm that Labor was regularly unable to meet the majority of its own performance indicators for elective surgery and emergency health care, with ambulance response times blowing out and patients left waiting in pain for urgent surgery. This is despite data manipulation and the fact that the public reporting of the performance of hospitals in the *Your Hospitals* report has still, disgracefully, not been made public more than six months after the end of the reporting period.

The question to the Minister for Health has to be: what has he got to hide? The government failed its own 2008–09 target to complete surgery within 90 days for 80 per cent of urgent category 2 patients; it managed only to treat 74 per cent. But astoundingly the minister says that is okay, because it is up on the previous appalling performance the year before, when it was only 70 per cent.

Victorian public hospital emergency departments continue to suffer overcrowding and fail to meet benchmarks. Access block is a continuing disgrace keeping elderly Victorians on trolleys for hours and putting their health at risk. There was a failure to treat target 3 patients within 30 minutes to an hour in emergency departments and a failure to discharge 80 per cent of patients not needing admission within 4 hours. We all know the ongoing failure to meet hospital admission targets because of the lack of beds in our hospitals.

Budget paper 3, when focusing on service delivery, shows a health system in deep trouble. But not even the government's manipulated data and questionable reporting can hide these realities. This brings me to a final point: what figures exactly are going to be reported in the *Your Hospitals* report given that hospitals, the Auditor-General's report and the minister's own response call for a resubmission of data from some hospitals? Why not all of the hospitals? Why not go back to 2007, which is the year covered by the Auditor-General's report?

I am not one for calling ministers to resign, but I can tell members that this minister is a total failure. He should do Victorians a big favour and take leave of his position, because he is unable to meet the commitment that is required of a minister to properly manage the health system here in Victoria and to properly cater for the needs of a growing and ageing population. Victoria needs all the help it can get. It is not getting it from the Labor Party.

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — I rise to support the Appropriation (2009/2010) Bill. In this debate unfortunately all that many opposition members are doing is reciting the words 'debt' and 'house of cards' like members of a religious cult.

We are experiencing the worst global financial economic downturn and recession since the Great Depression. People I meet in shopping centres, sports clubs and other public gatherings are worried about their jobs and, as a result, their mortgages and wellbeing. Small businesses want sizeable stimulus measures to weather the bad economic times. People want more investment in public transport to get on with their daily business in environmentally sustainable ways.

People want more investment in public education to create better schools. They want to know what all levels of government are doing to ensure that their children can be fed, clothed and protected from harm and that they have the opportunity to have a decent shot at life. The right understanding of those fundamental challenges we face and the right vision of the future are the hallmarks of this budget.

This is what eminent journalist Imre Salusinszky wrote in the *Australian* on 9 May 2009:

In the Victorian budget, Lenders performed an impressive three-card trick: he increased capital spending, cut costs and preserved the AAA. All this in the face of a collapse in state revenues, courtesy of their reliance on the business cycle.

The preservation of the AAA rating tells investors that Victoria is as safe an investment as you can find.

I will read out another statement:

The Victorian budget is the benchmark that other Australian governments should follow ... It's not perfect, but they have been able to deliver infrastructure, cut lead times and control expenses growth in trying circumstances.

Whose words are these? Certainly not anybody from this side of politics. These are the words of none other than the New South Wales shadow Treasurer, Mike Baird. I join many sensible members of this house in congratulating the Treasurer of Victoria, John Lenders, on a job well done.

Let us look at the arguments put forward by the Victorian opposition — very irresponsibly, I must say. If state debt reaches the hypothetical levels the opposition claims it will reach, then in 2013 it would still be less than 10 per cent of the gross state product (GSP). What the opposition is not telling Victorians is that back in 1962, under Sir Henry Bolte, state debt was almost 60 per cent of GSP. Our gross domestic product today is \$260 billion or thereabouts, and 60 per cent of \$260 billion is almost \$160 billion. This is a level of debt about 10 times greater than we have today. All the kids born in Victoria back then would have been born with a debt equivalent to \$30 000 these days. But debt did not ruin their lives. The opposition claims that \$6000 of state debt will be inherited by every Victorian. This is five times less than the Bolte debt in today's terms. The real point here is that the opposition is conveniently evading telling the Victorian public that, as a result of the budget sector investments, every Victorian inherits a \$14 000 share in net assets. This is expected to rise to \$16 500 by 2013, and that includes the opposition's so-called \$6000 share of future state debt.

With this budget every Victorian is a winner. The reason the government has gone into debt is to build things that will be useful to all of us — roads, railways, schools, hospitals, water supplies and residential developments. The infrastructure investment should be greater in hard economic times when the private sector goes soft on investments. The last thing governments should do is respond to the current crisis by cutting government spending and/or increasing taxes — as the opposition argues to get some cheap political traction. That is exactly what happened in the 1930s, giving the world the Great Depression instead of the Great Recession. The Great Depression's impact on Victorian society was devastating. Without work or steady incomes many people lost their homes and were forced to live in makeshift dwellings with poor heating and

sanitation. Is this what the Victorian opposition would like to deliver to the Victorian community?

During times of global financial crisis, all political parties need to do the hard work to develop policies that create secure jobs. Despite the fact that the world has been hit by the global financial crisis, the Victorian opposition has not come up with any policy to create even one Victorian job. Victorians want jobs, not job cuts. Unfortunately, the Victorian opposition is a vehicle without a clear windshield, heading towards a cliff with only a rear mirror. By contrast, just last month the Brumby Labor government released plans to secure up to 35 000 Victorian jobs by responsibly investing a record \$11.5 billion in job creation infrastructure. People in the electorate of Cranbourne and surrounding areas are recipients of the Brumby government's action on securing and sustaining jobs.

The Black Saturday bushfires were the worst in Australia's history. Tragically, 173 people perished and 2029 homes were destroyed. Eight properties in Casey were destroyed. The Brumby Labor government has committed significant resources to fighting fires, including a new heavy pumper for the Cranbourne Country Fire Authority brigade.

Public transport is also a winner in this budget. Over \$55 million will be invested in improving bus services, providing longer hours of service, wider geographical coverage and more services. Over \$600 million will be invested in the outer suburban train network, including in the purchase of an additional 20 new X'trapolis trains to cater for increasing demand. This budget also delivers an extension to the ever-popular 901 SmartBus route from Frankston to Ringwood. The route will now be extended from Frankston to Melbourne Airport. This bus route is also a favourite with the residents of Frankston North, Carrum Downs, Skye and Belvedere Park, which are all part of the Cranbourne electorate.

Roads are also a winner in this budget, with the commitment of \$700 million to build the new Peninsula Link toll-free road, starting from Carrum Downs in my electorate.

The Brumby Labor government is taking action to ensure that families have the best schools. The budget is accommodating a \$7.2 million modernisation project at Cranbourne Secondary College. This project will include the modernisation of the library, canteen and facilities for home economics, art and music, as well as a new staff administration facility. The announcement complements funding of \$2.28 million for Cranbourne Secondary College for the modernisation of a general

purpose room and classroom and a further \$486 000 refurbishment of the year 9 areas.

This funding announcement also complements the following Brumby Labor government education initiatives that have been recently announced or completed: the nearly completed \$5.1 million modernisation of Cranbourne West Primary School; the nearly completed \$8.6 million modernisation of Elisabeth Murdoch College; the announcement of the construction of a new Cranbourne East P-12 College; the announcement of the construction of a new Cranbourne North East Primary School; the announcement of the construction of the new Casey Central Secondary College; the already completed \$1.5 million modernisation of Rangebank Primary School; and the already completed \$2.6 million modernisation of Mahogany Rise Primary School. There is also the Rudd government's huge injection of funds towards its Building the Education Revolution rollouts, which include many schools in the Cranbourne electorate.

The Brumby Labor government is proud to be working shoulder to shoulder with the Rudd Labor government in delivering jobs and strong educational outcomes for all. The Brumby Labor government recognises that a strong economy is underpinned by a strong and fair society and by livable and caring communities. The budget builds on the \$4 billion already invested by the government in the A Fairer Victoria social policy strategy.

The budget is delivering a further \$630 000 to extend the ever-popular Frankston North community renewal project for an additional three years. Over the last two years the Brumby Labor government has invested over \$1 million on this project which will make Frankston North an even better place to live.

The Brumby government is making strong advances in improving the care, treatment and support options available to Victorians with a mental illness and their families. The budget is delivering \$66 million over six years to expand mental health facilities provided by Dandenong Hospital to support a total of 150 mental health beds. There is funding of \$8 million over three years for two new youth prevention and recovery care services at Bendigo and Frankston. As a result of the budget, additional funding will be provided to employ 200 new mental health workers across Victoria.

Health also received a huge boost in this year's budget. There is funding of \$10 million for BreastScreen Victoria's digital technology rollout.

The budget is also supporting our environment, with funding of \$6 million over four years to improve facilities, trails and recreational opportunities in urban parks, and funding of \$4 million over two years to improve piers, jetties and other facilities around Port Phillip Bay and Western Port. This budget delivers the largest infrastructure program in Victoria's history. It will secure jobs and ensure that Victoria is in the best possible position to move ahead when the global economy recovers.

Once again I congratulate the Treasurer for a job well done. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — In joining the budget debate I want firstly to acknowledge and detail the positive activities and actions that have taken place in the electorate of Murray Valley. I will then detail the great difficulties facing people in country Victoria generally.

One of the difficulties in my electorate is getting funding for major projects and developments needed in the more than 30 government schools. Funding of \$20 million has been provided for schools, in the main through the state budget, but that funding is also supported by the massive funding coming through from the federal government. I will add comments about that as I go.

There has been a great result as far as Wangaratta High School is concerned. The school merged with Ovens College a couple of years ago. Stage 2 funding of \$10.8 million has been approved for the next stage of that development. Other issues have developed in Wangaratta. The technical education centre is developing at GOTAFE (the Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE) in Wangaratta. At the GOTAFE rural campus in South Wangaratta over \$10 million is being spent on the development of a new equine centre, which will add further to the provision of education to people and students living in Wangaratta and surrounding areas. They are some of the positives.

There are positives right across the electorate, including in the township of Katunga, which is a small township. The town's primary school has been in portable buildings for many years. Funding was approved almost two years ago for the redevelopment of that school, and \$2 million is being provided for its total redevelopment.

Funding has been provided for many other schools, including \$500 000 for Rutherglen Primary School for the redevelopment of some of the ageing facilities at that school. The school will also be eligible to apply for

approximately \$2 million of funding through the federal government. Wahgunyah Primary School has received funding for a total rebuild. The Carraragarmungee Primary School will be rebuilt, as will Strathmerton Primary School, Whorouly Primary School, Wangaratta District Specialist School and Cobram Special Development School. Rutherglen, Cobram and Numurkah and Katamatite primary schools will also receive funding. They are the great positives as far as I am concerned for the provision of education across my electorate.

One issue that I have been working on for many years is the replacement of bridges across the Murray River between Victoria and New South Wales, particularly in my electorate of Murray Valley. The bridge at Tocumwal was redeveloped in 1989. It was the first new bridge built over the Murray River for more than 50 years. At the time I commented that if bridges were built at that rate, then I would be dead before another bridge was built across the Murray. However, we have had great success in recent years, with new bridges at Howlong, Corowa and Cobram, which have all been opened.

The only bridge I need is a replacement of the bridge over Lake Mulwala. I am pleased that the Minister for Roads and Ports has approved funding of \$1.05 million, funding that will be matched by the New South Wales government, to undertake further study into the development of a new bridge structure. That study will look at all the options and come up with costings for that bridge to be replaced. The minister has indicated to me that the government is looking at replacement by 2020. I have told him that is too long, that we need to get it built prior to that, so we are working on getting the next stage of the development report so we can see the options for the replacement of the bridge across the Murray River.

One of the areas which I have supported and for which I have sought support from successive governments is for funding sport and recreation programs, and my electorate has had some success in that area. I heard the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs speak about the Country Football and Netball program, which has been a great success story. The many football-netball clubs across my electorate have been able to access funding through that program. Just over a week ago the minister was in Yarrawonga where he announced funding of \$250 000 for the development of netball courts at a cost of approximately \$500 000. He also announced funding for a skate park at Wangaratta amongst other activities that will be provided for in funding through sport and recreation.

There is also funding for the development of the performing arts centre at Wangaratta, which is a great positive. This new development will cost about \$8 million. That is another plus as far as my electorate is concerned.

I note that non-government schools across my electorate are receiving funding provided by the federal government. The federal government has almost gone too far in providing that funding and I note it requires the schools to spend that money in a short time. A major builder within my electorate, Browns at Wangaratta, has indicated to me that it has a number of projects for which approval has already been given, but it was contacted earlier this week and asked to tender for 14 more school projects in the Wangaratta and surrounding areas. However, that company was also told it would need to put in tenders and start the projects before 30 June. That is an absolutely ridiculous situation. By providing that funding so quickly the federal government is putting pressure on the building contractors not only right across my electorate but across Victoria and Australia. That federal government funding needs to be spread out over a longer time so that those developments can take place.

I have to say I have been a great supporter of the theories of John Maynard Keynes. After the Great Depression he indicated that when countries or states were in economic decline the government should spend money to stimulate the economy, and when the economy was going well it should withdraw that money and reduce the amount it spent on those projects. I am a great supporter of Keynes, except that I believe state and federal governments have gone too far in providing funding support across Australia for a range of programs. They have left a huge legacy in the form of a debt for future governments and generations to repay.

In Victoria it is estimated that debt will be more than \$30 billion. We all remember the early 1990s when the Kennett government came into power and there was a \$32 billion debt which had to be drawn back. That was done successfully through the 1990s. It is estimated that the future federal government debt will go over \$300 billion, which will be a massive burden on future generations. That is an absolutely ridiculous situation, and we need some recognition of the huge problem that will create. We need to regulate how much is being spent or forced into the economy, and we need to make sure that it is spent over a longer period of time than the short time the government is looking at.

I wanted to talk initially about the positives for my electorate and then have a look at the downsides for

people living in country Victoria. When I talk about country Victoria I do not include the people living in Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong, because they are not in the same situation as the rest of country Victoria. When we look at country Victoria, we read statistics that include the huge areas of Geelong, Bendigo and Ballarat. Consideration needs to be taken of areas which we call the real country areas of the state.

I mention the problems of our primary producers. There is still doubt, but it appears we are going to have a much better season this year after the rain we have had in recent weeks. However, the government does not understand that primary producers have had many years of poor seasons and poor returns, and it will take many more years before primary producers are again profitable and able to contribute to the economy as they have in the past. The government needs to recognise that.

I note the federal budget has reduced funding to agriculture, whilst the Victorian budget contains some positives in its provision of funding for a range of programs for primary producers. However, we need to recognise the difficult situation that has been faced by primary producers for many years and will be faced by them in the future, even though they may have good seasons.

One of the major issues is the provision of water. People who live in north-eastern Victoria along the northern part of the state or the border really understand the difficulties with the amount of water being provided by the system. I will say it again: what has underpinned the supply of water through the Murray system has been the Dartmouth Dam and the Snowy Mountains scheme. That supports the provision of dams. The government has got it wrong when it says we do not need an extension of dams across Victoria. Why do farmers have dams on their properties? It is to hold water and to use the water when it is required for stock and domestic purposes. I say again to the government that it should not worry about its north-south pipeline. It needs to save and reduce water use in Melbourne by recycling and other activities, but it should not take water from a distressed system in northern Victoria, as is proposed now.

The federal authorities are also coming in and buying water, with \$3 billion of water to be bought from irrigators for the so-called environment. That will mean a lesser amount of water in the future for people who are the major food producers for Australia, in areas throughout the Goulburn Valley, the Murray Valley region and other areas in New South Wales. The Murray Valley is of critical importance, and that is not

recognised by the state and federal governments. If we do not have water and are not able to retain water for the food bowls of Australia, we will not have food to produce and provide food. That also affects exports, and I recognise the importance of primary production in Australia's export income. We need to address this issue, but unfortunately both state and federal Labor governments do not understand what is happening to people who live in country Victoria and rely on irrigation, and they do not know what is happening in primary production generally.

I want to look at what is happening in Victoria's high country. The governments always say the alpine resorts are great for tourism, and we need to get people going to the ski fields. Certainly they are great attractions for Victoria. We talk about climate change, but last year we had one of the best seasons we have had for many years in the high country alpine resorts. We hope that continues in the future. But the government is procrastinating in its support for the development of these alpine resorts.

I refer to an issue the member for Benalla and I have been very keen about, and that is Mount Buffalo. The procrastination by the Victorian government about that is just ridiculous. We need to get action to redevelop and re-establish that icon, the Mount Buffalo chalet, and other facilities in the Mount Buffalo national park. Those sorts of issues are affecting us in north-eastern Victoria. We need to recognise the importance of actions which are being taken by the state government and which are against the interests of people living in country Victoria.

In the short time I have left I want to mention the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council report and the recommendations contained in that report. People from metropolitan Melbourne, particularly departmental staff, should come up and have a look at what is going on in the Murray Valley so they get a true understanding of what will happen if the recommendations of the VEAC report are adopted. Those recommendations will have an absolutely detrimental effect on people living in the north-eastern part of the state if they are adopted. There needs to be a greater recognition of the difficulties they would create for north-eastern Victoria in particular and for northern Victoria generally.

I also want to mention that the Regional Partnerships program at a federal level has been abandoned and that there have been changes to the criteria for the receipt of the youth allowance. These are the problems country people are faced with. The problem of border

anomalies continues to be an issue that must be addressed — and we are getting action in that area.

Finally, I say to the house that while there have been positives for me in my electorate of Murray Valley — money is being spent by both the state and federal governments on issues that I have been working hard on to get results — on the other side of the equation some of the great difficulties that face country people, which are often not understood by people in metropolitan Melbourne in particular, need to be recognised. We want to make sure that governments have a better understanding of these problems, and that they address them. If they are not addressed country people will be seen to be abandoned. We want changes for the future to help them.

Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) — As the Treasurer said when he introduced the 2009–10 budget last month, the budget is about delivering jobs for Victorians amidst the worst global economic crisis since the Second World War. I would like to start by congratulating the Treasurer on this budget, which I believe is responsible and sensible and is exactly what Victorians need in these harsh economic times. The 2009–10 budget delivers on the Brumby government's commitment to stimulate the Victorian economy. The budget is also about leadership, responsible investment and securing Victorian jobs. In infrastructure projects alone, this budget will secure up to 32 000 jobs in the first 12 months. That having been said, this budget is not just about creating jobs but also about creating initiatives and providing support for the core services right around the state that Victorians rely upon — services such as education, health and transport. I will touch on each of those issues shortly.

The Brumby government knows that having a strong economy relies on having a fair society. We will continue to stand strong and continue supporting disadvantaged and struggling Victorians and communities right across the state. It has to be said that during these uncertain times the decisions made by the Brumby government have never been so important. I am confident that this budget will put Victoria in the best possible position to pull through this economic crisis stronger than ever.

The record \$1.9 billion injection into the Victoria Police budget is a clear indication that the Brumby government is committed to delivering a safer Victoria both now and in the future, continuing a strong trend of supporting our police and providing safer communities right across the state. I thank the Treasurer for a small contribution — \$95 000 — to the Frankston police station as part of the \$1 million police station priority

upgrade program. This program provides our hardworking police officers with modern facilities to ensure that they can continue doing their job of keeping the Victorian community safe. This injection of funds for Frankston's local police station will focus on improving the working conditions at the station and enhance the capabilities of our local police in Frankston.

Further, I would like to praise the Treasurer for recognising the growing graffiti problem and committing a further \$3.5 million to combat it. The \$3.5 million will be used to extend the Brumby government's highly successful graffiti prevention and removal strategy. As part of the program, low-risk offenders are put to work cleaning up the graffiti as reparation for their crimes. As well as being a productive form of punishment, the program is a great way of cleaning up our streets and keeping them clean.

Investing in core services has always been a strong and leading priority of the Brumby government since it came to power. Victoria's education, health and transport systems are essential services that Victorians use every day. Building the strength of these services is a commitment of the Brumby government which is backed up in the 2009–10 budget. For instance, the budget will deliver a record \$4.1 billion to create a first-class education system throughout Victoria; \$402 million for the next stage of the Victorian schools plan, including school regenerations across the state; 172 000 new vocational and training positions; and 15 000 new training places in the areas of skill shortage. In health the budget commits to invest in excess of \$2.6 billion to provide Victorians with the highest possible quality health care and also the latest medical advances in technology, providing the equipment that modern, cutting-edge hospitals require to perform the surgery and procedures they perform every single day.

In the last budget \$45 million was allocated to the Frankston Hospital. As an aside, the construction process at the hospital is going along very well. Anybody driving down Hastings Road in Frankston will see the enormous amount of work that is going on at the Frankston Hospital. It is not just a matter of providing high-quality, state-of-the-art health infrastructure. It is also about providing high-quality staff. Certainly at Frankston Hospital we have that — both the staff and the auxiliary members, the Pink Ladies, do a fantastic job. The government is also providing the state-of-the-art equipment that is so much needed in our health system. The government is also providing \$350 million to increase the capacity of Victorians to access hospital services; providing \$66 million to meet the growing need for medical

services, including chemotherapy and radiotherapy; and providing funding to treat an additional 9000 elective surgery patients and an extra 20 000 public dental patients each year.

In transport the \$38 billion Victorian transport plan is delivering more trains and buses to increase the capability of our public transport system and providing more choices for families. The patronage levels are certainly skyrocketing. The strong investment by the government in the transport plan and the budget is welcomed by a lot of Frankston families. This budget invests a record \$3 billion to commence the first four years of the Victorian transport plan. It will deliver new trains designed to house more passengers more comfortably, with up to 70 new trains on order for our metropolitan rail network. It will provide longer operating hours and increased frequency on local bus services, as well as up to 270 low-floor vehicles. It will provide an additional 50 transit safety policy to make our public transport network safer for Victorians. It will also create up to 10 000 jobs a year during construction, resulting in more than 100 000 jobs over the life of the plan. The Brumby government's Victorian transport plan will deliver key transport projects right across the state over the short, medium and long terms — and these projects will transform Victoria.

I am very pleased about the massive injection of funds for the local Peninsula Link project. Most Frankston residents and families are extremely grateful to the Treasurer for the commitment of funds in this budget for a project which will alleviate traffic conditions throughout the Frankston electorate. Following the allocation of \$354 million in the budget for the toll-free Peninsula Link project, work will now continue apace on creating this much-needed four-lane, 25-kilometre road link between —

Mr K. Smith interjected.

Dr HARKNESS — the EastLink in Carrum Downs — —

Mr K. Smith — You won't complete it for \$354 million.

Dr HARKNESS — The member for Bass is interjecting, but I will ignore those interjections. This is a very important project. There is \$354 million allocated in the budget for this 25-kilometre road link, which will link EastLink in Carrum Downs and Mornington Peninsula Freeway in Mount Martha. It is expected that 60 000 vehicles will use the link each day, so when it is completed it will significantly ease congestion on the Frankston Freeway, the Moorooduc

Highway and the surrounding roads. The project will save motorists time and money, and motorists travelling from the city — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Dr HARKNESS — I seek your protection, Acting Speaker; there is a lot of conversation while I am trying to speak about a very important project in my electorate and one that a lot of Frankston families are very pleased about.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! The honourable member for Frankston will continue without assistance. I am sure he can raise his voice.

Dr HARKNESS — Thank you, Acting Speaker.

I would like to turn my attention now to the bushfire relief which has been funded in the budget. Although Frankston was not directly affected by the Black Saturday bushfires, a number of people and families who were affected have relocated to the electorate of Frankston. I am very proud to see that the Brumby government recognises the unimaginably hard times of those affected by these terrific fires and what they must be going through and has provided in the budget nearly \$1 billion to help with the recovery and relief of those affected and of their communities as well. I take a great deal of comfort in knowing that the Brumby government and all Victorians have pulled together through what has been a terrible time. The efforts of the government and of all Victorians have meant that funding is reaching those who need it most and that sure that the rebuilding of devastated communities can occur and is under way.

This budget is about preparing Victoria for the worst economic crisis to be thrown at us. This includes building skills across all sectors, creating jobs and strengthening our core services right across the state. I am very confident that with this budget Victoria will continue to grow, will continue to strengthen and will continue to rise to the challenges of this economic crisis. Once again I would like to congratulate the Treasurer on this remarkable budget. I completely support the Appropriation (2009/2010) Bill, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Mr K. SMITH (Bass) — It is a pleasure to be able to join this debate regarding the budget for the state of Victoria for the year 2009–10. Can I say, having listened to the debates that have gone on in this house, I find it quite incredible that those on the other side of the house, the government side, are talking about all of the things they have received from this year's budget whereas the members on this side of the house are

talking about all the things we have not received from the budget. One can only say that it appears there is some discrimination at work here as far as money going into the electorates of members of the coalition is concerned. I am disappointed with that. I thought when this government came to office it was going to govern 'for all Victorians'. I think it might have meant all Victorians in Labor-held seats. It is just very disappointing that this has happened.

I, like all members of the Parliament, raced off to the papers office to get hold of the budget papers, which were all wrapped in cellophane. I had a bit of a look in there. I flicked through to see what was mentioned in the area covered by the Bass electorate, and I must say there were some things. There was funding put aside for the Inverloch Primary School. I am pleased that the Minister for Education is here at the table because I want to say that we are grateful that that money has finally come through.

Inverloch Primary School is a fantastic school, with a fantastic principal, fantastic students, and a fantastic students and parents council, but the facilities there are absolutely appalling. They would have to be rated as the worst school facilities anywhere in my electorate. That has been disappointing.

We have been asking for them to be upgraded for a long period of time. I think about \$4.5 million has been allocated to do up the school. We are not sure whether that is enough money for the school to be brought up to a standard that would be acceptable in Labor Party seats, but it is certainly going to be some help to my people down in Inverloch. The disappointing part, though, is that three-quarters of the money is coming from the federal government.

Ms Pike interjected.

Mr K. SMITH — Only one-quarter of the money is actually coming from the state government. I am grateful that we are getting the money and I am grateful for the Rudd government's stimulus package — —

Ms Pike interjected.

Mr K. SMITH — Minister, it is too late to make up excuses.

Ms Pike interjected.

Mr K. SMITH — We wanted the money. We have been asking — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! Interjections are disorderly, and the member on his feet will address the Chair.

Mr K. SMITH — I would just like to suggest to the minister that we have been asking for money for this deprived facility for some years. It has finally come through now, and I am grateful. I am just disappointed that this minister may have been doing such a bad job that it appears the federal government is heading towards funding state government schools. That worries me.

We have got the federal government running around dropping classrooms and multipurpose rooms into 256 schools around Victoria at the moment. That is stage 1. They are all going to different schools, and we are grateful for that, except the schools are not necessarily getting what they want. If they need classrooms, they are getting multipurpose rooms, and if they are wanting multipurpose rooms, they seem to be getting a bunch of classrooms put on their blocks of land. What they are getting does not always meet the requirements of the school, but if they do not accept what is being given to them, they will not go into stage 2 or 3 of the funding. In those two stages over 1000 schools will be getting some benefits.

We also got the Koo Wee Rup police station, which is another facility that has been neglected by this government for nearly 10 years. It is a tiny police station that houses I think four permanent police officers. It is a station that is badly in need of facilities. It is made up of a transportable building that has been put on the site. The police there do a fantastic job out of a very antiquated facility. We are now going to be in a position where there is money being put aside for that, but of course that leads to the question of extra police being made available to the people in the Koo Wee Rup area and so forth. That is another issue.

We have also got funding for what is called the Manks Road bridges project. I am giving you the positives here, Acting Speaker. I am giving the positives of what has been given to my electorate. It is a huge electorate covering nearly 2000 square kilometres. I represent something like 45 000 to 47 000 voters, which probably translates into about 65 000 to 70 000 people when you include the schoolkids and so forth. We have been badly neglected, I must say. It is not good. That is the end of the good news.

Let us get to the bad news. I have another school to mention. I notice that the Minister for Education is here. I ask the minister about Garfield Primary School, another school that has been badly neglected for a long

time. We are looking for some funding to bring that school up to standard. Substandard portable classrooms have been put on the site. The school council has worked extremely hard to put some money together to be able to make the school work, and it is once again a great little school, but we need money for a proper rebuild of that school at Garfield.

Inverloch Primary School requires six new classrooms. I am hoping that the funding that the minister has put into it, particularly the three-quarters of the funding that is coming from the federal government, will be enough money for it to be able to work properly. We need a new government secondary college over in the Pakenham area, in the Cardinia shire, and I hope that the minister is giving some consideration to that. We have one extremely large school in Pakenham that has about 1200 students, and is becoming quite overcrowded. We have a smaller secondary college Koo Wee Rup, probably some 15 to 18 kilometres from the Pakenham area, and we have a rapidly growing area in Officer. We have an estate being built in Officer that will probably house something like 20 000 people — I think about 10 000 houses are to be built there. We do not have a secondary college close enough for the children of those people to get to. They will not fit into the facilities at Pakenham.

I must say it would be nice if the minister would take into consideration two school matters — that is, the upgrade of Garfield Primary School and a new secondary college at Pakenham. Three new schools have gone into that Heritage Springs area — Pakenham South, I think it is called — which is terrific. The minister was there and I was grateful to be there also. I was also pleased to visit Lakeside Primary School, which is a new school. I have a large number of other things to talk about, so I will come back after lunch.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order! I will interrupt the member and the house will break for lunch. When this bill is next before the house, the honourable member for Bass will have the call.

Sitting suspended 1.00 p.m. until 2.04 p.m.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Minister for Planning: conduct

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Given that for the first time in 20 years a no-confidence motion has been carried in the Victorian Parliament against a minister of the

Crown, is it not a fact that in failing to sack the Minister for Planning the Premier is giving a green light to further corruption in his government?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — As I have made clear on a number of occasions in recent days in relation to the Minister for Planning, I have full confidence in him.

Water: Murray-Darling Basin

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — My question is to the Premier. Could the Premier explain the status of negotiations with the commonwealth on water reforms in the Murray-Darling Basin, in particular regarding the 4 per cent cap on permanent trade from irrigation districts?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for her question. I am pleased to confirm to the house today that the Victorian and commonwealth governments have agreed on a common-sense plan to integrate commonwealth water policy with Victoria's record investment in irrigation modernisation. Under the agreement which has been reached between the Victorian government and the federal government the Victorian government has agreed to exempt some farmers from the 4 per cent cap where the sale of this water is linked to an irrigation modernisation plan that has been developed with irrigators and the northern Victorian irrigation renewal project.

The exemption for the 4 per cent limit applies and will be approved by the Minister for Water only where the sale of the water is tied to the modernisation plan and where it is demonstrated that the exemption will result in a clear benefit for the community. The 4 per cent cap will otherwise remain on all trades until at least 2011, when a review of the progress will be undertaken consistent with Council of Australian Governments agreements.

The mechanisms agreed with the commonwealth will deliver more water for the environment and at the same time I believe they will support a modern, vibrant and value-adding irrigation sector. Under the agreement the allocation of the additional environmental water will be based on sound scientific principles, which means that water purchased by the commonwealth will be used to water key environmental assets, which would include, for example, in the case of Victoria, sites such as the Hattah Lakes. In return for the targeted exemptions agreed to by Victoria, the commonwealth, as was announced in the budget, will provide \$300 million for on-farm works in the southern basin to boost efficiency and deliver more water savings. Specific funding for projects will be based on proposals from farmers, from

irrigation water providers, from catchment management authorities and from peak industry groups.

I believe the approach that has been agreed with the commonwealth is an approach which enjoys broad community support in Victoria. I say that because the principles are based on proposals which have been developed and submitted by a range of organisations throughout Victoria. These include the northern Victoria irrigation renewal project's community modernisation committees, which work across six irrigation areas. They include northern Victorian irrigators, the Victorian Farmers Federation, Foodbowl Unlimited, Environment Victoria, the Greater Shepparton Shire Council, the Campaspe Shire Council, the Moira Shire Council, the North Central Catchment Management Authority, the Goulburn Broken Catchment Management Authority and of course Regional Development Victoria.

We took this approach in what I believe again were appropriate negotiations with the commonwealth based on common sense to meet our joint aims of achieving a stable and secure future for irrigators but also more water for the environment. Last week I visited a dairy farm at Katunga. This is a property leased by Laurel Boaz. I inspected modernisation works taking place in the region. While I was there I had the opportunity to inspect examples of fast-flow irrigation practices. I spoke to over 150 irrigators there, and it reinforced to me what has long been a missing piece in the jigsaw puzzle in relation to irrigation water policy. We have provided significant funding for improving the trunk infrastructure works, through the food bowl modernisation, matched I might say by the commonwealth with now \$2 billion committed, but the one area that I have long believed was underdone in terms of investment is on-farm irrigation works.

Part of the agreement with the commonwealth — and we have been negotiating this for some weeks — was announced in the federal budget and is that there is now an additional \$300 million available for these works in the southern basin. Through the food bowl modernisation we will get the investment in improving the trunk infrastructure and the huge water savings that are available through that. Now with this \$300 million we have the opportunity for farmers, particularly in the more viable areas, to put in the applications, to make the submissions to get the funding and to get the significant water savings that I saw illustrated at Katunga.

I think this is a breakthrough agreement. It brings together Victorian water policy with federal water policy. It does so in a way which only relaxes the 4 per

cent cap in those areas where farmers can sell because we believe, based on a set of criteria — they may well be in areas of soil acidification or overall salinity and viability problems — that it is appropriate for them to be able to sell. In conjunction with the \$2 billion for the food bowl modernisation and the \$300 million now, I believe this is a great win for the irrigation community and also for the environment and the Murray-Darling Basin. It shows what can be achieved when we work together constructively. This is a good program, a sensible program. I believe it represents a breakthrough in water policy. It will reward farmers and it will reward the environment.

**Minister for Police and Emergency Services:
conduct**

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to media reports of a voicemail message dated 17 July 2007 from the member for Albert Park, the then chief of staff to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, left on the phone of former Assistant Commissioner Noel Ashby, which says:

Bracks son speeding in Williamstown at 0800 wants to speak to ensure Ashby and Cameron's stories are straight.

To which a reply was left by Ashby saying:

Something will be sorted out and we had better leave it at that.

And I ask: will the Premier immediately stand down the Minister for Police and Emergency Services pending a full independent inquiry into these gravely serious revelations of collusion between the government and Victoria Police?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — As the Leader of The Nationals knows, this is a matter which is before the courts.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — Goodness!

Honourable members interjecting.

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

Mr BRUMBY — I will repeat the statement of fact: this is a matter which is presently before the courts. I am surprised the opposition is so excited about statements of — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Scoresby. I ask for some cooperation for the Premier to be able to respond to the question in silence.

Mr BRUMBY — It is a matter before the courts, but I would make the observation — —

Mr Burgess interjected.

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

Mr BRUMBY — I would make the observation that there has been no allegation of wrongdoing in relation to this matter. There is no allegation that Nick Bracks, who was the subject of the call, was dealt with softly in regard to the charges that were laid against him. The fact of the matter is that the young person in question, Nick Bracks, was subjected — —

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is clearly debating the question. This issue has got nothing to do with the young man to which the indirect reference was made. It has got everything to do with the conduct of a minister of the Crown, and that is what the Premier should answer — conduct of a minister of the Crown, Premier!

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask members of the government to allow points of order to be taken in silence. I ask members of the opposition to not interject in the manner that they are choosing to at the moment. It is difficult to sustain the Leader of The Nationals' point of order when in his question he referred to the former Premier's son. I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr Brumby interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr Ryan — On a further point of order, Speaker, the question is directed to the conduct of a minister of the Crown, and I ask you to direct the Premier to answer the question that has been put to him.

The SPEAKER — Order! As the Leader of The Nationals knows full well, I cannot direct a minister or a Premier as to how they will answer a question. The standing orders — —

Mrs Shardey interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Caulfield. Standing orders are quite clear in that a minister's answer needs to be relevant to the question. I have pointed out to the Leader of The Nationals where the Premier's answer is being relevant to the question. I will hear no further points of order. I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr BRUMBY — As I have said, it is a matter before the courts. The Leader of The Nationals' question referred to the former Premier's son, and the former Premier's son was subjected to the full force of the law.

Bushfires: recovery

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — My question is to the Premier. Could the Premier update the house on the ongoing efforts to rebuild those communities devastated by this year's bushfires?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I am pleased to advise the house that today I visited Marysville with the chair of the bushfire appeal fund, John Landy, to make further announcements in relation to bushfire assistance. While I was there I was able to advise that the clean-up effort across the bushfire areas is on track, with 2193 properties now cleaned up. I am pleased to say that we now have got a clean-up rate of more than 70 per cent. This represents best practice in terms of events of this scale across Australia and best practice across the world.

In Marysville itself there have now been 270 properties cleaned up. Twenty-eight groups are being established to work with local communities to determine future planning for their areas, and they will help to develop community recovery plans for their regions. The first of five tool libraries for bushfire-affected areas also opened in Marysville last week, with others to open in Traralgon South, Kinglake, Flowerdale and St Andrews.

As honourable members are aware, we have also got temporary villages set up. I visited again the temporary village at Marysville today. Radio station 3AW's Neil Mitchell was doing his broadcast from the village. I met with the triangle development group, whose members are doing a fantastic job in terms of bringing jobs and investment back to Marysville, and I met with many of the residents.

I mentioned that I was there with the chair of the bushfire appeal fund, John Landy. I should say that although the fund was closed off some time ago, \$367 million has now been raised through the fund.

Again, I only offer my thanks, and I know those of this Parliament, for the extraordinary generosity of Victorians, Australians and indeed people around the world, to that fund.

I am also pleased to say that the fund has committed close to a quarter of a billion dollars worth of initiatives — just under \$250 million — and already more than \$100 million is actually in the hands of the bushfire victims. I congratulate John Landy, his board, his committee and his team, who I think have done an outstanding job in a completely voluntary way in ensuring that they serve the Victorian community and disburse those funds in an appropriately generous and compassionate way.

Today the chair of the fund, John Landy, announced further support, particularly for orphans. He announced \$7 million in funding to assist those who lost one or both of their parents. These grants will support 20 children under the age of 18 and young adults aged 18 to 26 and will assist them in the areas of housing, lost possessions, education and counselling. Each child who lost both parents will receive \$50 000 and a commitment from the appeal fund for support through to early adulthood, as required. There is a range of other provisions. For young adults aged 18 to 26 who lost one or both parents and were dependent on their parents, a payment of \$35 000 dollars will be held in trust to help with education, skills training and other related needs.

There is also funding which has been made available for grief counselling, and a \$1000 grant is being made available to assist with financial planning where necessary. The fund also approved allocation of a further \$5 million, which is a grant to the YMCA. Again I think it is a fantastic initiative by the fund. This will provide school holiday programs for something like 30 000 children in the 16 affected areas, and that is across the term 2, term 3 and Christmas and New Year holiday period. That funding will be used to organise excursion programs. It will be used to organise programs on the ground. Again it is a great example of the very positive decisions that are made by Mr Landy and his committee.

Can I finally say in relation to the schoolchildren that all of the advice we get as a government and the briefings we as a cabinet have had given to us by the experts in this field indicate that the most important thing in terms of supporting children is to provide those opportunities in the community — to provide the support their families need and to provide support through schooling. But in a sense it is about the community rituals. It is about the school excursions, the

sport, the activities and the involvement in arts, culture and music and all of those things. It is about getting young people together, getting children together, and over time healing the terrible wounds which are still there from 7 February and which are very deep and raw. This is an appropriate announcement by the fund, and again I place on the record the government's appreciation for the great voluntary work the fund has done.

**Minister for Police and Emergency Services:
conduct**

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I refer to the previous question from the Leader of The Nationals, and I ask: did the minister seek in any way to collude with former Assistant Commissioner Noel Ashby to ensure 'their stories are straight'?

Mr Hulls — On a point of order, Speaker, I have no doubt the Minister for Police and Emergency Services is more than happy to answer the question, but I think it is incumbent on me to remind the house that caution needs to be exercised when asking questions that have the potential to impinge upon matters that are currently before the courts. I am simply reminding the house that extreme caution needs to be exercised. You, Speaker, would be aware of previous rulings in relation to the issue of sub judice, and it is important that that be taken into account in relation to any questions about matters that are before the courts.

Mr Ryan — On the point of order, Speaker, there is no point of order, if I may respectfully say so, and we should move on.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Government members will come to order. The Leader of The Nationals on a further point of order.

Mr Ryan — On a further point of order, Speaker, whilst it is certainly open to the Attorney-General to raise a point of order, he is not entitled in question time or at any other time to simply stand and give his dissertation on what is appropriate conduct for the Parliament. If he wishes to raise a point of order, he should do so.

The SPEAKER — Order! I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his advice. I do not uphold the point of order.

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — I start by reminding you, Speaker, that in the past the opposition has had a bit of form here. It accused my office of impropriety — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I remind the member for Ferntree Gully that the Chair needs no assistance in keeping order in the house. I will not hear the minister if he chooses to go down that path.

Mr CAMERON — Just as the Kit Walker matters were baseless, any allegation of wrongdoing on my part or on the part of my office is absolutely baseless. Let us be very clear about this, no allegation of any wrongdoing has been made in relation to this matter. I can advise you, Speaker, that nobody has ever raised this matter with me. The first time I was aware of it was today.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Members of the opposition may wish to shout down a minister; it will not happen while I am in the Chair.

Mr O'Brien interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Malvern. He will not be warned again.

Mr CAMERON — With any high-profile matter that is with Victoria Police, it is common for my office to find out what police are saying about that matter so that any comments — —

Dr Sykes interjected.

Debate interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

Member for Benalla

The SPEAKER — Order! Under standing order 124, the member for Benalla is asked to leave the chamber for 30 minutes.

Honourable member for Benalla withdrew from chamber.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

**Minister for Police and Emergency Services:
conduct**

Debate resumed.

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — Any comment I make is based upon the same information. Again I reiterate that prior to today nobody has made any allegation of impropriety. The reason for that is that there is no impropriety.

Crime: statistics

Mrs MADDIGAN (Essendon) — I have a question for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. I refer the minister to the Brumby government’s commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, the best place to work and the best place to raise a family, and I ask: could the minister advise the house how the government’s record investment in police is reducing crime and making Victoria a much safer place to live?

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — The Brumby government is very pleased and proud of the work of Victoria Police, an effort which since 2000–01 has seen a reduction in Victoria’s crime rate of 24 per cent. This morning the Australian Bureau of Statistics released its latest recorded crime victims survey for 2008. I can advise the house that the survey results add further support to show that Victoria remains the safest state in Australia, with the lowest rate of crime against persons of any state.

Highlights of the survey show that we have the lowest rate of crime against the person in any state. The assault victimisation rate fell 4.9 per cent in the past year and has fallen 31 per cent since 2000. Since 2000 the victimisation rate for homicide has fallen 22 per cent, the rate for robbery has fallen 13.5 per cent, the rate for kidnapping and abduction has fallen 30.5 per cent, the rate for burglary has fallen 44 per cent, the rate for motor theft has fallen by 61 per cent and the rate for other theft has fallen by 25 per cent.

That is, however, of no consolation to any victim, such as the people who are victims of street violence, and in recent times there has been public discussion in relation to Indians who have found themselves to be victims of crime. That is why as a government we invested in an additional 1400 police in our first two terms.

Honourable members — Where are they?

Mr CAMERON — Members ask, ‘Where are they?’. The opposition made an FOI request to find out where they were, but it held that back because 98 per cent of them were there in operational roles out in the regions across this great state. That is why we have seen the establishment of the Safe Streets task force. That is why we have seen banning notices put in place, something members will remember those opposite initially opposed, and that is why we have seen increased licensing powers and increased weapons penalties.

This is only one of two Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that attempt to measure crime and victimisation rates. The other was last released in 2006 — the *Crime and Safety, Australia* report. It showed Victoria as having the lowest number of crimes against the person. Those results are backed up by the Productivity Commission in its *Report on Government Services 2009*. That report is cited and endorsed by the opposition. We endorse what the Productivity Commission says when it comes to the issue of crime statistics.

I join with all members of the government to congratulate Victoria Police on the work it does. I congratulate chief commissioners Simon Overland and Christine Nixon on the work they have done to bring about these results for the whole of Victoria.

Mr Hodgett interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling the member for Gippsland East, I ask the member for Kilsyth to not interject across the table constantly as he has been doing.

Schools: building program

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Education. Stage 1 tender offers under the state-managed, federally funded Building the Education Revolution school building program have been released in my electorate, yet no local builders have been given the right to bid for projects within 200 kilometres. I ask: what will the state government do to guarantee that local builders are able to rightfully bid for local school building projects within close proximity of their regional base?

Ms PIKE (Minister for Education) — I thank the member for Gippsland East for his question. Two hundred and forty Victorian government schools will share \$457 million in funding as part of round 1 of the Building the Education Revolution program in primary schools. When coupled with funding from the state

government through our Victorian schools plan, we are seeing the biggest ever rebuild of education infrastructure in this state's history. Tenders for this work, as the member rightly identified, are reaching the market as I speak. This is an absolutely massive boost for jobs and the Victorian economy overall.

But this first round represents only 20 per cent of the work that is available under the primary schools rebuilding program. There is still a massive 80 per cent of work to be put to market between now and September. This is great news for contractors right around Victoria. Rounds 2 and 3 will include well over 1000 additional schools with a total value of an additional \$1.72 billion. There is plenty of work to go around. Today a member identified some contractors in their local area who are too busy to contract for work, so there is plenty of work to go around. There will be many further opportunities.

My department has undertaken extensive consultation with the building industry through nine industry forums that have taken place around the state. Over 1500 people in the building industry attended these sessions. To enable building projects to start quickly, the department has developed a register of contractors who are able to tender for building projects up to their assessed project values and in the geographic area for which people have expressed interest in tendering. It is true that in round 1 some builders withdrew from the tender process. They made the choice to withdraw from the tender process because the projects were too far from their base location. In other cases projects were bundled together — and that was to make sure that we got the best value for taxpayer dollars — because the combined project value was beyond their assessed limit.

My department is working with all the contractors who have withdrawn for the reasons I described to make sure we can modify and update the register to allow for specific local circumstances which will arise. We want with the remaining 80 per cent — and members should remember we had to move very quickly on this initial 20 per cent — to effectively match contractor capability to the available projects to ensure that we get the best outcome for schools and sustain local employment.

There is a huge amount of industry interest in these projects, not only the commonwealth-funded projects but also the projects that the state is funding. We know we have to drive the taxpayer dollar effectively; further, we want to get very good value for this money. We want to get the best outcome for schools across the state. These packages will deliver jobs for Victorians

across the state and will, importantly, provide our schools with modern educational buildings.

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is clearly debating the question. The member wants to know: why are the locals not getting the jobs that were promised to them under this program? The minister has not answered it.

The SPEAKER — Order! There is no point of order. The minister has concluded her answer.

Native title: settlement framework

Mr HUDSON (Bentleigh) — My question is to the Attorney-General. I refer to the government's commitment to make Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: could the Attorney-General inform the house of the action the government is taking to make the native title system fairer, faster and more effective in Victoria?

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — I thank the honourable member for his question. I am proud to inform the house that Victoria is leading the nation with a more effective, fairer and faster way to settle native title claims. I was delighted to announce today at a key national native title conference at the MCG, along with the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and the Minister for Environment and Climate Change, that Victoria has become the first state to negotiate, in partnership with traditional owners, a comprehensive alternative pathway for resolving native title claims.

The Victorian native title settlement framework will provide an out-of-court alternative for settling native title claims. As many members of this house would know, pursuing native title through the courts is very complex and very costly. Current processes under the federal Native Title Act are lengthy, they are technical and they get bogged down by bureaucrats, by administrators, by lawyers and also by technical experts. I think everybody would agree that the current system is not delivering outcomes. At the moment claims take an average of 10 years to resolve at a very high cost to traditional owners and taxpayers. At the current rate of settlement it would take some 55 years to resolve all existing and predicted native title claims in this state. This type of delay is simply not acceptable to traditional owners, the state, stakeholders, industry and the like.

For this reason the government last year set up a steering committee to find a much better way of resolving native title claims. That committee, as many members of this house would know, was chaired by

Australian of the Year, Professor Mick Dodson, and comprised representatives from the Victorian Traditional Owners Land Justice Group and the state. It has produced a new way forward which has been endorsed, I am pleased to say, by the Brumby Labor government.

Under the framework traditional owner groups can choose to negotiate directly with the state to settle their native title claims rather than go through the lengthy court process. The framework sets out the policy parameters for state negotiations with traditional owners and will result in faster resolution of claims, reduced costs, economic development, a stronger basis for cooperative land management and finality and certainty for all, given that agreements retain current protections for third parties.

Industry groups have been consulted in relation to this process, and they have been supportive of the process. They are very supportive of a more proactive role for government in bringing forward and settling claims so they can get on with business. I am pleased to say a media release put out today by the Victorian division of the Minerals Council of Australia says:

The Victorian government's new native title settlement framework is a welcome step forward for resolving native title in Victoria and will facilitate agreement making between the minerals industry and traditional landowners.

It goes on to say:

This framework represents an opportunity to streamline the process so benefits start flowing to traditional owners without the need for lengthy court hearings.

We welcome its support.

I think the framework demonstrates what can be achieved when parties are prepared to work in partnership. In particular Victoria looks forward to continuing to work with the commonwealth government to make this framework a success. We are working closely to elicit essential financial as well as policy support from our federal colleagues, because this new, innovative approach is dependent upon such partnership.

This framework is the result of a lot of hard work, good ideas and goodwill to achieve a fair and just outcome. I will conclude on this note: I am very proud that we have taken this step, I am very proud that the government has endorsed this new framework and I am proud that other jurisdictions can now look to Victoria's framework as a template to be adopted Australia-wide. I trust that this new approach is a real source of hope for all Victorians.

Member for Narre Warren North: conduct

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. When did the Premier first become aware that his own parliamentary secretary and members of his parliamentary secretary's staff have been involved in a campaign of bullying and intimidation of staff and councillors at the City of Casey, and who advised him?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I am not aware of any claims in relation to this matter.

Health: regional and rural Victoria

Mr EREN (Lara) — My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer to the government's commitment to making Victoria the best place to live, work and raise a family, and I ask: could the minister inform the house of how the government is boosting health services in rural and regional Victoria?

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Health) — I thank the honourable member for Lara for his question and for his longstanding interest in better health services for his local community. As a government we have very proudly supported rural and regional communities, large and small, right across the length and breadth of this state, giving our hospital doctors, nurses and other staff the resources and facilities they need to treat the growing number of patients who present for care. This is important in country communities, and it is this government that has provided that support. We remain resolute that we will continue to provide that support.

When it comes to supporting country health, there is no doubt whatsoever where this government stands. If you needed any further evidence of that, you would look at this year's budget. Important investments include \$19 million for the Alexandra District Hospital and ambulance station, which was warmly welcomed by the member for Seymour and warmly welcomed by that fire-affected local community.

There was \$20 million for Ballarat Health Services, which was warmly welcomed by government members in that local community. For the first time there are cardiac catheterisation services at that hospital, and there will be an upgrade to the special care nursery. This is an important boost to Ballarat Health so it can treat more patients and treat more patients locally.

There was an important boost to Barwon Health of \$30 million, which again was welcomed by government members in that local community. There is no doubt about where they stand in relation to these matters. Barwon Health received \$30 million, a new

24-bed surgical ward, additional mental health beds and theatre upgrades — an important boost.

Then there was \$3 million, a smaller but no less important amount, for the Wonthaggi Hospital, Bass Coast Regional Health.

Mr K. Smith interjected.

Mr ANDREWS — It is welcomed by the local member, and we are pleased to be able to provide that support to expand the emergency department at that health service in that growing community.

But the biggest, and in some respects most important, announcement that gives a sense of our ongoing commitment to country health was the \$55 million for the Bendigo Hospital redevelopment. We promised we would do this, and it is exactly what we are doing — delivering for the people of Bendigo. There has been much comment about this, some more coherent than others, can I say. The local media, the *Bendigo Advertiser* and the *Bendigo Weekly*, the chief executive officer of the hospital and the chair of the board — informed commentators in Bendigo — have been absolutely crystal clear about the fact that they welcome this and they are proud to work with the government to upgrade and expand health facilities in Bendigo.

But there are some other commentators who, on the question of their support for these measures both now and into the future, are both less coherent and, indeed, less certain. If I can quote one to you, Speaker, on the question of future support for the Bendigo Hospital redevelopment. Stick with me — this is sometimes hard to follow:

We have not, ah — it, it is not, ah, a project that we have, ah, given a commitment to at an election, but we have certainly given strong support to the local community in keeping, ah, this government honest.

If they are not weasel words, I do not know what is. Who might have said this? Who might have been so uncertain about their position in relation to Bendigo Hospital? It is none other than the oracle from Caulfield. This government supports country health; it always has, and be in no doubt that it always will.

APPROPRIATION (2009/2010) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Mr K. SMITH (Bass) — Before I was rudely interrupted by the lunch break, I was talking about

some of the things that we in the Bass electorate were missing out on. One important issue is the lack of police in the Bass electorate. I have been going through the right routes. I have been speaking to our local police, and I have tried to get some help for them. If only I had known that I could have made some direct connections right into the chief commissioner's office, I would have gone to the member for Albert Park. I am sure that he would have given me directions. He would have rung the police chief and the deputy and said, 'More police for the Bass area!' — into Pakenham and down into the Bass Coast. I have missed out; I should have known who to contact.

Those on the other side look sour faced, and so they should, because this is the height of corruption within this state. Members of the government getting to the police and using all their will and unruly behaviour and unruly contacts with the police to get better things for themselves is an absolute disgrace. We should have known about some of these things.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Bass will come back to the appropriation bill.

Mr K. SMITH — I will, Speaker. Twenty cents, or whatever it is, would have been the appropriation needed. If I had rung the member for Albert Park, I am sure he would have been able to put in that call for me to the chief commissioner's office, saying, 'Give the member for Bass more police in his area; he deserves it'. But I did not place that call. I should have, and I probably will next time around, but those opposite will not be in government the next time around.

The Minister for Health has just talked about all the money he has been giving to rural and regional Victoria. Every project he mentioned, except the \$3.1 million project that went to Bass Coast, went to Labor Party seats. This government is hoping to hold all those seats by lavishing money on people in Labor electorates and forgetting about the rest of Victoria — the vast majority. People in other electorates are also entitled to some of the privileges that are being offered by the Labor Party to people in Labor electorates. I think it is appalling that they do that.

Some 12 months ago the minister promised he would put a subregional hospital into Wonthaggi by upgrading what is there. Yes, it would take a lot of money, so three months ago he decided to have a review and look at the needs of health services. That got him past this budget that has just been tabled, and the result of that review will probably come out within the next two to three months. Why did he not start it when he promised it? Why did he not get them on the move so that we

could have got money in this budget to be able to provide proper hospital cover to the people in the Bass electorate and along the Bass Coast? We are upset with what the government has done for our area. The minister should not get the wrong idea! We are grateful for the \$3.1 million, but it probably should have been \$33.1 million to upgrade our hospital.

We also need a decent ambulance station. We have been running two CERTs (community emergency response teams), one in Grantville and another in Lang Lang. Some 350 calls are going through the Grantville CERT and about 150 to 200 calls through the one in Lang Lang. We need a proper ambulance service. We cannot just rely on the volunteers in our community to provide that service; it should be provided by a proper ambulance service. We need that service, and we need it now.

I also note that it takes 18 months just to get an appointment for public dental services in Wonthaggi. That is not long enough if you have a toothache or if your teeth are rotten and falling out because they have been neglected by this government in its dental service. It is appalling.

On the subject of roads, the Koo Wee Rup bypass project once again missed out. Currently nearly 10 000 vehicles drive through the middle of that town each day, yet this government did not see fit to allocate funds to put in a bypass. The sooner government members think about doing that, the sooner they will restore a great little country town to some normality instead of having 1200 B-doubles running through the middle of the town every day. It is not fair on that community, and the government should be doing something about bringing that money forward as quickly as it possibly can.

The Minister for Roads came down last week and announced stage 7 of the Bass Highway, from Woolmer Road at the top of Anderson Hill. We are grateful for that finally happening, but that VicRoads plan was to be completed in 2010. Stage 7 will now be completed in 2013. We waited two and a half years for stage 4 to be completed by probably one of the most inept road building companies of all time, Akron Roads. That company is hopeless in what it has done and the way it has carried it out. The government saw fit to allocate to Akron stage 6 of that road scheme, so one hopes that we do not have to wait another two and a half years to get about another 5 kilometres of road built. It would not have happened in the western suburbs or the northern suburbs of Melbourne, but it did happen along the Bass Coast. The government should be ashamed of what it allowed to happen there.

We got very little out of the budget that was recently tabled in this Parliament. I think we missed out because this government has been unfair and discriminatory. I am not the only one on this side of the house who thinks that the government has not been fair in the way it has doled out the money. We are all taxpayers in this state. We are all entitled to be treated in the same way and to be treated properly by this government, and not to be treated as we have been by this budget.

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) — It is a pleasure to be able to speak today on the Appropriation (2009/2010) Bill. I will say with no hesitation, indeed with unabashed enthusiasm, that this is a great budget for Victoria and excellent for the people in Narre Warren South. This budget is about creating jobs for Victorians. It is about creating 35 000 jobs. It is a jobs-building budget. The Brumby Labor government is able to do this because it has been prudent in its handling of the state's finances, and for nearly 10 years it has been totally committed to investing in community infrastructure.

I begin by pointing out some key features of the budget. There is no doubt, and it is a credit to all those involved, that this is a AAA budget. It maintains an operating surplus and it has a low net debt as a result of good financial management. The state government is working shoulder to shoulder with the commonwealth government, and that is what the people of Victoria expect; they expect governments to work together in partnership.

I am pleased to say it is also a family-friendly budget. It continues a strong record of providing extra services for people, especially those in the outer suburbs which I represent. It is also a budget that prepares the state for recovery. The recovery will come and is coming, and the budget ensures that Victoria is in the best place and has got a head start for when better times return. This budget is responsible. It talks about cooperation, and it gives great examples of cooperation. It is also compassionate and forward thinking. It is about planning for the future.

It disappoints me when I hear those opposite talking down the budget, talking down Victoria and criticising the actions the government is taking to create Victorian jobs. We are dealing with the problems that we face today, meeting the challenges and getting on with delivering good government and a good budget for the people of Victoria. It would be nice to hear those opposite give it a few ticks.

I am fond of reminding the house that since this government came to power seven new schools have

been built in my electorate. Under this budget two more are under way. The other night in Berwick parents and students were lining up to hear about Nossal High School, the Berwick select-entry school. This is a great new story not only for the people of Narre Warren South but especially terrific for all those people from the south-eastern suburbs, the Bass electorate and Gippsland. People from all over the south-east were at the information night, wanting to know how their students could qualify to go to this fantastic new facility.

It is disappointing to hear the opposition talking about losing out. I know for example that in my electorate and elsewhere millions more dollars are going to be spent on TAFE provision, and I know that students and families in my area are keen to see that their kids get the best possible skills training. This budget goes a long way to ensure that.

I am also pleased that this budget features a number of important health measures. I particularly emphasise the BreastScreen Victoria services. Some \$10 million has been allocated in this budget to complete the rollout of digital and mammography equipment for BreastScreen Victoria. We know that with breast cancer early detection and better equipment to do that are lifesavers. I refer to refer to a media release from BreastScreen Victoria on this matter. The chief executive officer, Ms Pridmore, said:

We are very pleased that despite the difficult economic climate due to the global financial crisis, Premier Brumby and health minister Daniel Andrews are committed to the rollout of this important health initiative for Victorian women.

Hear, hear! It will make a great difference to many people who are going through what can only be described as a crisis when dealing with health issues like this. They will have better facilities and better equipment, and those facilities will be close to home so that people can have their family close by when they are dealing with the issues that may arise.

I also point out that in my electorate there has been some wonderful work done with the Hampton Park renewal project. It is pleasing to see that the budget continues the funding for the project. When I was able to deliver this news to the many people who are now involved with the project they were thrilled. They feel they are just building up some momentum with this project and this extra funding for three years will allow them to continue their good work in the community. Some of the participants are Warren Calder, Jackie Bourke, Vanessa Gerdes and Michele Halsall. They are working hard to make sure that Hampton Park is a better place to live, work and raise a family. Jackie said:

Connecting this community excited me. The project has brought people back together.

That is a good sign, especially when we on both sides of the house know how important volunteering is. This project is going a long way towards facilitating not only the volunteers who are already involved but getting more people involved in a very worthwhile project.

I return to education, because, as we know, education is the no. 1 priority of the Brumby Labor government. In my electorate of Narre Warren South education is certainly my no. 1 priority. As I have just said, our record of achievement in this area — of seven new schools and two more to come, so nine new schools by the start of school next year — is a terrific achievement.

I am proud to see in the budget that the Courtney Gardens, Hallam Valley and Kilberry Valley primary schools will be receiving \$3 million each for new halls, gyms and multipurpose buildings as part of a state and federal government partnership. From visiting it over the years I know that Courtney Gardens is a terrific school with a totally involved school community which looks after the school well and makes sure that all kids at the school receive the best education. They are pleased that a hall that will accommodate all the students is on the way. I know that the principal, Loretta Hamilton, has been wanting this for some time, and I suggest that with this announcement all her Christmases have come at once. She does a great job in looking after the kids down there and she certainly deserves this reward.

I would like to comment on the fact that the government has a strong record in education funding. It has put \$7.9 billion in additional investment into schools since 1999. It is a fantastic record as we continue to build a 21st century school and education system.

I am proud of the fact that this budget also commits substantial amounts of money to rebuilding after the bushfires. There is no doubt that the bushfires of Black Saturday have taken an enormous toll on the people who have been affected, their families, towns and environments. It is commendable, as has the Premier's leadership been on this issue, that the bushfire recovery is receiving the substantial support that is evident in this budget.

I also commend the government on its continuing of the first home buyer grant. As people know, my electorate is probably the home of the first home buyer grant. There are new homes as far as the eye can see. I know, from being out at my mobile offices, as I was last Saturday, that people are thrilled to be receiving that

extra support for their children, who are taking the big step of home ownership. I also know, from going around doorknocking and talking to people about their new homes and what it is like living in Narre Warren South, that people are overjoyed that the government has thought sufficiently and proudly about where it puts its money and has supported them in their commitment to owning their own home.

I will finish by talking about a few features of the budget that are big-ticket items. The 2009 state budget invests almost \$1 billion to help Victoria respond to and recover from the worst bushfires in Australian history; it invests a record \$1.71 billion in the state's education system to prepare Victorians for the jobs of the future; it invests more than \$3 billion in delivering the first four years of the \$38 billion Victorian transport plan to create a world-class transport system for Victoria — and out my way we are all looking forward to those trains, as well as the car park at Berwick station; and it invests \$2.6 billion to boost Victoria's hospital and health service. The budget also invests a record \$1.9 billion to provide Victoria Police with the resources it needs to keep Victorian families safe.

As I said, this budget is a family-friendly budget. As the representative of an area that boasts having one of the highest numbers of families in Australia, I am proud of this budget, which is delivering for the families of Narre Warren South. It builds on a strong foundation of prudent financial management and a track record of delivering services and facilities for all Victorians, and it looks after Victoria today but prepares Victoria for the future.

I invite the member for Bass to come to one of the new schools in his electorate, the Berwick Chase Primary School. It is a fantastic new school. I know they would love to see him there. It is one of the best-looking schools that you could wish to see. That is evidence of the fact that this budget and previous budgets have been about delivering for all Victorians, including the young families of the electorate of Bass.

Without further ado I congratulate the Treasurer, John Lenders, on his second budget. I commend the budget to the house and wish it a speedy passage.

Dr NAPTHINE (South-West Coast) — This state budget once again proves that Labor simply cannot manage money. It simply cannot be trusted to manage taxpayers money appropriately and in the best interests of the future growth and development of this state and to provide opportunities for all Victorians. This state government has had 10 years of living off the back of the strong financial base left to it by the previous

Kennett government, and of benefiting from the strong economic leadership of former Prime Minister John Howard and former federal Treasurer Peter Costello. But we now see with the global financial crisis the exposure of the inadequacy of this government and the economic mismanagement of the Premier during both his term as Treasurer and his term as Premier.

We have had 10 years of this government, during which time it has squandered more than \$300 billion of taxpayers dollars. It has failed to invest adequately in infrastructure and it has failed to invest in productivity. Now, after 10 years of the government living off the back of federal government leadership, we are seeing a real crisis facing Victoria. In this budget we see debt blowing out to \$31 billion, with a \$2.2 billion interest payment each year. We are expecting 200 000 Victorians to be unemployed, particularly in the area of Ballarat, which has been hit extremely hard with Lyco Industries today announcing a further round of job losses. In this year alone a total of more than 500 to 800 people have lost their jobs in the manufacturing sector of Ballarat.

I refer to some of the areas for which I am responsible, as a shadow minister, particularly the racing industry, which is an important industry. Racing is not just a sport but an important economic driver and a major employer in this state. There are 75 000 jobs in racing, and the autumn and spring carnivals have some of the major events on the Melbourne and Victorian calendar. In country Victoria — whether it be the Warrnambool May Racing Carnival, the Country Cup Carnival, greyhound racing or harness racing across the state — the racing industry is an important job-creating industry.

The biggest issue facing Victorian racing industry is the long-term funding of the three codes. Currently racing runs on about \$300 million a year, of which \$220 million comes through the Tabcorp wagering licence and about \$80 million comes from Tabcorp through an arrangement with respect to electronic gaming machines.

In April 2008 the Brumby government announced that changes would be made to the operation of electronic gaming machine licences in Victoria and that racing would lose its \$80 million a year. That figure has been growing at 5 per cent a year, so by 2012, when the change is implemented, that loss would be \$100 million or more to the racing industry. The government also made it clear that in 2012 there will be a new wagering licence. The totalisator or parimutuel licence will be up for re-tendering.

After the announcements the government assisted the Victorian racing industry's three codes in employing accounting firm Ernst and Young to conduct an examination of the impact of those decisions and to look at the changes the government would have to make to ensure, as the racing minister promised, that the racing industry would be no worse off as a result of them. Ernst and Young handed its report to the racing industry and to the government on 1 August 2008. The report had to be released to the public because there was a significant stuff-up with respect to probity.

With respect to the three areas the report showed that over the 12 years of the new wagering licences, from 2012 to 2024, in terms of recurrent funding the racing industry would need an income of \$1.6 billion to be no worse off. The report said that the industry would need \$105 million in capital, of which the government could provide \$64.3 million, and that the tax rates on the new wagering licence should be somewhere between 2.55 per cent and 5.1 per cent. That was what it said was needed for the industry to be no worse off.

The government response, which came down in November last year and was reflected in legislation that came before this house, committed to providing an outcome for the racing industry that the Minister for Racing made very clear would deliver \$1 billion over the 10-year period. That is \$1 billion over the 10-year period when Ernst and Young said it needed \$1.6 billion, so there is a \$600 million black hole that racing is going to face in terms of funding.

Ernst and Young said the government should put in \$64.3 million worth of capital to upgrade regional racetracks — that is for the three codes. The government's response was, 'We will give you \$45 million', which is \$19 million short. The government has robbed the industry on recurrent funding and robbed it on capital. Then the government said the tax rate for the new wagering licence would be 7.6 per cent, whereas Ernst and Young had said it should be somewhere between 2.55 per cent and 5.1 per cent. Clearly under the new arrangements racing is going to be significantly worse off. There is going to be less money for prize money, less money for promoting racing and less money for jobs in racing across regional and rural Victoria.

There is real concern already in the racing industry about the direction and impact of the so-called Darwin-based or corporate bookmakers. We can see that in budget paper 4. Budget paper 4, at page 45, gives the forward estimates for taxation revenues. It is interesting that for the years 2009–10, 2010–11 and 2011–12 it projects income from taxation on racing of

\$133.1 million, \$138.5 million and \$145.5 million. However, last year's forward estimates project the income over the same periods as \$136.5 million, \$144.1 million and \$152 million respectively. Members can quickly work out that there is a decline in the forward estimates.

The government is predicting less money for the state Treasury from the wagering licence, which also means less money for racing from the wagering licence, even before these big changes are introduced. That is a real concern for the racing industry. The predictions are 2.5 per cent down for 2009–10, 3.9 per cent down for 2010–11 and 4.3 per cent down for 2011–12. This is due to the impact of the shift of punting money from the local TAB totalisator to Darwin-based bookmakers or Betfair in Tasmania. Because of the significant financial advantage they have with lower tax rates, they have got this massive taxation advantage which is really hurting Victorian racing and hurting the Victorian Treasury and Victorian taxpayers.

What is worse, in the forward estimates for the year 2012–13, which is the first year after the introduction of the new wagering structure, the government is predicting that under the lower tax rates it will get \$71.9 million. The difference between that figure and what one would project the government would have received under the previous system is only \$79 million. That means that the government is already admitting it is going to underfund and rob racing under the new deal for so-called no less favourable treatment.

There certainly needs to be action on this. It raises a really important question: what is the value for totes in Victoria of this so-called exclusive parimutuel licence that is going to be up for tender in the near future? Will it deliver the money that is needed for the three racing codes? And what benefits will it deliver the taxpayers of Victoria? There is a very real question as to whether anybody will bid for this so-called exclusive licence when there is no exclusivity guaranteed, no protection for that licence, and people can use their phone or the internet to bet with interstate-based bookmakers who can offer a better deal because they have lower tax rates. There needs to be leadership from the Minister for Racing across all jurisdictions to make major changes.

Tabcorp said in its submission to the Productivity Commission:

Tabcorp estimates that the annual funding loss to Victoria and New South Wales is now:

tax loss in Victoria of \$18.9 million and New South Wales of \$29.8 million;

racing industry funding loss in Victoria of \$45 million and New South Wales of \$58 million.

If these distortions are not addressed, Tabcorp estimates that racing industry funding could fall by 25 per cent to 30 per cent over the next 10 years.

That will be absolutely diabolical and devastating for racing, so action is needed. We need leadership from the Minister for Racing to get a national approach and a national agreement on taxation levels so that we get a fair and competitive wagering and betting system which gives a good deal for punters, a fair deal for bookmakers and the totalisator operators but also a fair return for the racing product which is being bet on.

We should not have one jurisdiction playing off against another, offering lower taxation rates and everybody being a loser, but particularly the racing industry. I call on the Minister for Racing to put the interests of racing first, to stand up for Victorian racing, to take the leadership at a national level and to make these national changes that are absolutely necessary.

The other issue I wish to raise with respect to racing is the future of country racing. Under this government we have seen seven country harness racing tracks closed in 2005, 28 country race meetings removed or downgraded in 2008 and this minister will close the Wangaratta greyhounds this year. The last race meeting at Wangaratta will be held in June unless the minister takes action to stop that happening, which he should do. The Wangaratta greyhound facility holds good race meetings and should be allowed to continue.

In 2009 we have had announcements that another 38 country thoroughbred race meetings will be removed over the next five years, that there will be defunding and closing of nine training centres at Camperdown, Mansfield, Warracknabeal, Kerang, Casterton, Murtoa, Edenhope, Coleraine and Mortlake and that another 10 training centres will be earmarked for no capital improvements. Those centres are at Ararat, Terang, Horsham, Bairnsdale, Benalla, Colac, Hamilton, Tatura, Yarra Valley and Stony Creek.

If there are no capital improvements, it will mean those training centres will be earmarked for no growth and no development and there will be no new trainers, yet this minister put out a press release welcoming these changes to country racing which will take away 38 country race meetings, close 9 training centres and guarantee that another 10 country training centres will not get any funding. This minister is a bad Minister for Racing — and a very bad minister for country racing. However, he can resurrect himself by doing something

at the national level to fix the long-term funding for racing. I urge him to do so.

I wish to speak briefly about the Warrnambool hospital. In 2006 the government promised that it would fully fund stage 1 of the hospital redevelopment. It was interesting that the Liberal Party wanted to fully fund all stages of the redevelopment from the first brick to the very last drop of paint. This government promised to fund only stage 1. It funded only part of stage 1 in last year's budget but neglected to fund the integrated care centre, which was an essential component of stage 1. Then with great fanfare it announced \$26 million in this year's budget for the centre. This is a centre it promised years earlier, forgot to fund and is claiming credit for.

If members look at table A.6 on page 321 of budget paper 3, they will see the fine detail. There is \$300 000 in the coming financial year, \$1.1 million in 2010–11, \$18.8 million in 2011–12 and \$6 million in 2012–13. The vast majority of the funding — 95 per cent — will come after the next state election. There is also no commitment to the rest of that stage of the redevelopment, and most importantly there is no commitment by this government to fund radiotherapy services at the Warrnambool hospital.

The lack of that commitment is an indictment of this government. Cancer is an insidious disease that affects far too many Victorians. Many Victorians in south-western Victoria are diagnosed with cancer each year, and many of those — about 53 per cent — require radiotherapy as part of their treatment program. They are forced to travel to Melbourne or Geelong and stay there for six or eight weeks to get 5 or 10 minutes of treatment a day, which disrupts their lives and the lives of their families at enormous cost. This government will still not fund radiotherapy services in the local area. If we take the number of cancer patients in the Warrnambool area, in south-western Victoria and in the south-east of South Australia, we will see there are more than enough to warrant such a service. As an editorial in the Warrnambool *Standard* states:

We have noticed Mr Andrews wears a pair of elegant and expensive-looking spectacles. Is he short-sighted or long-sighted, we wonder?

He certainly is short-sighted on this matter.

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I seek leave for an additional 10 minutes of speaking time.

Leave granted.

Mr INGRAM — I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2009/2010) Bill. Budget debates are always interesting. They give us the opportunity to look at some of the positive things that might be happening in our areas, but they also give members the opportunity to highlight those things which have not been funded but should be funded and to highlight what the government should be doing to improve the way it reacts to rural communities.

It struck me that the Bairnsdale train station upgrade was mentioned in the budget announcements and is mentioned in the budget papers. I look forward to the improvements to the station. I notice the Minister for Public Transport is at the table. There has been a very successful program to return passenger train services to Bairnsdale. If you go to the train station now, you find not only is it the site where people get on and off the passenger train but it is also a major bus interchange. It is an incredibly busy site which almost descends into chaos at peak times. We recently celebrated the five-year anniversary of the return of passenger train services to Stratford and Bairnsdale. It was a great day. I think the departmental and V/Line officers were totally surprised by the number of people who turned up to cut the cake and celebrate the fifth anniversary of the return of the passenger service. Some people in our region did not support the return of the passenger train services, yet in five years patronage of the service has increased by 107 per cent or 81 000 passenger movements per year just from the Stratford and Bairnsdale stations.

On that day we also congratulated the Save Our Train group for its unending and passionate campaign to return the passenger train service. Without the group it would have been much harder for me, and I am sure the government, to keep up the interest in returning the passenger train service to that town. I know we are at the stage where we need to have additional services put on that line. As a regular train user I have on a number of occasions been booked on the train, have wanted to change my booking for particular reasons and have not been able to get a reserved seat in any of the first three carriages of the train. That has happened quite often. Recently I was on a train back to Bairnsdale which had an extra carriage and was too long for the platform at a number of stations. We need additional services on that line, which will also bring increased patronage. That is good, because the more people we can get on public transport the better.

One of the disappointing things about the budget — and I have raised this matter a number of times before — concerns fire management. The figure in the state budget of 130 hectares for the size of target areas

for prescribed burning for ecological and fuel reduction purposes — I know this through my involvement in the Environment and Natural Resources Committee inquiry into bushfires — is based solely on resources. On a number of occasions Department of Sustainability and Environment staff members were asked how this figure was established, and there is no scientific basis for that figure. The figure is not based on protecting communities, protecting lives, protecting assets or scientifically improving the ecological life of our forests. It is based on what resources the state wishes to allocate to fuel reduction burning.

It is extremely disappointing that even though we have seen the devastating impact of the fires and there have been a number of recommendations to government to increase the fuel reduction burning targets, the government still has not chosen to increase the targets in the state budget. This is despite the fact that the Department of Sustainability and Environment, in response to the Auditor-General's report and in response to questions during the Environment and Natural Resources Committee inquiry, has stated clearly that the optimum level of fuel reduction burning is about 3.3 per cent of the national parks and state forests estate. The current target is 1.7 per cent. That is well below what even the department acknowledges is required to improve ecological health and protect our communities.

I just want to highlight exactly how far out of whack we have got this. If you look at the budget figures on fire suppression, you will see that during last summer's fires one day's expenditure on fire suppression is the government's annual allocation for fire prevention. This is consistent with expenditure during the 2002–03 and 2006–07 alpine fires. The cost of one day's summer fire suppression is equivalent to the amount we spend over a full year on preventing fires.

There is a really good quote from a senior Department of Sustainability and Environment bureaucrat who was at a forum in Bairnsdale a number of years ago. Basically he explained that if we spent the equivalent of what it costs to bring one Erikson Airplane to Australia every year for fire prevention in the off-season, we would not need the services of the airplane in the first place. We must look at the economic costs of this. This is a Treasury problem. Treasury staff need to get it through their thick skulls that this is economic lunacy. The short-changing in fire prevention is costing us dearly in the amount of forest resources we have.

Look at the impact on the ash resource — one of the most important timber resources in my region — over the last few years. Look at the impact on water quality

and quantity; at the cost of fire suppression; at the cost to farmers of replacing fences, stock and assets and of losing productivity; and at the costs of recovery from these fire events. More money needs to be spent on fire prevention, preparing our communities, preparing the forest, and reducing the fuel loads. If that is done, we will have a better outcome everywhere, and particularly a better environmental outcome.

Recently I was at a meeting where I was discussing this with a number of summer fire crews. The most disappointing thing in the middle of this debate about fires is that we have summer fire crews made up of professionally trained, good-quality people who have been stood down and do not have permanent jobs. They have all the qualifications but they are on casual employment, and because they are not given enough hours they have to go elsewhere to get jobs. The summer fire crews that have been there need to be put on permanently to ensure that we have the resources required to do the fuel-reduction burning.

I would like to raise some issues about education, particularly the youth allowance, on which there have been a number of comments. It is a federal issue, but it is essential that the state government do all it can to influence the federal government to change the system. People in regional areas need to have the same opportunity to access university as students in metropolitan areas. There is a clear disadvantage for rural students going to university because of the higher cost of living away from home. It is unacceptable that the government has pulled the rug out from under these students.

I raised a question earlier with the Minister for Education about the Building the Education Revolution (BER) funding. This is something the state government needs to fix. It has been very poorly handled. In New South Wales schools are trusted to get the best value for the dollars the government puts in. The money has been given to the schools and the government has said, 'This is how much you're allocated. We know you'll spend it. We know that principals of local schools have the best interests of their students at heart and will spend it on the facilities they need to deliver the best educational opportunities to their communities'. Unfortunately in Victoria we have not had that system implemented. The government has appointed project managers. Some of those project managers clearly have no understanding about the size of Gippsland and the impact of this on Gippsland.

I asked a question earlier about the bundling together of projects. Local, good-quality builders who employ 30-odd staff and subcontractors have regularly built

school buildings in the past. One of the outrageous things is that one of these builders has handed in his tender documents and said, 'I'm not going to tender for this'. In the last few years he built an entire school in East Gippsland. The BER funding is for just the multipurpose facility at that school. He is not allowed to bid for that tender. He has been given the opportunity to tender in West Gippsland, nearly 300 kilometres away. With the cost of him doing business down there, including the cost of accommodation and travel, he said, 'I'm not going to put my workers through that, because I will not be competitive with anyone else'. Basically what this is opening up is that the only people who will get these jobs will be outside contractors and builders, such as Melbourne-based builders. This is supposed to be a stimulus package for our local communities, but the money will be disappearing out of our region.

The answer the minister gave to my question highlighted that the real answer is to say, 'Stage 1, forget it. Local builders, forget bidding on your local schools, you're not going to get the opportunity. If you don't get involved, tough luck'. Hopefully the 80 per cent of jobs that are left will have some reasonable outcomes. It must be fixed. If the government is going to bundle projects together, it needs to make sure that local builders have the capacity to do the work. This needs to be fixed quickly, because this money is going to roll out very fast.

There are some other issues about the rushing of this and about how schools have been allocated money. One of the disappointing things is that in the state budget schools like Toorloo Arm Primary School, which have been in the funding process for a long while — they have been there waiting patiently for their school upgrade, they need their school upgrade — have missed out in the state budget. Other schools have been allocated money through the federal BER funding and they are saying, 'We don't really know whether we need this, but since it's there, we're going to build this anyway'. I think that in five years time we might look back at this and say, 'That was rushed. We haven't got the best value for our dollars. We haven't necessarily got the best outcomes for education out of this money'.

I know the money needs to be spent reasonably quickly, but the first thing that the government should have done is given the first cut to those schools that have been in the process for a long while. Those schools that have been waiting patiently for money from the state and federal governments for a number of years should have been delivered the first rollout of funding. We might not have been able to promise that every primary school in the state would get funding, but we would have

delivered what was really needed on the ground. The fact that projects did not get funding commitments by the state government in the last state election campaign does not mean those projects are not important and should not be delivered.

Another school waiting for funding is Bairnsdale Secondary College. This is an important school; it is the largest public secondary school in my electorate and it delivers quality education in fairly difficult circumstances. It is a school with split campuses as a result of a technical and secondary school amalgamation, and because the campuses are near enough on the same site, the school does not get the funding that a school with two separate campuses would get. We have finally resolved most of those issues. The school is hopeful that at some stage it will get funding. Hopefully it will get some of the next round of science funding from the commonwealth. However, we need to make sure that it gets a major rebuild and that rebuild is in future budgets.

Improving the education opportunities for young people in our town is the no. 1 priority for our region. The Department of Education and Early Child Development and the school are working through the process of looking at the entire education needs of the Bairnsdale region. I am involved in that process, and I think we are close to the stage where we will get those funding arrangements in place.

I am disappointed that there is no funding for the Gippsland Lakes task force in the state budget. The Gippsland Lakes are our most important regional asset for tourism and for lifestyle, and it is essential that the government acknowledges how important this is. I had a close association with the task force a number of years ago. The government needs to explain what its future idea is for the Gippsland Lakes, how the money should flow to it and how the system should be managed. One of the challenges of the Gippsland Lakes is that many different organisations have a bit of the management of the lakes. That has always been the challenge: each different organisation doing their own little bit of management separately to everyone else and not necessarily coordinating to get the best environmental outcomes.

Another contentious issue in my electorate is the uncertainty in planning in and around coastal communities. The state government must get involved and give clear direction to our local communities. Developers and local councils have real concerns because of the inundation levels, and we are starting to see projects that are not being approved. Developers only have one option, and that is to go to the Victorian

Civil and Administrative Tribunal to challenge the rulings that the catchment management authority is making. As I understand it, on top of that we potentially have the issues of climate change and sea level rise. The councils are waiting for some clear policy direction from the state government, because they are the only organisations with the capacity to legislate and to provide security and protection from litigation and other restrictions as a result.

An issue which has not been addressed and needs to be addressed is that of access to firewood. This is an ongoing issue and is very concerning for most of my community.

The issue of a boat ramp at Bastion Point has been going on for about 25 years. In his wisdom the previous Minister for Planning sent the construction of the boat ramp to an environment effects statement (EES) planning panel. We have been working through that with the East Gippsland Shire Council and the local community for a number of years. The panel report has been with the minister now for nearly 12 months, and the community is starting to get frustrated and disappointed about the delay. We have been through a Christmas and Easter period, and the tourism people say a large number of people come down for recreational fishing. We have a section of the coastline from Eden to Lakes Entrance where there is no safe reliable ocean access. We are talking of a section of coastline over 300 kilometres long, with no safe, reliable ocean access.

Many people down there feel like they are children of a lesser God. We have this spectacular coastline with enormous tourism potential, and yet we cannot utilise it, access it or show it off. We should be like anyone else in the state or country and have access to the ocean. This is just a boat ramp. My view — and I have sent it through to the EES panel — is that we should just build it. The minister must make a decision, and we must be able to go ahead and have access to the ocean at Mallacoota.

One issue I am strongly involved in is water. In recent days dams have again come up in the spotlight. I was involved in the parliamentary Environment and Natural Resources Committee inquiry into the future of Melbourne's water supply. It is interesting to note that a couple of minority reports were presented, and one of them was mine. I admit that I presented a minority report of that inquiry. I was extremely disappointed with one aspect of the report — which I do not believe was adequate enough — about purified recycled water and the opportunities that exist to stop or reduce ocean outfalls and utilise that water in the best way possible. I

know the Acting Speaker has a strong interest in desalination. The use of purified recycled water is a better option. It stacks up. It gives a high-quality, regular supply of water at much less cost and with less environmental impact than desalination or other options.

Unfortunately the one thing the coalition members of the committee wanted was to build dams. The evidence to the committee was quite clear: dams are much worse environmentally than all the other options. The only site that keeps coming up in Gippsland is the Mitchell River. Our good mate Andrew Bolt keeps rabbiting on in the *Herald Sun* about the Mitchell River as a site for a dam. It was disappointing that in its minority report the coalition was not brave enough to say — even though its members supported the construction of dams — whereabouts the dam would be.

In Gippsland we know people have got their eyes on our rivers. We will not accept it. We will not accept any more water coming out of the Gippsland Lakes. That is unacceptable for Gippslanders. The coalition needs to come clean; its leaders need to be clear about where they want to build the dam. It was the only policy announcement they have made in the last couple of years. They stood up on the Eildon Dam wall and said, 'We are going to build a new dam for Melbourne'. It should not be in Gippsland.

The coalition needs to come out now and fess up that this policy was made on the run. It is not acceptable. It cannot be delivered, and the coalition needs to end it now or come out and tell the Victorian community which river it is going to sacrifice for the roses of Melbourne. That is what it needs to do. It is unacceptable. It keeps running around and saying dams are the go, but it will not tell us where they are going to be.

There are a number of other issues that are important for my community. The Snowy River is one. Unfortunately there are some issues with the New South Wales government. We will be working through the next 12 months to try to resolve some of those issues. The state government must take a more proactive stance with New South Wales to resolve that. One of the positive things in last year's state budget — and I recently visited the planned site — is the development of the walking infrastructure in far East Gippsland. The Tulloch Ard Gorge walk is in its planning stage and will be in the construction phase in this financial year; it is in the state budget. This is going to deliver an iconic experience for people who like wilderness walks. It goes into the lip of the Tulloch Ard Gorge. You are basically 400 metres directly

overlooking the first big rapid in the Tulloch Ard Gorge of the Snowy River. It will be a spectacular piece of infrastructure. I was recently there with Parks Victoria staff inspecting the planning of the walk. Like many of the tourism operators in our communities, I look forward to seeing that planning come to fruition.

We are also working with the East Gippsland Shire Council, the East Gippsland community forum, Parks Victoria and the Department of Sustainability and Environment on the icon walks project, and the Tulloch Ard Gorge walk is one of those. The icon walks project involves a number of high-quality, wilderness-type experience walks, forest walks, coastal walks and river walks within our region. Eighty per cent of my area is in the national park or state forest. It is a spectacular and diverse area, but we do not gain the full benefit because we do not have the high-quality tourism infrastructure that we need so that people can access it.

The coastal walk from Eden in New South Wales all the way to Cape Conran has been on the agenda for a long while. It is good to see that there appears to be some positive movement on that project. The other projects are part of a number of new walks and the upgrading of a number of existing walks — rebranding them, branding them and developing them into one product. It is a great thing.

I know there have been a number of speakers who have spoken about the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. Infrastructure is essential for the future of our region. We need improvement to roads and other key pieces of infrastructure. Under RIDF there are a number of opportunities that should be explored, like funding for broadband in small towns. I note that small towns will probably get left out of the federal government's broadband internet connections strategy. Under RIDF there is a good opportunity for the rollout of broadband for those small communities.

Further extensions in the rollout of natural gas are essential in places like Strathford in my electorate, Orbost and Lakes Entrance. We are very disappointed that we do not have access to natural gas, particularly when our region is so close to the gasfields where most of the gas comes from for the supply of not only Victoria but all up the east coast of Australia. The pipeline goes through my electorate, but most of my communities do not have access to natural gas.

We need funding for roads like the Princes Highway. This is well below par; it needs major upgrades. It is the no. 1 highway in this country, yet it is basically a goat track east of Bairnsdale. It needs major investment to improve the safety of this road. In my view the other

roads that need major investment are the tourism roads, the north–south connecting roads in and around our areas — roads like Barry Way — and the roads to the member for Benambra’s electorate, like the Omeo Highway and the Sassafras Gap road. If these things were done to improve the condition of those roads, there would be an increase in tourism, which is essential for the economic development of our region.

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak on the Appropriation (2009/2010) Bill and support the Brumby Labor government’s budget. The 2009 state budget is being delivered in some of the most difficult economic conditions ever, affecting jobs, businesses and consumer confidence. Therefore it is one of the most important budgets in Victoria’s recent history. In this budget the Brumby Labor government delivers to see Victorians through the global financial crisis and build for the future. The government, in particular the Premier and the Treasurer, are to be complimented and congratulated on continuing the great legacy of sound fiscal monetary management that is synonymous with this Labor government.

In the face of the global financial crisis this government has delivered a budget that offers unprecedented investment in infrastructure for education, transport and community safety whilst sustaining the state’s AAA credit rating. The global financial crisis has had a significant impact on Victoria’s budget position with uncertainty surrounding the time of the economic recovery. The commonwealth government’s fiscal stimulus packages have provided a boost to the Australian economy at a time when it is needed most to deliver more jobs, increase our investment in education and skills and build critical new infrastructure.

This budget holds funding for schools for the people of the Forest Hill electorate, for our transport networks and for our police. In education the Brumby government has allocated funding to six primary schools within the Forest Hill electorate. The schools will share upwards of \$16 million for refurbishing, modernisation and the construction of multipurpose buildings. These primary schools in the Forest Hill electorate are Burwood Heights Primary School, which will receive \$5 million; Parkmore Primary School, which will receive \$3.2 million; Camelot Rise Primary School, with an allocation of \$2.5 million; and Burwood East Primary School, Highvale Primary School and Weeden Heights Primary School, which will each gain \$2 million. The allocation of this much-needed funding will give these schools the best facilities and infrastructure to ensure that they are able to provide the highest quality educational opportunities

to our children in the 21st century. I, along with families, teachers, principals, school councils and the community of Forest Hill, have been lobbying for this funding, and we are thrilled with the government’s support.

This budget has, in my opinion, successfully utilised the federal government’s \$42 billion economic stimulus funding in conjunction with the \$1.7 billion Victorian schools plan to continue rebuilding, renovating and extending schools in Forest Hill to ensure our students achieve excellent learning outcomes in these great facilities. This \$402 million investment in schools across the state will secure up to 5000 jobs in construction. This investment will stimulate the economy now and build better schools for the future, making sure all children get the best start in life. The Brumby Labor government is delivering new school buildings, the latest technology and more support than ever for teachers, ensuring Victorian students can access a world-class education system.

A further highlight of the 2009–10 budget for the people of Forest Hill is a share in the allocation of more than \$3 billion statewide as part of the Brumby government’s \$38 billion Victorian transport plan. Some \$60 million of this \$3 billion will go towards the Springvale Road grade separation project. This project will see the removal of the Springvale Road level crossing by lowering the Belgrave and Lilydale lines underground. The benefits of eliminating the level crossing will be that the people of Forest Hill and surrounding areas will spend less time commuting and more time being involved with their families, which is something we all hold as a high priority.

This budget also includes \$650.6 million for 20 new metropolitan trains. Over \$354.3 million will go towards the Peninsula Link project, a 25-kilometre, toll-free road between EastLink at Carrum Downs and Mount Martha, securing over 4000 jobs. This shows that the Brumby Labor government is delivering on its commitment to create jobs and build a world-class transport system.

The environment was also a big winner in this budget, with \$27 million being invested in green transport initiatives. Cyclists in Forest Hill will benefit with a share of a more than \$13.2 million program to extend the Forest Hill Pipe Track bike path. This program will also allow for the delivery of a number of projects across Melbourne, including a public bicycle hire scheme, the promotion of car pooling and bike lockers, which are all designed to reduce dependence on motor vehicles and ensure a sustainable Victoria for the future.

This government is committed to delivering a safer Victoria, and the 2009–10 budget is testimony to this, with a record \$1.9 billion Victoria Police budget to ensure the safety of not only Forest Hill residents but all Victorians now and into the future. It contains measures to combat the road toll, giving police access to the latest in speed, drink and drug detection devices to save lives. The highlight of that is the \$1.8 million program to install moving mode radar units in police cars, allowing police to monitor traffic speeds whilst patrolling, which will reduce the number of crashes on undivided highways in regional areas. It is fantastic to see this government building on its commitment with nearly \$450 million allocated since 1999 to rebuild and refurbish over 160 police stations across the state.

While conducting my last mobile office I saw firsthand the result of the callous destruction of public property that graffiti causes around Brentford Square. Graffiti is a stain on the Forest Hill electorate. The members of that community, including me, welcome this budget and its additional statewide funding of \$4.5 million to extend the successful graffiti prevention and removal strategy program.

I commend the government on a 2009–10 budget that delivers so much for the people of the Forest Hill electorate and the state. Members should make no mistake: people in the eastern suburbs will remember that it was a Labor government budget that delivered better school facilities, safer roads, a greener and more efficient transport network and an unparalleled police presence in our streets that ensured the safety of our communities.

The bushfires that occurred in February this year had a devastating effect on people not only physically and emotionally but obviously financially. The task of recovering from the worst bushfires in history — fires that tragically cost 173 lives, destroyed homes and businesses and devastated our communities — is by no means an easy one, but this budget provides \$986 million over five years to fight to rebuild and recover from the disastrous February 2009 fires. This budget contains \$344 million for fire suppression activities to be undertaken during Department of Sustainability and Environment, Metropolitan Fire Brigade and Country Fire Authority operations, including interjurisdictional assistance, aerial measures and containment line restoration. It contains \$24 million for additional police resources required to respond to the fires, including support from Victoria Police and other jurisdictions.

The budget allocates \$70 million over two years for case managers to work with Victorians affected by the

bushfires to ensure that they receive the financial assistance, services and personal support they need to make decisions about their futures with regard to their lives and their homes. The budget allocates \$36 million in 2008–09 for compassionate assistance, including temporary housing assistance, funeral expenses, emergency health and medical services, counselling services and emergency hardship grants. The budget provides \$51 million for a business assistance package to assist small businesses and primary producers, including subsidised low-interest loans, business assistance grants and business restart mentors. It allocates \$10 million for a tourism package to encourage tourists to visit regions economically affected by the bushfires through a cooperative marketing and branding program and —

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr K. Smith) — The time appointed under standing orders for consideration of items on the government business program has arrived, and I am required to interrupt the business of the house.

STATE TAXATION ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 2 June; motion of Mr CAMERON (Minister for Police and Emergency Services).

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Circulated amendments

Circulated government amendments as follows agreed to:

1. Clause 1, page 2, lines 12 to 14, omit “with a commencement date on or after 1 July 2009” and insert “and special eligible transactions”.
2. Clause 12, omit this clause.
3. Clause 13, page 10, lines 16 and 17, omit “(a) or 13(1)(b)” and insert “(b) or 13(1)(c)”.
4. Clause 13, page 11, after line 3 insert —

‘() For section 18(7) of the **First Home Owner Grant Act 2000** substitute —

“(7) Subject to subsection (7A), in relation to a special eligible transaction an additional amount is payable as follows —

- (a) \$7000, if section 13A(1)(a)(i) applies to the transaction; or
- (b) \$3500, if section 13A(1)(a)(ii) applies to the transaction; or
- (c) \$14 000, if —
 - (i) section 13A(1)(b)(i), 13A(1)(c)(i), 13A(1)(d), 13A(1)(f) or 13A(1)(g) applies to the transaction; and
 - (ii) the home has not been occupied as a residence since it was constructed, renovated or refurbished; or
- (d) \$7000, if —
 - (i) section 13A(1)(b)(ii), 13A(1)(c)(ii), 13A(1)(e) or 13A(1)(h) applies to the transaction; and
 - (ii) the home has not been occupied as a residence since it was constructed, renovated or refurbished.”.

NEW CLAUSE

5. Insert the following New Clause to follow clause 12 —

‘AA Special eligible transactions

For section 13A(1) of the **First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 substitute** —

“(1) An eligible transaction is also a special eligible transaction if it is —

- (a) a contract for the purchase of a home in the State (other than a contract for an off-the-plan purchase of a new home) entered into —
 - (i) on or after 14 October 2008 and on or before 30 September 2009; or
 - (ii) on or after 1 October 2009 and on or before 31 December 2009;
- (b) a contract for the purchase of a new residential premises in the State entered into —
 - (i) on or after 14 October 2008 and on or before 30 September 2009; or
 - (ii) on or after 1 October 2009 and on or before 31 December 2009;
- (c) a comprehensive home building contract for a home in the State entered into —
 - (i) on or after 14 October 2008 and on or before 30 September 2009 and in respect of which —

(A) the construction work commences within 26 weeks from the date that the contract is entered into or a longer period that the Commissioner considers appropriate in the circumstances of the case; and

(B) the building work is completed within 18 months of the date of commencement of construction work or a longer period that the Commissioner considers appropriate in the circumstances of the case; or

(ii) on or after 1 October 2009 and on or before 31 December 2009 and in respect of which —

(A) the construction work commences within 26 weeks from the date that the contract is entered into or a longer period that the Commissioner considers appropriate in the circumstances of the case; and

(B) the building work is completed within 18 months of the date of commencement of construction work or a longer period that the Commissioner considers appropriate in the circumstances of the case; or

(d) for the building of a home in the State by an owner builder and the building work —

(i) is commenced on or after 14 October 2008 and on or before 30 September 2009; and

(ii) is completed within 18 months of the commencement of the eligible transaction or a longer period that the Commissioner considers appropriate in the circumstances of the case; or

(e) for the building of a home in the State by an owner builder and the building work —

(i) is commenced on or after 1 October 2009 and on or before 31 December 2009; and

(ii) is completed within 18 months of the commencement of the eligible transaction or a longer period that the Commissioner considers appropriate in the circumstances of the case; or

(f) a contract for an off-the-plan purchase of a home in the State and —

(i) the contract is entered into on or after 14 October 2008 and on or before 30 June 2009; and

(ii) the construction work is completed by 31 December 2010 or a later date that

the Commissioner considers appropriate in the circumstances of the case; or

- (g) a contract for an off-the-plan purchase of a home in the State and —
 - (i) the contract is entered into on or after 1 July 2009 and on or before 30 September 2009; and
 - (ii) the construction work is completed by 31 March 2011 or a later date that the Commissioner considers appropriate in the circumstances of the case; or
- (h) a contract for an off-the-plan purchase of a home in the State and —
 - (i) the contract is entered into on or after 1 October 2009 and on or before 31 December 2009; and
 - (ii) the construction work is completed by 30 June 2011 or a later date that the Commissioner considers appropriate in the circumstances of the case.”’.

Third reading

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

APPROPRIATION (2009/2010) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed.

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — The Brumby government recognises the vital role played by the fire and other emergency services in Victoria’s ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from future bushfires. Because of this, \$167 million has been allocated over four years to maintain and improve emergency services communications with the public and between emergency services organisations, and \$70 million has been allocated over five years for modern firefighting equipment and additional operational staff.

As an immediate response to the February 2009 bushfires, the government waived land tax in a one-off measure for properties destroyed or damaged by the fires, while stamp duty relief is also available for the replacement of family homes or vehicles lost in the fires. Payroll tax assessments for late lodgements and payments due in January 2009 from businesses affected by the bushfires were deferred. The government also made provision for an extension of the first home buyer assistance package. Against that backdrop the Victorian

economy has displayed great resilience and is still expected to grow by 0.25 per cent in 2009–10 and 2.25 per cent in 2010–11. Victoria is well placed to recover from the crisis with sound economic fundamentals, a diverse economy, strong population growth and responsible financial management.

Difficult times are an opportunity for good governance to shine, and the Brumby government has shown exceptional leadership in creating opportunities and in investing in our services. Investments in health, transport and education have always been Labor priorities and Victoria has proudly developed a reputation of having a strong and fair community. This budget accelerates the Brumby Labor government’s infrastructure program by delivering capital projects that will secure up to 35 000 jobs in 2009–10, including the initial stages of the \$38 billion Victorian transport plan and the continued delivery of the Victorian schools plan, as well as working alongside the commonwealth government to deliver its Nation Building economic stimulus plan. By working in partnership with the Rudd commonwealth government to stimulate the state’s economy through fast-tracking public infrastructure, providing more training and skills opportunities and significantly increasing investment in education, health, housing and transport, this budget delivers the largest infrastructure program in Victoria’s history to secure jobs and ensure that Victoria is in the best possible position to move ahead when the global economy recovers.

In addition to the \$1.9 billion Victorian schools plan, Victoria is partnering with the commonwealth to deliver the Building the Education Revolution program, which provides \$2 billion to build new infrastructure for primary schools and special schools, including libraries and multipurpose halls, classrooms or the upgrading of existing facilities; \$209 million to enable schools to undertake construction and small-scale infrastructure and/or minor refurbishment projects; and an estimated \$141 million for science and language centres in secondary schools that have been the greatest in need as well as having a demonstrated capacity to be able to build the facilities in 2009–10.

The Brumby Labor government recognises the importance of supporting Victorian industries during the economic downturn and boosting their capability to identify opportunities that will create jobs, attract investment and grow exports. The government also continues to take action to ensure that Victoria builds the skilled workforce needed for the future, addresses skill shortages and has skilled workers available to meet current and future requirements of key industry sectors.

In the government's document *Securing Jobs for Your Future — Skills for Victoria*, which was released in 2008, the government committed \$316 million to raise the skills of the Victorian workforce, assist Victorians who have been displaced from the workforce and enhance the state's ability to increase productivity as the global economy recovers. This government has made unprecedented investments in education and health, has undertaken the largest infrastructure program in Victoria's history and has delivered an ambitious program of economic reform, all within a framework of responsible financial management, placing Victoria in a sound position to minimise the impacts of the global financial crisis and current economic downturn and make a good recovery over the coming years.

The Brumby Labor government is focused on investing and taking action to deliver jobs now and to support Victorian families by investing a record \$11.5 billion in the next financial year to fast-track job-creating infrastructure across the state, by investing almost \$1 billion to help Victoria respond to and recover from the worst bushfires in Australian history, by investing a record \$1.71 billion in the state's education system to prepare Victorians for the jobs of the future, by investing more than \$3 billion to deliver the first four years of the Brumby Labor government's \$38 billion Victorian transport plan to create a world-class transport system for all Victorians, by investing \$2.6 billion to boost Victoria's hospital and health services and by investing a record \$1.9 billion to provide Victoria Police with the resources it needs to keep Victorian families safe.

The Brumby Labor government is rebuilding after the bushfires and helping families through the global financial crisis while keeping the budget in surplus and delivering more jobs, world-class infrastructure and a strong safety net for Victorian families. Accolades have flowed from so many organisations and individuals in support of this government's capacity to make the tough choices necessary to support Victorian jobs and protect vital services.

The top priority of this government right now is jobs. Put simply, this government is focused on protecting current jobs and creating new ones. Government initiatives for the business sector, such as reducing the regulatory burden and making Victoria conducive to new business investment, are obvious. This government is rebuilding communities and providing Victorians with a fully funded budget in surplus that maintains the state's AAA credit rating. The budget shows that the Brumby government is willing to make these tough economic decisions to ensure that Victoria is the best

place to live, work and raise a family. I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr WELLER (Rodney).

Debate adjourned until next day.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Member for Narre Warren North

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — I wish to make a personal explanation to the Parliament in relation to a question asked by the Leader of the Opposition today in question time. I have never bullied any councillor or any officer of the City of Casey. I refute all imputations in the opposition leader's question and, again, categorically deny any suggestion that I would condone the bullying of anybody.

Remaining business postponed on motion of Mr WYNNE (Minister for Local Government).

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Water: tank rebates

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — The issue I have is with the Minister for Water. The action I am seeking of him is to put an end to public confusion over rebates for water tanks. A suggested solution I have for him is that he update the application form for rebates for water tanks and other water-saving devices. Unfortunately, as people are aware, the government is very keen on stunts. I suspect that the minister is bound to have another stunt before 30 June, which is the date on which the Water Smart Gardens and Homes Rebate Scheme is notionally due to 'expire'.

On the one hand, information on water retailers' websites and water rebate application forms shows that the application period closes on 30 June 2009, and staff at the water authorities are saying they do not know what the status of the scheme will be post-2009. On the other hand, however, the scheme was funded in the 2007–08 budget. At page 327 there is \$5 million for each of the four years up until 2010 or 2011. It is also clear from the South East Water website that the scheme has been funded. Indeed the minister told the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that the scheme was funded.

So what does the June 2009 cut-off date mean? It either means the government wishes to terminate the scheme or that the government will do a public relations stunt, announcing the extension of the scheme. Another alternative is that the scheme's funding has expired. The problem with the government is that it is very good at stunts and announcements. I would urge the minister not to do another stunt and to clarify the future of the scheme.

Go for Your Life campaign: dancing

Ms THOMSON (Footscray) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs. In February I asked the minister to take action to investigate the feasibility of developing a dance program within Go for Your Life to offer an alternative to sport for young people from disadvantaged families in Footscray and the inner west for whom sporting pursuits are not an area of interest. The west is one of the most disadvantaged areas in Victoria, and it is therefore vital that our young people are given access to the same opportunities for recreational activities as other youth enjoy.

I note with pleasure the recent opening on 28 April of the Phoenix Youth Centre in Footscray, which was made possible through a \$1.18 million funding grant from the Brumby Labor government's Community Support Fund. Last week I was also pleased to meet with the young dancers and performance artists involved in the Under the Radar project run by Western Edge Youth Arts, which was recently given \$80 000 in funding by the Brumby Labor government.

However, there is still more to be done. I appreciate the minister's personal involvement in providing opportunities to young people in the west, and I ask that he now take action to look at developing a pilot program within the west to assess the possibility of providing a dance program for young people from disadvantaged families.

Greyhound racing: Wangaratta

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Racing and, in his absence, the minister at the table. I refer to the action being taken by Greyhound Racing Victoria in seeking to close the Avian Park Raceway in Wangaratta for the conduct of greyhound racing at the end of June. This issue has been running since early in April, when Greyhound Racing Victoria contacted the local race club, indicating to them that greyhound racing would finish at Avian Park Raceway at the end of June.

Greyhound racing has been operating there successfully for about 40 years. The local club runs 47 meetings per year very successfully. We took a deputation to Greyhound Racing Victoria on 21 April. We met with some of the board members and brought to their attention our concerns relating to what they were doing. They indicated that the board would investigate this matter. At a meeting the next week the board confirmed the closure of the track.

I then raised this matter in personal discussions with the Attorney-General. I also took the opportunity to raise the matter through a 90-second statement during the previous sitting week of the Parliament. The minister indicated to me that he appoints people to the board, but the board is independent in the actions that it takes. I believe the minister should intervene. There is huge opposition to the actions which are being taken by the board in seeking to close down this racetrack. We have had a huge response from people in north-eastern Victoria. About 150 dog owners own more than 800 dogs within north-eastern Victoria, and the matter has raised huge concerns.

I met with the shadow Minister for Racing, and I met with the people affected last Friday at a meeting in Wangaratta. It was further brought to our attention that we have a petition signed by about 3000 people, which I will present during the next sitting week of the Parliament. The minister has a responsibility to represent people in north-eastern Victoria. Greyhound owners in north-eastern Victoria and beyond are concerned about the actions being taken in seeking to close the greyhound racing track at Avian Park Raceway in Wangaratta.

I seek the minister's intervention on this matter. Despite the fact the minister says he cannot intervene because the board is independent, I suggest he undertake further investigations. Representatives from Wangaratta sought to meet with the board last week. They had legal representatives with them, and the board would not meet with them because those legal representatives were present. That was an outrageous situation and one which the minister should take on board. He should recognise the strength of the opposition to closing Avian Park Raceway and seek a change of heart from the board of Greyhound Racing Victoria.

Planning: growth areas infrastructure contribution

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Planning. The action I seek is for him to closely examine the impact of the government's proposed growth areas infrastructure

charge on rural land-holders in parts of my electorate currently in the urban growth boundary study area.

Following an invitation from one of my constituents, Scott Barrow, along with my colleagues the members for Seymour and Melton and members of the opposition, I attended a meeting of concerned residents in Beveridge last week. As legislation is yet to be drafted I felt that this meeting would be an opportunity for me and the community to hear more about the proposal from the Growth Areas Authority (GAA) itself, and for the authority in turn to respond to issues raised by the community.

Community members raised many valid concerns, which I have passed on to the minister for advice and to be taken into consideration when his department is framing the proposed legislation. Because I thought it was an opportunity for that dialogue to occur, I had requested that a representative from the Growth Areas Authority attend the meeting. I am disturbed that did not occur, because it was an opportunity lost.

I am also disturbed to see that the opposition, in an unscrupulous manner, has caused unnecessary fears among land-holders in areas well outside the study area, including the rolling hills of Eden Park. Any logic would show that this area would never be the subject of development because of the vegetation in that area.

I now seek the support of the minister because of the failure of representatives from the Growth Areas Authority to attend that meeting and because of the baseless scaremongering by members of the opposition. I ask the minister to direct the Growth Areas Authority to undertake meaningful and individual discussions with the affected land-holders so they can be fully informed of what this proposal might mean for them. This would be an important step as part of the framing of the legislation. It would also allay some of the concerns of residents.

Having read some of the questions and answers that were provided, I do not think that information was adequate, particularly on capital gains tax and other matters, as well as the type of land-holdings that would be affected. I was concerned with what some of the speakers said at the meeting — erroneously — about this charge applying to inheritance and Family Court matters, which is not correct. I think the GAA now needs to have meaningful and direct discussions with affected land-holders so that the truth can be told in this matter. I urge the planning minister to act.

Croydon South Primary School: site

Mr HODGETT (Kilsyth) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education regarding the land and buildings at the site of the former Croydon South Primary School in Croydon South. The action I seek is for the minister to allow the buildings to be used for community use. By way of background, the Croydon South Primary School merged with Tinternvale Primary School on the Tinternvale Primary School site from the beginning of the 2009 year. The merger now sees the Croydon South Primary School site vacant, and the future use of this land has raised a great deal of concern among local residents and community groups. The land and buildings sit vacant and unkempt, deteriorating and subject to acts of vandalism.

Late last year the Hope City Church inquired about using the site. The Hope City Church is a contemporary Christian church that provides a range of services to those in need and undertakes some terrific work in our local community. In December the minister rejected this request, stating:

Given the imminent closure and potential disposal of the site it would be inappropriate to provide a lease at this time.

Croydon University of the Third Age would benefit from using the site. Croydon U3A has 600 members and conducts classes over a range of venues, but has insufficient room and is constantly looking out for additional space for its increasing membership and expanding classes. The demand for facilities for community use in our local area is enormous. Until recently the Croydon Chess Club operated from the L. J. Hooker office meeting room in Mooroolbark. The Croydon Model Railway Club pays rent on commercial premises in Chirnside Park, which is sending the club broke. The Croydon Toy Library has outgrown its existing space, the Eastern Volunteers Resource Centre is in a commercial rental property and would prefer to operate from a community hub, and a number of callisthenics clubs in the area are looking for space. There are numerous examples of clubs, groups and organisations desperately seeking access to community space to conduct their activities.

These clubs and organisations would jump at the opportunity for space and permanent accommodation to house their activities. It begs the question: why can we not use the Croydon South Primary School site for community use? I implore the minister to give this matter favourable consideration. At the very least the building should be made available for community use until the future of the site is determined. The

Mooroolbark Primary School closed in 2003. The land at the former Mooroolbark Primary School sits vacant today in 2009, six years after the school closed. My point is that a refusal of this request on the basis of any potential disposal of the site would be a short-sighted excuse.

I recently undertook a community survey to ascertain the views of local residents on the future use of this site. Hundreds of completed surveys were returned to me, and an overwhelming 89 per cent of those residents surveyed want to see the land turned into public parkland and open space and the buildings used by community groups.

I again call on the Minister for Education to allow the buildings and facilities at the Croydon South Primary School site to be put to community use.

Housing: Cranbourne electorate

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Housing. In my electorate there is an urgent need for affordable housing for low-income families. The action I seek from the Minister for Housing is for the Victorian government to work in cooperation with the commonwealth to improve the supply and quality of public housing in my electorate. In particular I would like to raise the issue of maintenance of public housing properties.

According to a December 2008 rental report, rents increased by 12.9 per cent in the south-east of Melbourne. The number of people waiting for public housing is also on the increase — for example, there are 4453 people on the waiting list in the Dandenong area. In response to the increasing demand for public and social housing the Brumby government is leading the way in expanding housing choices for low-income Victorians and combating the housing affordability crisis through the building of new public and social housing. We welcome that new construction; however, we also need to ensure that the existing properties managed by the Office of Housing are in good condition and that they provide safe and comfortable accommodation that meets the needs of the community.

In my electorate there are a number of public housing dwellings, both freestanding properties and housing estates, that are in urgent need of maintenance work. Many of these are approaching the end of their lifecycle, or they have been listed as properties that are in need of maintenance in order to be habitable for an extended period. Other freestanding public housing and community housing dwellings are at the midpoint of their lifecycle in terms of their condition profile. These

properties need repairs such as painting and recarpeting to improve their condition and make them more comfortable for tenants.

The people of Cranbourne, along with all Victorians, deserve to live in safe and affordable accommodation that is close to jobs, services and recreational facilities. Therefore it is important to conduct maintenance works on properties that are well located and that are consistent with the Melbourne 2030 strategy.

I call on the Minister for Housing to invest funds from the stimulus package in my electorate to improve the supply and quality of public housing.

Victorian College of the Arts and Music: courses

Mrs VICTORIA (Bayswater) — I rise to ask the Minister for the Arts to immediately make representation to the University of Melbourne on behalf of the performing arts community. In 2006, during the second reading of the Melbourne University (Victorian College of the Arts) Bill, the Minister for Finance stated the following:

... the integration will guarantee that the college's role as Australia's pre-eminent provider of visual and performing arts training and education can continue.

He went on to stress that the objects of the newly formed faculty will be 'similar to the current objects of the college', including 'providing for education in the creative, performing and other arts'.

Now, in June 2009, we have a very different story. In the past month the degree in music theatre and other courses have been axed. The degree was only in its infancy. Finally, Melbourne could offer a degree course to rival that of institutions like WAAPA (Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts) and NIDA (National Institute of Dramatic Art). In Melbourne there is also a cloud over ongoing funding for NICA (National Institute of Circus Arts) and ANAM (Australian National Academy of Music), not to mention yesterday's announcement that all performing arts degrees at Melbourne University will have to have 50 per cent of the curriculum outside the chosen discipline.

Melbourne has long been touted as the arts capital of Australia, but in the very near future that could change. It is estimated that up to 80 per cent of production crew at the MTC (Melbourne Theatre Company) are ex-VCA (Victorian College of the Arts) students. The majority of those who train in a city go on to work in

that city. The ADAA (Australian Drama Agents Association), a peak industry body, has said:

The music theatre industry is one of the biggest and most consistent long-term employers of performing artists ... The ability of a performer to be a 'triple threat' —

that is, a singer, actor and dancer —

is highly valued by ADAA members and is increasingly sought after by casting directors. The fact that music theatre was the first degree to be 'suspended' at the VCA displays a profound ignorance of the industry in which we operate.

It is likely that agents will become more Sydney-centric because it is cheaper to hire local production crew and stage talent. Many actors live in the city of their original training. But they will not be training in Melbourne. We no longer have a centre of excellence here.

The intent of the 2006 bill is very clear: nothing was to change in course content; it was to result in just the creation of a more streamlined administration. Apparently one very senior university employee has been informing staff recently that it is no longer a training institution but a research institution. This, if true, is a disgrace and is directly contrary to the intention of the bill. In my speech on the Melbourne University Amendment Bill I stressed the need for the college to retain its multidisciplinary, practical focus.

To quote the ADAA again:

An actor without a camera or stage is not an actor. A filmmaker without a singer/actor/dancer to film cannot make a movie musical.

We cannot lose this specialist multidisciplinary training. I ask the minister to immediately speak with the University of Melbourne on behalf of the arts community and all Victorians so that the faculty of the Victorian College of the Arts and Music retains its historical and aesthetic vision and continues to provide, as promised in the 2006 bill, an elite practical focus on educating and producing performing artists rather than arts academics.

Rail: Nunawading level crossing

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — I stand tonight to raise a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports. The action I seek is for the minister to reaffirm the state government's commitment to the funds allocated to the Springvale Road grade separation project in the face of reports that the federal Liberal Party and federal Nationals are voting not to support the Nation Building Program (National Land Transport) Amendment Bill 2009. That would jeopardise the Rudd federal government's allocation of funds for this project.

This is a \$140 million project that is to provide Nunawading with a major boost in the removal of the busy Springvale Road level crossing with a new grade separation to be completed by 2010. The Victorian state government has committed \$60 million out of its 2009–10 budget, and the announcement was incredibly well received by all of us who live or work or even just drive through the eastern suburbs.

This location has been identified in the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria's red spot location list as no. 1 for a number of years in a row. This grade separation will improve safety for drivers and train passengers who have to battle traffic congestion on a daily basis. The project will also be a huge boost to the local economy, with more than 100 jobs being directly created. Innovative construction techniques will ensure the works are completed efficiently to minimise disruption to drivers and to train passengers.

We saw firsthand the incredible work that was done on the Middleborough Road project which came in under time and under budget and had an incredibly positive effect for all of those who live in and around the eastern suburbs. Initially there was a small minority group of people who were upset at the delays that may have been occurring whilst the construction was under way, but even those who had voiced some opposition at the time were standing arm in arm with the rest of the community in support of this great project.

The Springvale Road grade separation is a wonderful project. I do hope that the federal Liberal Party and federal Nationals will not stand in the way of this significant project for all of us in the eastern suburbs. I ask the minister to reaffirm the state government's commitment to ensuring that the project goes ahead.

Schools: Kew electorate

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — I have a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. The matter I wish to raise with the minister concerns the funds earmarked by the federal government for its Building the Education Revolution program, to be administered in Victoria by the Victorian department of education. The action I seek from the minister is to ensure that the department of education, in dealing with schools, particularly schools in my area of Kew and the whole Boroondara area, provides clear and transparent guidance as to how the schools should access this funding. Under the federal government's Building the Education Revolution program, schools are to share in \$14.7 billion to build and upgrade large-scale infrastructure such as library and multipurpose facilities

in all primary schools, specialist schools and K-12 schools.

There are strict guidelines for meeting the eligibility requirements, speed being one of them. The first works will start this month, and it is expected that minor infrastructure will be completed within six to eight months of major works such as libraries, halls and the like by 2010. Decisions about the final funding amounts for each school will be made by the state government for government schools.

In order to expedite these building projects, templates have been put forward which schools are encouraged to choose from for their building designs unless they are totally unsuitable for their needs. For the government schools in my electorate of Boroondara the problem is that many of the schools are landlocked and they do not have the space to build additional buildings without depleting the amenity of the school area by building on ovals or playgrounds. The department has encouraged them to produce their own architectural designs, and they were encouraged to deal directly with the department through their regional network leaders.

Many of the schools in Kew and the City of Boroondara have complied with this and done an enormous amount of work in producing architectural or building plans and submitting them to the department. They say they meet the department's criteria. However, since that time many of the schools have found there is a lack of transparency when communicating with the department, and they cannot get any clear indication as to whether their plans meet the criteria, what they can do to amend them or whether they will be able to secure that funding.

Many government schools have been left in total confusion. They simply have no idea where they stand and what the status of their building projects may be. They are in limbo. The schools fear that the amount of funding they have been allocated may be whittled away by the cost of reports of departmental consultants as well as by rising building costs, and that that may well lead to them having to accept unsuitable, off-the-shelf templates from the department or get nothing. I ask the minister to provide clear guidance and communicate with my schools to tell them what the actual position is.

Planning: urban growth boundary

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — My adjournment issue is for the Minister for Planning. The action I seek is for the minister to organise and authorise the Growth Areas Authority (GAA) to conduct forums and information sessions for land-holders after the draft

urban growth boundary is announced by the government. Last Friday at the Rockbank hall there was a meeting organised by Nola Dunn for land-holders who are in the investigation area for the urban growth boundary. In essence, what I discerned was that there was a lot of misinformation around at that time. A lot of people were agitating at the meeting, and there were some genuine concerns and genuine issues that needed to be dealt with, especially for people whose properties fall within the urban growth boundary.

For the people outside the urban growth boundary, in essence their land remains at the same value and the same things can be done there that are being done at the moment. But a number of land-holders have some concerns about what will happen once land comes within the urban growth boundary which were not able to be dealt with at the meeting last Friday.

The GAA should look at having those meetings locally at Rockbank and talk to the land-holders whose properties will come within the urban growth boundary so that information on issues of concern like land tax, rates and so forth can be imparted to them. This is a very serious issue. A lot of those land-holders are sitting on quite large blocks of land, and they will be dealing with things like rates and ongoing charges. The advice that I gave them was that they need to work together, they need to get some good, expert advice, and they need to talk to their lawyers and to their accountants so that if their land does come within the urban growth boundary they will be fully prepared to deal with that. By talking with their neighbours they can work together to use some experts and negotiators to get the best deal for their land if it comes within the urban growth boundary.

The urban growth boundary changes are very important for metropolitan Melbourne. They are needed to deal with the growth that is occurring in Victoria. Everybody wants to come to Victoria because it is the best place to live, work and raise a family. These changes will be very important for the future of land-holders in both Melton and Rockbank — and also in the Diggers Rest area, if there is an extension of the urban growth boundary there. I urge the Minister for Planning to organise forums and information sessions with the land-holders in my electorate.

Mr McIntosh — On a point of order, Speaker, there is a great deal of similarity between the matters raised by the member for Melton and the member for Yan Yean. Perhaps some clarity could be provided. If they are the same matter, one of them should have been ruled out of order.

The SPEAKER — Order! I am happy to rule on the point of order. The member for Yan Yean asked the Minister for Planning to assess impacts on rural land. The member for Melton asked for information sessions around changes to the urban growth boundary. I do not uphold the point of order.

Responses

Mr WYNNE (Minister for Housing) — The member for Brighton raised a matter for the Minister for Water in relation to rebates for water tanks and sought clarification of that before 30 June. I will make sure that the minister is aware of that matter.

The member for Footscray raised a matter for the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs in relation to support for a dance program for young people in the western suburbs. I will make sure her advocacy is known to the minister.

The member for Murray Valley raised a matter for the Minister for Racing, seeking his intervention in relation to the proposed closure of the greyhound racing venue at Avian Park in Wangaratta. I will make sure the minister is made aware of that.

The member for Yan Yean raised a matter for the Minister for Planning in relation to the growth areas infrastructure charge and sought that the Growth Areas Authority further discuss with land-holders the potential implications of the charge.

The member for Kilsyth and his cheer squad of one raised a matter for the Minister for Education, seeking support for the now-closed Croydon South Primary School to be used for community use. I will make sure the minister is aware of that matter.

The member for Bayswater raised a matter for the Minister for the Arts, seeking her advocacy with the University of Melbourne to ensure that the Victorian College of the Arts and Music faculty be maintained as a stand-alone specialist facility —

Mrs Victoria — Practical facility.

Mr WYNNE — That the faculty be maintained as a stand-alone practical facility within the university's remit.

The member for Forest Hill raised a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports, advocating for the much-needed Springvale Road crossing grade separation work, which is a joint federal-state funded project. Her advocacy will be noted by the minister.

The member for Kew raised a matter for the Minister for Education in support of the federal government's funding of public schools within his electorate, seeking clear guidance for all of the school communities in his area in relation to access to funds.

The member for Melton raised a matter for the Minister for Planning, seeking the support of the minister for the Growth Areas Authority to conduct thorough consultations in relation to the draft urban growth boundary plan, which will be released in the very near future.

The final matter was from the member for Cranbourne. What a delight it is to have him back here in the Parliament, fit and well and healthy. It is marvellous that he is back with us. His strong advocacy for housing on behalf of his community is not diminished. The member indicated to me his continuing concerns to ensure that the funding that is provided by both the state and federal governments is well directed. His area is one that has for a long time been a focus of attention for the government.

As the member knows, the government has committed almost \$100 million to the renovation of properties right across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria. The first \$50 million tranche of that is being spent at the moment. I can indicate to the member that in the city of Casey, for instance, \$720 000 is being spent on maintenance in 2008–09, with further funding to be allocated in 2009–10. This year's funds will be used to repair 18 stand-alone properties and two community housing properties and older persons housing units.

As to the request by the member for Cranbourne that we ensure that existing public housing is properly maintained, certainly that has been a significant emphasis of this program. I can also indicate to the member that the record investment of the Brumby government, the \$510 million in the budget before last, is being well expended throughout the metropolitan area and in regional Victoria as well. As the member will recall, \$200 million is being spent on public housing and \$300 million is being spent on housing associations to boost their capacity as alternate not-for-profit providers.

I can also indicate to the member that we have a significant and welcome challenge from the federal government to expend \$1.5 billion in public social housing and housing associations over the next two years. He can be assured that those funds will be rolled out — and 75 per cent of those funds will need to be rolled out over the next 18 to 19 months. That is a

significant but welcome challenge for us. He can be assured that those funds will be directed through both housing associations and public housing delivery so we can ensure that the impact of this massive and record investment by the Rudd government goes to areas of need.

Five thousand units will be put on the ground through the Rudd government investment. That is one of the most significant builds to be undertaken by a state government since the Olympic Games were held in Melbourne in 1956. It is a massive build and one we are certainly up for. This investment is going to make a real difference to the lives of low-income people in this state, and I know that they are the people the member for Cranbourne stands up for every time he is in this chamber.

There are good times ahead for public and social housing, but in terms of the employment outcomes that are going to be achieved from this, the economic stimulus packages cannot be forgotten. The dual prongs of the Rudd government and the Brumby government will ensure strong economic stimulus, good employment outcomes and of course fantastic social outcomes for the public, social and not-for-profit sectors.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 4.43 p.m. until Tuesday, 9 June.

