

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Tuesday, 7 August 2007

(Extract from book 11)

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

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Deputy Speaker: Ms A. P. BARKER

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

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

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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:

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

¹ Resigned 6 August 2007

² Resigned 6 August 2007

CONTENTS

TUESDAY, 7 AUGUST 2007

RESIGNATIONS OF MEMBERS	2487	<i>Stud Road–Timbertop Drive, Rowville: traffic lights</i>	2524
MINISTRY	2487	<i>Napoleon Road–Lakesfield Drive, Lysterfield: safety zone</i>	2524
CONDOLENCES		<i>Public transport: Murrindindi shire</i>	2524
<i>Hon. Walter Jona, AM</i>	2488	<i>Agriculture: funding</i>	2524
<i>Adjournment</i>	2506	<i>International Criminal Court: prosecutions</i>	2525
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE		<i>Andrew Bairstow</i>	2525
<i>Public sector: debt</i>	2506	<i>Hon. John Cain, Sr</i>	2525
<i>Government: initiatives</i>	2507	<i>Tamil community: fundraising</i>	2526
<i>Water: north–south pipeline</i>	2508	ADJOURNMENT	
<i>Aboriginals: justice agreement</i>	2509	<i>Water: north–south pipeline</i>	2526
<i>Public transport: investment</i>	2509	<i>Energy: rebates</i>	2527
<i>Children: early childhood outcomes</i>	2510	<i>Stawell–Warracknabeal Road: upgrade</i>	2527
<i>Water: dams</i>	2511	<i>Coburn Primary School: bike shed</i>	2527
<i>Consumer affairs: property financing companies</i>	2511	<i>Middleborough Road, Box Hill: grade separation</i>	2528
<i>Schools: drought support</i>	2512	<i>Road safety: hoons</i>	2528
<i>Health: funding</i>	2513	<i>Ferntree Gully Road: triplication</i>	2529
CONFISCATION AMENDMENT BILL		<i>Cycling: Hell Ride</i>	2530
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	2514	<i>Princes Highway West: upgrade</i>	2530
LAND (REVOCATION OF RESERVATIONS) BILL		<i>Housing: long-term leases</i>	2531
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	2514	<i>Responses</i>	2531
PETITIONS			
<i>Water: north–south pipeline</i>	2514		
<i>Greater Bendigo: performance</i>	2514		
<i>Nuclear energy: federal policy</i>	2515		
<i>Monash Freeway: noise barriers</i>	2515		
<i>Port Phillip Bay: channel deepening</i>	2515		
<i>Abortion: legislation</i>	2516		
SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS			
COMMITTEE			
<i>Review 2006</i>	2516		
<i>Regulation review 2006</i>	2516		
<i>Alert Digest No. 10</i>	2516		
DOCUMENTS	2516		
ROYAL ASSENT	2517		
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE			
<i>Program</i>	2517		
MEMBERS STATEMENTS			
<i>Darfur Australia Network: forgotten people project</i>	2519		
<i>Hon. John Murray</i>	2520		
<i>San Donato Festival</i>	2520		
<i>Victorian Environmental Assessment Council: river red gum forests report</i>	2520		
<i>Paraguay: Victorian consular office</i>	2521		
<i>Public sector: debt</i>	2521		
<i>Elizabeth Anthony</i>	2521		
<i>Robert Johnston</i>	2522		
<i>Southmoor Primary School: kitchen garden program</i>	2522		
<i>Floods: Gippsland</i>	2522		
<i>BATS Theatre Company: Rumors</i>	2523		
<i>Donald Mackay</i>	2523		
<i>Sri Lankan study centre: 15th anniversary</i>	2523		

Tuesday, 7 August 2007

The SPEAKER (Hon. Jenny Lindell) took the chair at 2.05 p.m. and read the prayer.

RESIGNATIONS OF MEMBERS

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to announce that on 6 August 2007 I received the following letter of resignation from the member for Williamstown:

Dear Speaker

I wish to formally tender my resignation as the member for the Legislative Assembly seat of Williamstown.

It has been an enormous privilege over the last 13 years to serve as Williamstown's member of Parliament.

It has also been a privilege to represent the electorate in this parliamentary chamber.

I wish you and all members of Parliament all the best for the future. It has been an honour to serve with you.

Yours sincerely,

Hon. Steve Bracks, MP
Member for Williamstown.

I wish to announce that on 6 August 2007 I received the following letter of resignation from the member for Albert Park:

Dear Ms Lindell

I would like to formally advise that I will be resigning from the seat of Albert Park effective immediately.

Yours sincerely,

John Thwaites
MLA Albert Park.

MINISTRY

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I wish to inform the house of the responsibilities that will be undertaken by ministers in this Parliament.

In the Legislative Assembly I will be responsible for the portfolios of Premier, Veterans' Affairs and Multicultural Affairs.

The honourable member for Niddrie is Deputy Premier, Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing.

The honourable member for Bendigo East is Minister for Regional and Rural Development and Minister for Skills and Workforce Participation. She will answer for

the Minister for Innovation, the Minister for Industry and Trade and the Minister for Information and Communication Technology in another place.

The honourable member for Mulgrave is the Minister for Health.

The honourable member for Thomastown is Minister for Community Development and Minister for Energy and Resources. He will answer for the Minister for Environment and Climate Change and the Minister for Planning in another place.

The honourable member for Bendigo West is the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Minister for Corrections.

The honourable member for Ripon is the Minister for Agriculture and the Minister for Small Business.

The honourable member for Lyndhurst is Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission, Minister for Water and Minister for Tourism and Major Events. He will answer for the Treasurer in another place.

The honourable member for Altona is the Minister for Public Transport and Minister for the Arts. She will answer for the Minister for Major Projects in another place.

The honourable member for Monbulk is the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs and the Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs.

The honourable member for Mount Waverley is the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development and the Minister for Women's Affairs.

The honourable member for Bellarine is the Minister for Mental Health, the Minister for Community Services and the Minister for Senior Victorians.

The honourable member for Tarneit is the Minister for Roads and Ports.

The honourable member for Melbourne is the Minister for Education.

The honourable member for Mitcham is the Minister for Gaming, the Minister for Consumer Affairs and the Minister Assisting the Premier on Veterans' Affairs.

The honourable member for Richmond is the Minister for Housing, the Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs.

In the Legislative Council, the Honourable John Lenders is Treasurer; the Honourable Gavin Jennings is the Minister for Environment and Climate Change and the Minister for Innovation; the Honourable Justin Madden is Minister for Planning; and the Honourable Theo Theophanous is Minister for Industry and Trade, Minister for Information and Communication Technology and Minister for Major Projects.

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) (*By leave*) — I rise to congratulate the Premier and the Deputy Premier on their elevation. We wish them well in their endeavours.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the exceptional contribution of the now departed Premier and Deputy Premier in the work they have done for this state.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) (*By leave*) — I join with the Leader of the Opposition in extending congratulations to the Premier and the Deputy Premier. I must say, Speaker, that I cannot wait for the day when the Deputy Premier is the Acting Premier!

I also extend my congratulations to the former Premier and the former Deputy Premier for their excellence of service to this place.

CONDOLENCES

Hon. Walter Jona, AM

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death of the Honourable Walter Jona, AM, and places on record its acknowledgement of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Hawthorn from 1964 to 1985, Minister of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs and Assistant Minister of Health from 1976 to 1979 and Minister for Community Welfare Services from 1979 to 1982.

The house is saddened by the passing of Walter Jona on Sunday, 22 July, aged 81. Mr Jona was a person of great compassion and integrity. He was well known to many members of this house. He was a political pioneer, overseeing the world's first introduction of mandatory seatbelts in Victoria in 1970. He was a prominent and active member of Melbourne's vibrant Jewish community. According to the former Governor-General of Australia, Sir Zelman Cowen, he was also 'a wise and tolerant' man with an abiding concern for the wellbeing of the wider general community.

Over the years, both formerly as Treasurer and as opposition leader, I attended many functions at which Walter Jona was present. I remember the first function, a B'nai B'rith function, that I attended with him as opposition leader back in the 1990s. I was a speaker at that function and so was Walter. He was a person who inspired many in the community with his great sense of concern and compassion for those around him.

Walter Jona was born in Hawthorn on 17 July 1926 to parents Lily and Jacob, a successful GP. He attended Glenferrie State School, Scotch College and the University of Melbourne and enjoyed a diverse career before entering Parliament. He served, among other things, as a pilot officer in the Royal Australian Air Force Reserve during World War II. Following this he worked for the Royal Exchange Assurance Group and a pharmaceutical company, Nicholas Pty Ltd.

Mr Jona joined the Liberal Party in 1947 and was elected as the member for Hawthorn in 1964, a position he held until 1985, when he proudly retired as that seat's longest serving member. Mr Jona had a long and distinguished parliamentary career. He served as parliamentary secretary to the cabinet. He was appointed Australia's first ethnic affairs minister — I know he was very proud of this — and did much to promote cultural diversity across our state. He was also Assistant Minister of Health. As Minister for Community Welfare Services he worked hard to reform the state's prison system, and he oversaw the construction of the maximum security Jika Jika wing at Pentridge.

I think it is fair to say that Walter Jona was highly regarded on both sides of politics. In fact he once described himself as a parliamentarian, not a politician, and he dedicated his life to supporting and serving those in need. Indeed one of his greatest political legacies arose from his work as chairman of the parliamentary Road Safety Committee between 1967 and 1973. As we know, car seatbelts became mandatory in Victoria under his guidance and leadership, and that has been a far-reaching initiative which has saved, literally, the lives of tens of thousands of Australians.

It must also be noted that Walter Jona was just as active outside the parliamentary chamber as he was within. After marrying his wife Alwynne in 1972, Mr Jona immersed himself in community life. He chaired the Gandel Charitable Trust and the Asthma Foundation of Victoria, and he was a life governor of the Association for the Blind. He also made a valuable contribution to the Melbourne Olympics Social Impact Panel and the Pyramid Emergency Advance Panel. Mr Jona was a

state commissioner of the Australian Cricket Board code of behaviour, and he was a member of the Victorian Cricket Association Taskforce on the Future of Cricket in Victoria. He received an Order of Australia for his services to the community in 1986, as well as an honorary doctorate from Tel Aviv University in Israel in 1996.

In an article which was published in the *Age* last month Brian Costar, who is a professor of Victorian parliamentary democracy at Swinburne University, described Walter Jona as 'an incredibly energetic and engaged citizen whose interests had few bounds'. In his 2006 autobiography, entitled *People, Parliament and Politics*, Mr Jona said that an active community life was one of the great advantages of his active political life. He attributed his ability to cope with the pressures of that public office to a number of things — firstly, a good sense of humour; secondly, the Hawthorn Football Club; and thirdly, the unwavering love and support of his wife, Alwynne.

On behalf of the Victorian government I offer my sincere condolences to Mrs Alwynne Jona, as well as to Mr Jona's family and friends.

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — It is an honour to join the Premier in this condolence motion for Walter Jona. Walter was a friend, a Liberal, a fellow member of Parliament and my predecessor, and I do not think Victoria has seen a finer man for many, many years.

Walter Jona made a remarkable contribution to the Victorian community as a member of Parliament, as a minister, as a philanthropist and as a leader in so many communities. He was always a true Liberal of passion and humility. As I said just a few weeks ago, he saved lives with his leadership and he changed lives with his care and compassion.

Walter was widely and deeply respected right across the Victorian community and by all sides of politics. He was loved by many, many people. He was a much honoured man, and the honours and tributes have flowed for Walter Jona not only over the years but certainly in recent days. He was the son of Jacob Jona and Lily Wittner, the grandson of migrants to this country. Walter tells the wonderful and proud story of the Wittner and Jona families in his book. He was, of course, a member of this Parliament and a predecessor of mine — the longest serving member for Hawthorn from 1964 to 1985.

As the Premier reminded us, he was Minister of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs from 1976 to 1979 —

the first minister for ethnic affairs — and a proud one to boot. He was Minister for Community Services from 1979 to 1982 and chair of the Road Safety Committee, amongst his other achievements. Of course, Walter will be remembered for the introduction of seatbelts. In a groundbreaking exercise, a world first, compulsory seatbelts in Victoria are a tribute to Walter's work and commitment. When Victorians, and indeed people around the world, click on their belts every day, they are clicking on a little bit of Walter Jona.

As the Premier mentioned Walter was very active in the great *Jika Jika* story, a story which aroused much passion at the time. Again in his book Walter tells that story magnificently. For those of us who can recall, many streets in Melbourne in those days were littered with that very sharp piece of graffiti which said, 'Jail Jona'. In many ways Walter was proud of that. Some of the graffiti survives to this day, and I invite members to find it and reflect on somebody who aroused passion and aroused commitment and gave his all. It is indeed a wonderful story.

But he was more than just a member of Parliament and a minister. He was involved in more than 50 organisations, not just as a member but as an active participant on the boards, and indeed in running and leading those organisations. It is tempting to read them all into the record but clearly not possible to do, but it is an extraordinary record. As a philanthropist he was involved with the Gandel Charitable Trust, the Royal Melbourne Hospital Neuroscience Foundation and the Asthma Foundation, just to name a few. He was a community worker with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Rotary, the Pyramid Emergency Advance Panel, as the Premier mentioned, and with Montefiore Homes.

Of course, as a sports lover Walter was not without fault. He was a Hawthorn supporter. As I have said to many people over the years, how can I be the member for Hawthorn and not support Hawthorn? Unfortunately I have been to almost all of Hawthorn's triumphs over the years — they have been against Geelong — and Walter would often remind me of that.

He was very active in the world of cricket, working with the Victorian Cricket Association on the committee overseeing the future of cricket and with the Australian Cricket Board. Walter was actively involved in developing the Australian Cricket Board's code of behaviour. One of the first players to appear before Walter and the board was Dean Jones. If only there were a transcript of that!

As a multiculturalist Walter Jona was one of the most celebrated members of the Jewish community, not only as a minister for ethnic affairs but also as the longest serving Jewish member of Parliament in this country, and he was a very active member of progressive Judaism. He had a passion for his family, and for his extended family in particular, and the stories in his book of the migrant experience clearly moved and supported Walter throughout his whole life.

To me he was a friend, a fellow Liberal and a predecessor. Barely 12 months ago he gave me the honour — and indeed it was an honour — of launching his book, which the Premier mentioned. As I said at the time, the book is not in the contemporary genre of political memoirs. It is a book that does not hector and does not insult. It is a book that is humble but proud, and it records the great contribution of a very fine man who served his community. There is a quote from the book launch that I will mention again, because I think it sums up the nature, the style and the feeling of Walter Jona. Recounting his experiences in the early days as a budding politician amidst the various debates at the time about who might be standing for which seats and what they might be doing, he said:

If people are going to criticise those they elect, then the people ought to jolly well get off their bottoms and find those people they are prepared to vote for and persuade them to stand.

That is beautifully innocent language, Speaker. I probably could have used that last week!

Walter Jona was a quiet guide, he was a wonderful role model, and as I said he was a friend and predecessor who continued to give me and others the joy of his warmth, his smile and his wisdom. He has left a remarkable political legacy not only in terms of policy positions but also socially. I have heard over the years many fine tributes and many fine condolences, but the tributes we heard at Temple Beth Israel on 26 July from Rabbi Fred Morgan and Emeritus Rabbi John Levi were quite extraordinary. They were Walter's friends, not just people with his pastoral care in mind. Speaker, you attended the service, as did the then Premier and I. They were true friends, and they said many fine things about Walter, but I noted in particular that Emeritus Rabbi Levi said he was always interested — and he was. As those of us know who worked with and knew Walter, he was always interested. Again as Rabbi Levi also said, he was a man with the purest of motives and a man who was 'the proudest of Hawthorn residents'.

The book tells wonderful stories about Walter. He was somebody who energised and elevated people. Walter had been struggling with his health for many years. I

pay tribute to the extraordinary generosity of spirit, compassion and care of Alwynne and the family, who looked after Walter and gave him nearly 10 years of active life and spirited engagement after he was first diagnosed. In that time, particularly in recent months, Alwynne made it possible for many people to visit and share some experiences with Walter. I had the extraordinary privilege of doing that in recent months, and others I know have also done it. To find Walter there smiling, thinking, engaging, talking, laughing and telling stories was just remarkable.

I know, and I am sure he would like me to put it on the record, how grateful he was for his last visit to the football, which was just a few months ago. The Hawthorn Football Club made a special effort to make him welcome so that he could see the Hawks triumph again. He told me with great affection the story of his last visit to the footy. He was still hoping to go again — but he did not. He told me at the time how the care and attention he was getting sometimes made him feel energetic and sometimes made him feel a little flat. He was recounting the game that Hawthorn had played on the previous Friday night, and he said 'I felt so charged up on Friday night I could have played them all by myself and won'. But then he said 'I don't think I would have passed the drug test!'.

We are here to deal with this condolence motion to celebrate Walter's life, particularly as a member of Parliament. I want to note that he came into this chamber and this Parliament as a man of compassion, passion and care. He also came in here with integrity and ideals. He set himself the highest standards of personal behaviour and maintained them quietly and unpretentiously. Can I reflect on that and say that, from my observation and the observations of others, he left this place with his reputation enhanced to an extraordinary level, with his integrity glowing and with friends on all sides of politics. I do not think there can be a greater tribute than that. He never crossed anyone, and I do not believe anybody crossed Walter; he just was not that sort of character.

I have a vision of Walter doing what he loved: talking, debating, thinking and creating, surrounded by his much-loved Hawthorn City brass band and the Victorian State Opera, wearing brown and gold, and uttering his favourite reference to what he described as the great Australian Liberal Party.

What a gap Walter Jona leaves! What respect he has generated! Can I simply say that our thoughts and care will be with Alwynne and the extended family forever.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — On behalf of The Nationals, I join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in speaking on this condolence motion to mark the passing of Walter Jona. By any standards this was a remarkable man. He passed away at 81 years of age on 22 July. For 21 of those years he was the member for Hawthorn, having been elected to this place in June 1964.

He came here with that greatest of assets, his life experience, including the many elements of his life up to that point that he was able to bring to bear in his glittering career as a parliamentarian. He had been a member of the Royal Australian Air Force and continued as a member of the RAAF Reserve. He had a wide range of commercial experience and even at the stage of his election to this place was involved in an array of charitable causes.

In his inaugural speech in this place on 7 October 1964 he spoke of some of those things that were dear to him. Amongst them was the then Swinburne Technical College. He spoke about the importance of the role of technical colleges in the education of young people in particular. He spoke about the necessity of and justification for federal support for the technical college system. He lauded the fact that degree status was being applied to technical college courses. He said there was a real synergy between university qualifications and those that could and should be achieved at a technical level. In that sense he was very much ahead of his time.

He spoke of education broadly and its importance in our community. He referred to school extension programs and the importance of having the capacity in the education system to encourage those whose performances warranted it. He also spoke, though, of those who struggled with their education and of the need to support them. In a sense that was an insight into a man who, as we know, had an enormous social conscience and was a great social reformist.

He spoke also about the Chief Secretary's office, the social welfare branch of that area and the important role it had to play. Interestingly enough, he also spoke about policing generally. He lamented the fact that up until that year the CIB at Hawthorn did not have any police cars, and he was delighted to see that the budget of that year had enabled vehicles to be provided to them. He was the 13th member for Hawthorn over the previous 75 years of the electorate.

His achievements while in this place were many. He had various ministerial roles, all of which he fulfilled with distinction. He is remembered most for the contribution he made with regard to the introduction of

seatbelts and also the reforms he made to the prison system, which were remarkable for their time. As I said, he was a social reformist and he carried out his ideals in that regard to the nth degree in his ministerial and his general parliamentary roles in this place.

He was a man, it seems to me, who had a wonderful balance in himself between the necessity for economic reform and economic drive — which need to be the foundation of the activity of this Parliament to ensure that all people are able to prosper to the extent we can have it happen through our joint efforts here — and, on the other hand, the necessity to also ensure that the most disadvantaged in the community are able to be accommodated and cared for under the legislation which flows through this Parliament.

He was a member of something of the order of 52 community groups at the time of his passing. Amongst them were the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the Asthma Foundation, the prison services association, the Association for the Blind, the Hawthorn Football Club and of course the cricketing fraternity.

His memoirs, *People, Parliament and Politics*, were published last year. They offer a further insight into this quite remarkable man and his many achievements, both within the walls of this place and beyond. The book itself covers a range of topics. It deals with seatbelts, his first ministry and *Jika Jika*, and there is a chapter on 'A vote is a valued possession'. How true it is, and it is a principle that is appropriate to reflect upon on a day such as this.

He also paid tribute to his wife, Alwynne. In the preface of his memoirs, in reference to his wife, he wrote:

She was exceedingly patient and tolerant throughout my public life, while at the same time managing to pursue her own interests and maintain her own community involvements. She proved to be a rare person indeed.

Those comments are borne out of course by the matters that have just been mentioned by the Leader of the Opposition.

In describing Alwynne as being a rare person, Walter Jona could equally in fact have been referring to himself, because he was just that. He was a man of great faith, he was a man of common decency and a man of great common sense. He was a visionary who came to this place to make a difference, and he did make a difference. I join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition and the other members present in offering my condolences on behalf of The

Nationals to his wife, Alwynne, and to the extended family.

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — A list of Walter Jona's achievements reads like a testament to public service. He was a person who believed that with privilege came responsibility. Walter Jona served the Victorian people for almost a generation as the member for Hawthorn and for a lifetime as a man with his feet placed firmly in the community. With interests both immense and diverse, Walter Jona demonstrated an integrity and strength of principle founded in concern and compassion for ordinary people. From cultural diversity to improvements in the prison system, Walter Jona worked to secure decency in Victorian government services.

From his membership of the Association for the Blind and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, to his directorship of the Victorian State Opera, and indeed as a proud ambassador for Victoria's vibrant Jewish community, Walter Jona strived tirelessly to instil decency and diversity in everyday Victorian life. In particular, as I am sure will be mentioned here many times today, Walter Jona's work as the chair of the parliamentary Road Safety Committee between 1967 and 1973 led to Victoria becoming the first jurisdiction to enforce lap-sash seatbelts in front and rear car seats in 1970.

As we know, Victoria has always been a pioneer in the area of road safety, and as a former minister responsible for the Transport Accident Commission I know only too well the fundamental importance of seatbelts to road safety and the horror of the injuries incurred in their absence. To many I am sure that the idea that only a generation ago Victorians drove around unbelted seems inconceivable, yet if it were not for the work of Walter Jona and his colleagues many more lives would have been lost on Victorian roads.

Walter Jona's life, as we have heard, was certainly very rich. An avid cricket and football enthusiast as well as a keen businessman, he gave of his talents to all aspects of community life. His contribution across the breadth of government alone may well have mirrored the view held by the Premier for much of Walter Jona's career, Sir Dick Hamer, who believed the states were responsible for the issues of most importance to ordinary people. Clearly a life of service at state level can make an extraordinary difference, especially if this life is led with the dignity and clarity of purpose shown by Walter Jona.

On behalf of the Victorian government, I express my deepest condolences to Walter's wife, Alwynne, and to

his family. I conclude by saying that they certainly have the gratitude of the people of Victoria for giving so generously of one they loved for the benefit of so many.

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I too wish to contribute very briefly to this condolence debate in the memory of Walter Jona, who was an outstanding Liberal member of Parliament and the member for Hawthorn from 1964 to 1985. His career was a distinguished one, and the previous speakers have itemised the offices Walter held, both within this Parliament as minister and outside the Parliament.

He was a man of very firm beliefs. He was, of course, on the socially progressive wing of the Liberal Party and was very keen to ensure that many others followed in his footsteps. He spent a considerable amount of time with the Young Liberal Movement in the era when I was active there and tried to instil a desire for social participation and social progressiveness amongst that youth wing as it then was.

Walter Jona also held very firm views about the role of the states — which make for interesting reading in the current political debate with, obviously, a more centralist approach being taken by both parties at the Canberra level. He was also not afraid to criticise his own party. He did it in a most distinguished manner and without any aggression, but he had the capacity to relay advice, often in a public sense, and to give constructive criticism of his own Liberal Party in the time in which he was a parliamentarian here and post his time as a parliamentarian.

I also read with interest in his book *People, Parliament and Politics* that Walter was a very unusual man, in that he did not want to be just a member of Parliament; he only ever wanted to be the member for Hawthorn. He was born in Hawthorn, grew up in Hawthorn and was schooled in Hawthorn, and that was the seat he was going for — which I think is a measure of the man. I would refer people to one chapter in his book, called 'The Richmond connection'. Walter, for his sins, had an area of Richmond in this so-called safe Liberal seat, or relatively safe Liberal seat, and he describes his shock over a number of political activities in Richmond through that era. I would recommend it to members to read; it makes very interesting reading.

Walter Jona's achievements were many, and honourable members have touched on those, in the areas of seatbelts and significant development in prisons. He was a pioneer for the Jewish community and will be long remembered for that, but again, as other speakers have said, he had a very broad series of social interests and wide community involvement

outside Parliament. He was highly respected by both sides of Parliament and that, of course, is not always universal.

I wish to place on record my thanks to Walter Jona for his assistance in my own career, particularly in the early days. He was an amazingly helpful man and was happy to assist a wide range of younger people as we made our way up through the ranks. He was an outstanding man of integrity and dignity and a wonderful human being. My condolences to Alwynne and family.

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — I join with other leaders and members of the Victorian Parliament to pay my respects to Walter Jona and offer my condolences to his wife, Alwynne, and his family. It is an honour to speak on this condolence motion for Walter Jona.

Walter, as we have heard, is the longest serving member for Hawthorn. He entered Parliament in 1964 and eventually retired in 1985. At that time he was also the first Jewish minister in Victoria in three decades. In the Jewish community Walter Jona came from the liberal or progressive stream and served as chairman of the Victorian Union for Progressive Judaism. In politics Walter Jona was a social progressive; he was a small-l liberal who was guided in public life by broad Jewish values of compassion and respect. The attitude in the community to Walter Jona is best summed up by Rabbi John Levi who said:

Walter had a nice sense of humour — a ready smile and a story to fit every event. He was wise, tolerant and committed. He was fair, painstaking and worthy.

In an earlier interview in the *Australian Jewish News* in September 2006 Walter Jona said that ‘rescuing people’s lives or giving them the strength to cope with their burdens’ was the theme that had run through his public life, firstly, as Australia’s first ethnic affairs minister and also as Minister for Community Welfare Services, in which he saw his role in social justice terms, such as in helping prisoners to improve their quality of life. He believed his faith informed his approach to these roles and identified strongly with the Talmudic saying that ‘he who saves a life, it as if he has saved the world’.

This saying was also relevant to another post Walter enjoyed prior to becoming a minister in the Hamer government in 1976. This was the role of chair of not only Victoria’s but Australia’s first parliamentary Road Safety Committee. As a former Minister for Transport, I want to acknowledge the contribution to road safety made by Walter Jona. The parliamentary Road Safety Committee was created in response to a very sharp rise

in road deaths in the mid to late 1960s. The road toll had gone from less than 400 in the early 1950s to 955 — nearly 1000 — in 1966. Clearly something had to be done.

In October 1968 the committee commenced formal hearings into the compulsory wearing of seatbelts, which at the time was a very controversial concept. Seatbelt-wearing rates were extremely low and the notion of the compulsory wearing of seatbelts was not something that found much favour with the public. However, following a lengthy inquiry the committee made a number of recommendations, one of which was particularly groundbreaking. It recommended that motor vehicles be fitted with the number of seatbelts equivalent to the number of passengers and that all occupants of motor vehicles be required by law to wear the fitted seatbelts.

This recommendation was not immediately taken on board. In fact, as Walter was about to table the committee’s report in Parliament, he was advised by the then Chief Secretary, Arthur Rylah, that the cabinet had already decided on the matter and they had no intention of making seatbelt wearing compulsory. It became clear to Walter and the others on the committee that neither the government nor the opposition was likely to become a public advocate of this course, despite the fact that the committee, which included representatives from all parties, had been unanimous in its recommendations. Committee members from both sides of politics undertook a campaign to win public support for this concept, and to roll the political orthodoxy of the time.

Walter Jona and his committee colleagues approached the media in 1970. The *Age* published a feature article that year which in effect pressed the government to accept the committee’s recommendations for the compulsory wearing of seatbelts. The *Sun*, as it then was, also took up the cause with the editor, Harry Gordon, enlisting the help of surgeons who commented that they were sick and tired of seeing road accident victims jellied up with their faces smashed and spines paralysed. It was a very emotive time in the media. The legislation was eventually introduced into the Parliament. It by no means enjoyed unanimous support, even from cabinet, but the important thing is that it was passed.

It is interesting to note that our neighbours in New South Wales were critical of the legislation. In Adelaide the general manager of the automobile association announced that his organisation did not support the legislation. The Victorian Council for Civil Liberties also opposed the law and called for it to be withdrawn.

But opposition soon died down and other states began to follow Victoria's lead. Of course eventually the world followed this initiative from Walter Jona. The legislation passed through Parliament by December 1970 and was proclaimed early in 1971. This made Victoria the first state in the world to legislate for the compulsory wearing of seatbelts. As we know, the compulsory wearing of seatbelts has been taken up right around Australia and in fact in most parts of the world.

The significance of this piece of legislation, and the emphasis on road safety it subsequently inspired, can only be realised when we look at Victoria's road toll over the last 30-odd years. In 1970, when the new legislation was passed, Victoria's road toll was 1061. In 2003 our road toll was 330 — the lowest in recorded history. That is 731 lives saved in one year as a result of that initiative. It is an outstanding legacy. This is even more remarkable when you consider the extra amount of travel undertaken and the additional cars on our roads. In the early 1970s there were approximately 1.3 million cars on our roads, in the late 1990s there were over 3 million, and yet the road toll is being brought down.

I believe the initiatives led by that Road Safety Committee, and those that followed in later years, have played a significant role in the drastic reduction in the road toll. This is a great achievement, one I know Walter Jona was proud of, and deservedly so. Furthermore, the bipartisan nature of the work in the road safety area at that time was a great accomplishment. It really set a trend that continues through to today where road safety measures must continue to be delivered in a bipartisan fashion.

Walter Jona was a dedicated parliamentarian. He was well respected by colleagues, and some of those who knew him and worked with him are here today. He will be sorely missed by many Victorians and remembered for the great role he played in this policy victory. I once again offer my condolences to the family.

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — I rise to acknowledge the service of Walter Jona to this Parliament and to the Victorian community. As a former Minister for Youth and Community Services I particularly wish to acknowledge the service of Walter Jona to our community in his role as Minister for Community Welfare Services from 1979 to 1982. Walter was one of the first to ring me and congratulate me when I was appointed community services minister.

I ran into Walter at a number of functions in my time as minister for community services and subsequently.

Walter always showed a very active and positive interest in the work of community services and in how we can continue to make life better for the disadvantaged in our community. His interest was always active, and he was always listening and always positive. A number of people who have retired from politics are tempted to be critical when they talk to their successors, whether they be in the ministry or the Parliament. Walter was always quietly spoken, positive and good with a story, but he always left with a very firm, supportive and positive message.

With regard to Walter's role in community welfare services, I hark back to his inaugural speech on 7 October 1964, when he spoke about the social welfare branch of the then Chief Secretary's Department. In that speech he placed great emphasis on the need to expand training opportunities for people who were interested in careers in welfare work. That was at a time, in 1964, when a career in welfare work was not really seen as a career at all. Walter saw great opportunities in the creation of careers in welfare work and was one of the first people to seek the expansion of training opportunities in welfare work. He saw opportunities for people who worked both in the professional welfare sector, as he described it, and for volunteer sector organisations. Walter saw a complementarity between volunteer organisations and government-run organisations.

At his funeral the rabbi said of Walter that when he died he was still actively involved in more than 50 community groups. When you look at the community groups that many other people have mentioned you see that they cover a wide range of interests, from community service, cultural activities and sporting activities to local, Hawthorn-based groups and statewide groups, groups involved in philanthropy, groups involved in direct, hands-on services and groups involved in a whole range of other activities that Walter took part in.

Other speakers have spoken about his leadership role in his parliamentary career in terms of compulsory seatbelt wearing. That initiative alone has obviously saved thousands of lives and brought benefits to the people who have been saved and their families.

In his role as Minister for Community Welfare Services Walter was very active in an unpopular area. It was often said in politics, and it still is said today, that there are no votes in jails or prisons, but that did not deter Walter from doing what he perceived and knew to be right. He insisted that prisoners receive proper meals and proper health care and attention. He insisted that prisoners receive rehabilitation, even in the very

rudimentary form of those days. He considered it absolutely vital that prisoners were treated as human beings and given every opportunity to rehabilitate themselves. He made comments such as that being locked away from society was punishment enough and that our duty was to look after those people, help them return to society in a better condition and provide better opportunities for them. He also insisted on trying to improve the training and education of prison officers and the people involved across the whole welfare sector.

Sir Zelman Cowen and others used many words to describe Walter which I think epitomise him: wise, committed, tolerant, fair and reliable. I want to finish with a quote by Walter Jona himself in an article that Kyle Patterson wrote:

If a person is suffering difficulty of some sort, a cheque for \$200 may be of no benefit or give only short-term relief.

But a \$50 cheque and counselling from welfare officers can be of great benefit.

I think that summarises Walter's approach. It was about trying to work with and help people to help themselves, and, instead of just giving, it was about working alongside them professionally and helping to build their self-esteem and confidence.

Walter was a wonderful human being, a great parliamentarian and a great advocate for our community, and he certainly achieved a great deal. I offer my sympathy to Alwynne and his extended family.

Ms NEVILLE (Minister for Mental Health) — I too rise to speak briefly in support of the condolence motion for the Honourable Walter Jona, who was the longest serving member of any party to represent the people of Hawthorn. During the 21 years in which he aptly represented the residents of Hawthorn he also played a significant role in improving the lives of many Victorians and in passionately defending democratic principles.

Walter Jona is, of course, most well known in our community as the champion of the compulsory wearing of seatbelts. As other members have made reference to, he was a very strong advocate for a change in the legislation. That change in the law should not be underestimated, and nor should the battle that he had to achieve it. It has had a profound impact on the death rates on our roads, and it has also contributed to a change in culture and a recognition of the continuing need for road safety measures to be introduced by governments. Now it is hard to believe that there was a

time when people did not wear seatbelts. It is unthinkable now for me to allow my son to travel in a car without wearing a seatbelt. That decision and the advocacy of Walter Jona have saved the lives of many children.

There were of course many other achievements in his service to this Parliament that should be equally celebrated. He served as the Assistant Minister of Health, with responsibility for early childhood development and for the Year of the Child in Victoria. I am sure he would have been pleased to see that this has continued to be a key priority for government. He understood the importance of governments investing in children and children's services.

He then spent more than three years working to represent some of our most disadvantaged Victorians when he took on the role of Minister for Community Welfare Services. During that time he had responsibility for prisons, and he worked hard to improve conditions at Pentridge and promoted professional development among prison officers to improve standards. He also supported the development of a range of programs that were targeted at improving the lives of our most disadvantaged — children who were at risk and women who had been victims of family violence. In fact under his leadership he oversaw the expansion of the Victorian women's refuge program.

He also made an enormous contribution to Victorian life outside Parliament. He was an inspiring contributor to the community through his support of and involvement with a broad range of groups and organisations, charitable trusts and foundations. He contributed through the Queen Elizabeth Centre Foundation, caring for children in distress; through his role as a special patron of the Asthma Foundation of Victoria; and through his involvement with the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Throughout his service he passionately defended the principles of representative democracy. In his memoirs, *People, Parliament and Politics*, he wrote:

I began early to recognise that there was a big difference between being just a politician and being a competent and respected parliamentarian. A good parliamentarian had not only to be a good politician, but he or she also had to be effective at representing and understanding people, be very much part of community activity and have a healthy reciprocal relationship with all groups and individuals in the community, not just with those whose political ideologies coincided with their own.

It is a description which we all aspire to and which Walter Jona adhered to in his long career in this

Parliament. If I can borrow the words of Ben Bodna in his tribute to Walter Jona: ‘Walter was the public citizen par excellence’.

I would like to extend my sincere sympathy to Alwynne Jona and to his extended family, friends and former colleagues.

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — It is indeed an honour to rise and make a contribution on this condolence motion for Walter Jona, a highly respected Australian. In speaking about a man like Walter, members of this chamber cannot help but draw attention to his outstanding career as a member of this house representing the seat of Hawthorn and to his being its longest serving member when he retired in 1985.

Walter, who has been described as a social progressive and a true Liberal, committed his time both in Parliament and beyond to the betterment of others through his support of and work with schools and universities, his leadership in addressing the appalling road toll through the introduction of the compulsory wearing of seatbelts, his groundbreaking service as the first minister for ethnic affairs in Australia in supporting multiculturalism; and his service as Minister for Community Welfare Services in modernising and updating the Victorian prison system.

I knew Walter Jona as a man who had many loves and many passions: his beloved Hawthorn Football Club; his practice of progressive Judaism; his membership of and service to the Liberal Party. But to all it was very obvious that his greatest love was Alwynne, who was by his side for much of his life; and of course his journey in the last few years was somewhat difficult. Despite Walter’s amazing array of interests and areas of contribution, one always had the impression that his very best friend and the person he most liked to be with was Alwynne, his wife, whom Brian Costar described as ‘an integral player in “Team Jona”’. Brian Costar said he was also deeply committed to:

... his faith; to his community; to his party ... and last but certainly not least to the Hawthorn Football Club.

Within the Jewish community one of the greatest compliments one can ever receive is to be referred to as a ‘*mensch*’. Those who joined the hundreds of others at Walter Jona’s state funeral at Temple Beth Israel would have heard Rabbi Morgan say that Walter Jona was a true *mensch*. It means that you are regarded as a person who thinks of others and gives back to the community. It means you are admired for your unselfish contribution to the community. As Stan Marks wrote in a letter to the *Jewish News* just last week:

Walter was passionate about certain issues, including the rights of individuals. A man for all seasons and reasons, he is best summed up as a *mensch*, in the true meaning of the word.

... That was Walter Jona, who, in his quiet and subtle and very unassuming way, achieved many things for the Jewish and non-Jewish community and directly or indirectly helped to indicate Jewish contributions to the Australian community as a whole.

Directly or indirectly, he helped counter anti-Semitism and the evils of hatred and, above all, hypocrisy.

Shalom, in the true meaning of the word, Walter.

Walter’s unselfish and socially progressive contribution was recognised by the broader Australian community when he received the Order of Australia in 1986.

Over the 11 years thus far that I have served the seat of Caulfield I personally was most appreciative of his advice, his assistance and his enormous support. I assure you I had many long conversations with Walter about an enormous range of issues. It always amazed me that even after more than 20 years since his retirement from Parliament Walter continued to be enormously passionate, interested and very well informed about the political arena in this state.

I visited him just a few weeks before he passed away. It was after Parliament on a Thursday night. I had rung to say I was coming — could I pop in for just 5 minutes? That 5 minutes turned into 45 minutes, and Walter did most of the talking. I was really quite taken — he was so at peace, he knew what was ahead of him. He talked about the palliative care he was receiving and what an angel that nurse was; he talked about his state funeral, which I think was a very hard thing for him to do, but he was so proud of the fact that he had been offered a state funeral; and then he just wanted to chat about politics and how he saw the world.

I noticed he had a transistor by his bed with a little earphone. I too have a transistor by my bed with a little earphone. I said, ‘Tell me, is this something you just pop into your ear if you wake up at 3 or 4 o’clock in morning?’ He said, ‘Yes. You know, I sometimes catch the news’. I guess that really impressed me.

I say to Alwynne: I wish you a long life. And farewell Walter. Allav ha shalom.

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Public Transport) — I too am honoured to join the condolence for Walter Jona. As has been mentioned in this house, Walter had an incredibly distinguished political and parliamentary career and a very distinguished career outside the Parliament as well. He had a very rich and varied life

and achieved an extraordinary amount. Many of us sitting here listening to his achievements can only hope that in our political careers we achieve even a small amount of what he achieved.

Certainly his input into mandating the wearing of seatbelts in cars has been talked about quite extensively. As the opposition leader mentioned, when we travel overseas we find that seatbelts are a standard part of the cars we travel in. It is now a compulsory and automatic thing that we do, but it is not so long ago that Walter Jona and his committee were looking at introducing it. We really have Walter Jona to thank for the many lives that have been saved as a result of that incredible initiative.

Walter Jona was very much a household name for me. I grew up knowing Walter Jona as a political figure when I was going through school and later in politics. I first met Walter when, for my sins, I worked on the failed Melbourne Olympic Games bid. I was responsible for working with the groups that had concerns about the bid. Walter was asked to chair, and subsequently chaired, the social impact assessment panel on Melbourne's Olympic bid, so I had quite a bit to do with him from 1989 to 1990. He worked incredibly well and closely with a whole range of groups and managed to allay a lot of the concerns and fears they had, but he also fed a lot of their concerns back to the Melbourne Olympic Games committee so that it could take those into account when looking at the bid. As I said, I worked closely with him in my role. He was always incredibly polite and incredibly helpful and thoughtful, and would also listen to a wide range of views, including mine.

At that time I was contemplating a career in politics, and — and this is the other side of Walter — he provided me with some friendly political advice. I had just missed out on my first preselection, and, calling on some of his own experiences around preselections, he told me to stick at it. I was only 28 at the time and regarded very highly what he had to say. I appreciated the fact that this very distinguished man had taken time out to talk to me as a political fledgling not only to give me some advice but also to talk about some of his own experiences and basically say, 'Stick at it'. I really appreciated that support, even though he could not have had a vote in my preselection!

I consider it an honour to join with others in this house in celebrating the life of Walter Jona. He has left an incredible legacy in this state and indeed right around the world. We want to very much remember Walter and pay our respects and extend our condolences to his wife, Alwynne, and to his extended family and friends.

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — Ten years ago a newly arrived rabbi, Fred Morgan, was being interviewed for an appointment in this city. As it was told at the funeral, Walter and his wife, Alwynne, kindly offered to show the rabbi and his family around Melbourne for a day. They visited the Melbourne Cricket Ground, they visited Parliament and they also visited the office of a former Australian Governor-General, Sir Zelman Cowen. At the end of the day the rabbi reflected:

What Walter was really showing us was himself, his energy, his passion and his true delight in Australian life.

The Walter Jona I remember was a highly courteous man of meticulous appearance who had a level of utter reliability. In the political sphere this translated into an assiduous conscientiousness on behalf of the people whom he represented. His biography records the forums in which he conveyed their opinions, from parliamentary committees to the party room to the Parliament.

Walter served as the Minister of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs between 1976 and 1979. He records that his aim was to create a favourable community climate where migrants could fully share in the rights and responsibilities of citizens while sharing their rich cultures to the good of society as a whole. He was the right man in the right place at the right time to do the right job.

Throughout Australia's history, predominantly the migrants who have come to Australia have arrived on these shores fleeing tyranny, seeking economic opportunity or to build a future for their children. Walter, through his insight from his own family background, which is etched through the pages of European history, understood the journeys of those migrants who landed on Australian shores both in the 20th century and in the 19th century. The assiduous work ethic on behalf of his constituents, his loyalty to the liberal democratic ideal in which he believed, his Jewish faith and cultural background, and his respect for people and the democratic process were characteristics of his service.

He has been adjudged as being the great pioneer of the seatbelt legislation, but in fairness to his colleagues at the time on the parliamentary Road Safety Committee, and as recorded in his biography, he nobly paid tribute to the other members of the committee — Frank Wilkes, a Deputy Leader of the Labor Party; the contribution of Sir Percy Byrnes, the Leader of the Country Party; his own immediate colleagues on the committee, Brian Dixon and Murray Hamilton; and the wider work of a couple of other people including Bill

Fry, who also contributed to the vigorous community debate that took place at that time. I think it is a reflection of the man and his assiduous attention to detail that he recorded the contributions of those around him. Brian Dixon took over as chair of the committee in 1970 and worked vigorously with Walter on the seatbelt legislation reform.

As a loyal member of the Hawthorn Football Club for some 75 years, Walter might rightly take his place alongside the pantheon of Hawthorn heroes whom he followed year in, year out — people such as Kennedy, Crimmins, Knights, Hudson, Tuck, Edwards, Mew and Matthews, who brought premiership glory to Hawthorn.

Walter vigorously opposed dictatorship and supported due process. He was respectful and tolerant of all people. He believed in political substance rather than short-term gimmickry; face-to-face discussion rather than backroom deals; and action rather than empty promises. Commenting on a colleague's use of communications technology he wrote, 'My constituents were more impressed with my personal representations'.

He loved his work, his wife, Alwynne, and the multifaceted political world to which they both gave their lives. At his funeral it was reported that every night of Walter's life he recited the Shema, the Jewish evening prayer. It was his affirmation of life itself.

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Health) — I too am honoured to rise to make a brief contribution in celebration of the life and the great contribution that Walter Jona made to his local community, to progressive Judaism, to the people of Victoria, to the Parliament of Victoria.

I was honoured to attend the state funeral at Temple Beth Israel, and it was clear to me, both through the contributions of Rabbi Morgan and Rabbi Levi, that Walter Jona's life was a life lived in the service of others. His was a contribution that he could be proud of, a contribution which those 50 groups of which he was a passionate member were much better for. Multiculturalism — cultural diversity — was much better in this state because of his work. Many social causes, many important issues, many great challenges were much better off for the work, the passion and the ongoing commitment that he brought to them.

Much has been made of his ministerial service to this Parliament. Much has been made today of his membership and chairmanship of the Road Safety Committee between 1967 and 1973 and the obviously

important, indeed world-leading change, to the compulsory wearing of seatbelts that came from his important work on that parliamentary committee.

Much has also been made of his contribution as Australia's first ethnic affairs minister. It was in my capacity as the then Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs that I was pleased to attend the funeral and in a small way honour the contribution he made to the great cultural diversity and the great multiculturalism that now makes Victoria such a fundamentally interesting place to live.

The Leader of the Opposition made mention of one quote that I think came from Rabbi Morgan, who said that what was perhaps most amazing about Walter Jona was the purity of his motivation — that is, the great commitment, the great passion, the great goodwill, the great inherent decency of this man in pursuit of those matters that he considered to be important and that his local community considered to be important.

I conclude where I began. A life lived in the service of others should be honoured, and that is exactly what Walter Jona's life was all about — the service of others. On behalf of those who support multiculturalism and on behalf of all people of goodwill across this state, I offer condolences to Mrs Jona and to the extended family. We as a Parliament and we as a community owe him a great debt of gratitude.

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — I joined the Liberal Party back in the early 1980s after leaving university. I joined a branch in Kew within the federal seat of Kooyong — and of course Kew and Hawthorn are the two predominant state seats in that federal electorate. My recollection of my early days in the Liberal Party includes two climactic events — major events in the formation of a young Liberal. One was Andrew Peacock coming to address what was from recollection quite a violent meeting some two or three days before Peacock, then the foreign minister, was to challenge Malcolm Fraser for the prime ministership of Australia, a challenge which was ultimately unsuccessful. Notwithstanding Andrew Peacock's significant support in the Kooyong electorate, it was a fairly hostile meeting that he fronted.

The second event was a meeting of new young members in the Kooyong electorate. There were a number of leading apparatchiks at that meeting, but most importantly Walter Jona was the guest speaker. What struck me at that meeting was Walter Jona's way of articulating his brand of liberalism. With enormous dignity he articulated his view of politics, which was to achieve a beneficial outcome not only for the

community but for individuals. Individuals were very important to Walter Jona, and that was articulated with unbelievable dignity. Afterwards as I talked to him what struck me was the generosity of spirit with which he was encouraging many of us there in our lives in the Liberal Party. That contact remained with me up until his death.

The other thing that struck me about Walter Jona on that occasion was his eclectic mind, which was able to range across a number of broad issues. We have all come to know that his involvement in his community did not begin or end with politics. It began perhaps with his commitment to his community and it certainly ended with that commitment, and he supported his community in this place as an MP and also as a minister. But his eclectic mind was able to range across a broad number of subjects, from football or cricket to neuroscience and asthma, from the Glenferrie Primary School to the Tel Aviv University and from opera to art. He had a great command of all of these matters and a great way of articulating a vision for each and every one of those areas of his interests. After my election in 1999, while my contact with Walter Jona was irregular, it was a matter of some profound benefit to be able to draw upon the wisdom that he brought to this place as an MP and a minister, and also to his community.

As many people have articulated, he will of course be remembered predominantly for his championing of compulsory seatbelt wearing in the state of Victoria as the then chairman of the Road Safety Committee. What underscores that, and the Leader of the House touched upon this, is that this was championed in the face of quite hostile opposition. We all know, and the Leader of the House mentioned it, that cabinet had made a decision not to support compulsory seatbelts, notwithstanding that there was substantial evidence to support the benefits that would flow to the community. But the cabinet decided not to support it, particularly given the political sensitivity of the issue.

I never met Henry Bolte nor my predecessor as member for Kew, Arthur Rylah — I am certainly aware of them — but I know that in my electorate Arthur Rylah still stirs up a lot of passion on both sides of the equation. To be able to stand up to those two men and drive an agenda that actually led to an outcome is a measure of Walter Jona. What he was doing was for the benefit of his community and individuals, and what an impact — perhaps that is an inappropriate word — it had on our road toll. Of course we all remember the famous Declare War on 1034 campaign. We are now down to 350 deaths a year on our roads, which is still unacceptably high, but seatbelts have made it profoundly better, and the level of injuries sustained in

road trauma reflects that. But of course it was a measure that faced very hostile opposition, and despite the fact that it could not have been a politically enhancing move, Walter Jona was prepared to stand up and be counted on that issue. That was very much a measure of the man.

I note that he was a strong advocate for improvements in conditions at the Maribyrnong detention centre, standing up against the interests of his own party and articulating a view of his own community. In relation to prison reform, a matter which I am now particularly interested in, I think we would all acknowledge that our prison system here in Victoria owes a great debt to Walter Jona for the reforms he commenced which have been carried forward by subsequent governments since that time.

Due to personal circumstances I was unable to attend the funeral last week, but I noted the comments of Rabbi Fred Morgan, who described Walter Jona as a man who took life seriously but lived it joyously, and that is certainly the measure of the man I witnessed from the late 1980s onwards. Walter Jona was a person that all of us here have deep in our hearts. He was a great member of Parliament, a great minister, a great community leader, a great Victorian and a great Australian. With those words I pass on my sincere condolences to his wife, Alwynne, and to their extended family.

Mr HAERMEYER (Kororoit) — I wish also to add my condolences to Walter Jona's wife, Alwynne, and to his family. I want to express my gratitude for this opportunity to pay tribute to somebody who I think has done a great deal for the Victorian community.

Walter Jona was a man of dignity. He was a man of decency and a man of integrity and great generosity of spirit. I last saw him at the cricket, the Australia-New Zealand day-night match — I cannot remember whether it was in late January or February. As always he was impeccably presented and his mind was as sharp as ever, inquiring and knowledgeable. He was a man who always impressed me.

We have heard about Walter Jona's contribution in terms of the seatbelt legislation. It made a great difference. It was controversial at the time, but he showed great courage in pursuing that legislation. It also inspired a great tradition here in this state of Victoria, where we have gone from being one of the worst jurisdictions in the world per capita in terms of road-related deaths to being one of the best.

We now have people from jurisdictions across the world coming here to Victoria to see what we are doing. That compulsory seatbelt legislation created a tradition and was followed by random breath testing, the Transport Accident Commission ads changing the whole mindset of the community as far as road safety goes, and of course random roadside drug testing, which was also initially controversial but is now being emulated by other jurisdictions not just here in Australia but across the world. Each of those measures was initially controversial, but Victoria has led the way. I think Walter Jona, through his work on the seatbelt legislation, inspired a tradition here in this state for which we stand out as a beacon to the rest of the world.

The other area in which I think he made a very significant difference and a very significant contribution, as we just heard from the member for Kew, was in the area of corrections. It is one of those areas where I guess as a minister you generally try to keep out of the news, because an ice-cream machine at a prison sometimes warrants a front page headline. It is an area where good policy and good politics are often like oil and water — they just do not mix. I think Walter Jona as a minister, and later in his ongoing contribution in the corrections area, was always committed to good policy, and that was something I think he inspired in many of the ministers who were to follow. He understood that in corrections we needed to get away from the turnkey mentality — lock them up and throw away the key. Maybe with some of them that has to be the case, but most of these people have committed crimes for which they will serve their sentences and will at some stage be released, so are we going to do something that makes it more likely or makes it less likely that they will reoffend when they are released?

The work Walter Jona did — which was later built on by someone I look up to as a mentor, the late Pauline Toner — I think established a tradition in this state where our corrections system is not typified by the sorts of attitudes that are there when you look around corrections systems in other states. When you have a look at the outcomes — we have the lowest crime rate in Australia, we have the lowest rate of recidivism — you can understand other states coming here and asking why. It is because we do not take a purely retributive approach to corrections, we also take a very strong rehabilitative approach. Walter Jona — I think it was at the invitation of Steve Crabb — agreed to chair the ministerial correctional advisory committee.

The role of that committee was to oversight the prisoner leave program for prisoners who from time to time would receive leave for compassionate reasons, for

health reasons and sometimes also for rehabilitative reasons, because to try and re-establish that link with the community is important in making sure that those people do not return through what can sometimes be the revolving door of the corrections system. It was a program that could have been very controversial were it not for the respect that Walter Jona had across the political spectrum, because sometimes the prisoners that were let out under that program did not return voluntarily, and the program could have been jeopardised. I think his oversight of that program and his advocacy for it is something that needs to be respected.

I also had occasion to deal with him when we introduced the home detention scheme — again, something that was politically controversial — but Walter Jona said, ‘No, I will back this because I believe it to be right’. I think that is a real testament to the integrity of the man. Walter Jona’s life’s work is done. I think it has been done with distinction, and I think his family can look back with a great deal of pride and say that he really did make a difference.

Mr O’BRIEN (Malvern) — Walter Jona was committed to public service in the very best sense of the term. He served as member for Hawthorn between 1964 and 1985. He served as a minister in the Hamer and Thompson governments. He served his country in the Royal Australian Air Force during World War II, and he served his community both inside and outside Parliament, for which he was made a member of the Order of Australia in 1986. Walter Jona was a true liberal. He was also a member of the Melbourne University Liberal Club, his contemporaries at the time including Lindsay Thompson, Alan Hunt and Allan Missen, all four of whom went on to make great contributions to this and other parliaments.

I had the opportunity to meet with Walter Jona a number of times in the last year, and as the title of his autobiography and memoirs indicates, he was fascinated by people, by Parliament and by politics. He had a wonderfully sharp mind despite his very serious physical illness, and he could not have been more interested in me and the campaign that I was facing as the newly endorsed candidate for Malvern.

Pride is not a word that has normally been associated with Walter Jona, because he was a humble man, but he was proud to be Jewish. He was very proud of his faith, and the Jewish community was very proud of Walter, as it should have been. He made a tremendous contribution to the Jewish community here in Victoria but also in Israel, and his service on the board of governors of Tel Aviv University has been recognised

by that university through its naming of significant buildings after Walter for the tremendous contribution he made to that educational institution.

Walter Jona was, above all, a compassionate man, and he dedicated his life to serving the needs of his fellow citizens. That is reflected in the work he did on the seatbelt law, and it is reflected in the work he did undertaking prison reforms. Walter Jona was also a man who passionately believed in true federalism. He believed in the importance of this Parliament and its responsibilities. In his recent book he made some comments about the importance of ensuring that state parliaments discharge the roles and responsibilities which they are required to do, and in today's climate, where the lines between federal and state political powers can increasingly become blurred, we would all do well to take stock and remember Walter's sage words of counsel.

Walter was a gentleman, he was a contributor, he was an advocate and he was an ornament to this Parliament. I pass on my condolences to Alwynne. Walter leaves a lasting legacy, and he will be missed.

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — I rise to pay tribute to Walter Jona and to his openness to truth, goodwill, decency and professionalism. He was a passionate advocate for social justice, a passion which for him was not akin to hollow emotionalism or subjectivism but to justice based on the dignity of the human person. Politics gave him the opportunity to implement justice. For him, justice was the purpose of politics.

I first came across Mr Jona long before I had even considered running for Parliament. It was in a capacity I enjoyed as a volunteer in a particular organisation that Mr Jona came to my attention. He changed lives, and he changed them because he was someone with compassion who was calm and withstood pressure. The organisation to which I am referring at which our paths crossed was the Caroline Chisholm pregnancy support service.

We have heard today that from 1976 to 1979 Mr Jona was Assistant Minister of Health and from 1979 to 1982 he was Minister for Community Welfare Services. It is interesting to know that as a result of work to which Mr Jona contributed greatly, Victoria was the first state to fund a pregnancy support service. During his time in public life there was fierce debate about the law in relation to pregnancy support. Mr Jona was able to see and steer a very calm and balanced course through what was a very difficult period.

I want to thank him for the trust he placed in a number of people and organisations in his ministerial life, particularly to that fledgling organisation with a comparatively large volunteer base. I have learnt a lot about Walter Jona in the last few weeks. It was interesting to hear that at the time when he decided to support this particular organisation he was obviously very familiar with his portfolios and very familiar with the needs of families. He decided that this tiny organisation that operated from a miniscule room in a Collingwood Uniting Church would be funded. He wanted it placed in the western suburbs, where he thought there was a real need for family support services.

From what I am told by people who worked with him at the time, he had an immense sense of humour and astuteness. At a meeting he attended of the Caroline Chisholm Society the people there pondered how they had managed to get funding. At the meeting he said, 'Well, we did check you out'. The public servant looked at the minister, and the minister apparently looked back at the public servant, and he said, 'Some of the female public servants made a number of phone calls to check out that what you were claiming really did occur'.

As a result of his foresight Mr Jona was able to provide last year, through that particular welfare agency, support to well over 1600 families through the prison system, and his quiet encouragement allowed the public servants to think outside the traditional square of funding organisations that used to be based in church services. He made a real difference to people's lives.

I want to pay my sincere condolences to his wife, Alwynne, and to his extended family and friends. I want to thank them in particular for sharing a man of such generosity who allowed so many women, men, children and families to be enriched as a result of his giving his life to public service.

Mrs VICTORIA (Bayswater) — I am delighted to be able to contribute to this condolence motion and to join my colleagues in paying tribute to the life of a very special man. The leader of the parliamentary Liberal Party has mentioned that in the past few months many people had the privilege of seeing Mr Jona, speaking with him and reflecting on all things that were precious to him. I have the greatest pleasure today in relating a conversation that Mr Jona had with Ken Jacobs, the former chief executive officer of Cricket Victoria, and to convey some of the recollections of a man whom Ken admired greatly. Ken Jacobs said:

I have indeed been fortunate to have known Walter Jona since 1985, when Cricket Victoria approached Walter to act as a

code of behaviour commissioner for first-class cricket matches played in Melbourne.

I will come back to this position, because it was actually in his role as the chairman of an independent task force to review the structure of cricket throughout the state that I initially spent a considerable amount of time working with Walter.

For the record, other members of the task force were former Australian captain Bill Lawry, Dr Phillip Opas, QC, and His Honour Judge Gordon Lewis.

I had the good fortune to act as secretary to the task force, and over the ensuing 18 months or so got to know all the gentlemen very well. I also had the opportunity to observe and learn from Walter in his handling of some very difficult recommendations that were ultimately to be submitted in his report to the board of Cricket Victoria.

I say 'difficult' because this was a far-reaching report which was, to a conservative organisation like Cricket Victoria, somewhat visionary but at the same time revolutionary.

For example, they recommended changes to the way the sport was administered and where it was to be played at club level.

Ultimately the final report of the task force was received in 1989, and whilst many of the recommendations were adopted some of the more controversial recommendations were, unfortunately, shelved.

It is quite ironical, however, that one of the key recommendations, which was to take senior cricket into the growth corridors of Melbourne, is now taking place, some 20 years later.

As a code of behaviour commissioner in Australian cricket throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Walter was dealing with some of the biggest names in Victorian and Australian cricket. There were some pretty temperamental characters to deal with who occasionally stepped out of line and were reported by the officiating umpires — e.g., Dennis Lillee, Merv Hughes, Dean Jones and the great English all-rounder, Ian Botham.

During the 1987–88 season Botham represented Queensland in the Sheffield Shield competition, and in a match against Victoria at the MCG he was reported for an on-field misdemeanour.

At the post-match hearing, when Botham was due to appear before Walter, I was in attendance as Walter's 'assistant' for the purposes of recording the proceedings.

Walter was very conscious of Botham's standing in world cricket but at the same time equally conscious that he had to be dealt with just the same as any other player.

The hearing commenced with Walter 'thanking Mr Botham for his attendance', which immediately put Botham on the back foot. He could not quite fathom that he was being thanked for his attendance, nor that he was addressed as 'Mr' when he was the one who had allegedly committed the misdemeanour!

The hearing proceeded with evidence being provided by the officiating umpires, Botham and his captain — another great of the game, Allan Border.

Walter then asked the players and umpires to leave the room for a few minutes while he deliberated, which he duly did.

Before advising Ian Botham of the decision, he again thanked him for his attendance, for the evidence he had provided, apologised that he had to take the action he had but then advised Botham in no uncertain terms that he had a responsibility to uphold the integrity of the great game of cricket.

He then said to the player 'As do you, Mr Botham!'.

He promptly imposed the fine of \$250 (which in 1987–88 represented a significant portion of the players match payment).

Later that evening, after everyone had dispersed, Ian Botham asked me about Walter, his background ...

He couldn't believe how polite, fair minded and knowledgeable Walter was about the game of cricket and about Botham's own career.

Botham also noted how much Walter cared about the values associated with the game of cricket.

I can assure everyone that he was more than suitably impressed with Walter, the man — and as he said, particularly because he was a Victorian!

Ken Jacobs then said:

I suspect the likes of Allan Border, Jeff Thomson and co. had well and truly indoctrinated Botham about 'Victorians' —

but Walter was a redeeming factor.

The fact that Walter was prepared to fill this role as a code of behaviour commissioner for some 17 years in a voluntary capacity again demonstrated not only his great love for the game of cricket but also his willingness to 'give' quite freely of his time. This was in amongst his many other duties and devotion to so many community and charitable organisations.

Walter continued to provide wise counsel, both personally and professionally, to me on many occasions, even after his official role with Cricket Victoria had concluded, and I will be forever grateful for his support and advice.

Victorian cricket also remains in his debt for a wonderful contribution to the sport.

In my opinion, Walter Jona was the epitome of the word 'gentleman'.

That, as I said, ladies and gentlemen and colleagues, is from Ken Jacobs, the former chief executive officer of Cricket Victoria.

My sincerest condolences go to Mr Jona's family.

Mr LUPTON (Prahran) — Walter Jona was a real servant of his community throughout his life. I am privileged to be able to make a contribution to the debate on this condolence motion, and I extend my heartfelt sympathies to Alwynne and the extended family.

I had the privilege of getting to know Walter very well over a number of years. We often attended community events together, even up until a couple of months ago. Over that period of time Walter would sometimes call me to talk about the issues about some of those community events, particularly regarding the Jewish community. During those telephone calls we would talk about a range of current political issues and matters of concern. It was an expression of the fact that party politics was not at the forefront of Walter's thinking; he was someone who was genuinely concerned about the betterment of the community.

He worked tirelessly throughout his life not only during his period in Parliament but both before and after that in an enormous array of community activities. Earlier speakers have mentioned many of those organisations, and I will not repeat them. I think they show the breadth of Walter's enlightened views. He was a socially progressive thinker; he was a reformer; he was somebody who cared deeply about the human condition and wanted to make a contribution to improving the lives of his fellows in the community.

I think all members of this house understand Walter's contribution was such that he left our state and in fact the wider community around the world a better place; not only because of the extraordinary work he did regarding seatbelt reform and road safety but by advancing the cause of humanitarianism and the cause of making our society a better place for all of us to live in. We owe him a great debt of gratitude. My condolences go out to his family.

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — Walter Jona had left Parliament for three years when I was first elected in 1988. However, my predecessor, Jim Ramsay, had been a contemporary of Walter for much of their parliamentary service. Jim spoke very highly at the time of Walter and of his universal reputation as a man of decency and great integrity who was civilised and courteous. That of course has been borne out by what has been said today.

A lot has also been said about the debate and reforms regarding seatbelts. Even for those of us who are of an age to remember that debate and the introduction of seatbelts in Victoria, one has to force one's memory back to what life was like before seatbelts became universal and to think about the time when seatbelts were first introduced. One looked around in the car to see if a belt was or was not fitted and made that conscious effort to fit the belt and make sure one complied with the law or, indeed in the case of quite a few people, that one was wearing one's belt even before the law made it mandatory. It goes to show that

things that seem to be obvious now were certainly not obvious then. It shows the degree of vision, grasp of issues and commitment to bring about change that Walter Jona must have had, along with his other colleagues, to take on that debate.

Today it has been remarked that he did not initially enjoy the support of the cabinet at the time. Since Walter's passing a few weeks ago one of my constituents has raised with me the fact that there had been strong support for this reform at the state council of the Liberal Party and that it had passed a resolution urging such reform. That was of course a campaign that Walter carried forward to great success.

Walter was perhaps fortunate to have lived in an era when the word 'spin' had not been thought of in a political context. But even making an allowance for that, his focus on issues and in bringing about reform, rather than politics for politics sake, is something for which he should earn the admiration of us all.

Although Walter's path and mine had crossed on previous occasions at various party functions, the most vivid memories I have of him are of some conversations that took place in later years when he made various visits to this building. The content of those conversations has long faded from memory, but what remains clear in my mind is the warmth of his personality, the liveliness of his conversation, the enthusiasm and interest he displayed about the topics in hand, and his intense engagement with issues. These are very strong memories which remain with me despite the considerable time that has passed since then.

Walter made a remarkable contribution to public life in Victoria. He and his approach to public life — and to life in general — will be sorely missed.

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I join others in honouring the memory of Walter Jona, the former member for Hawthorn, a neighbouring electorate of mine. Like other MPs I met him at various functions over the last few years and was touched by his kindness and willingness to engage with me as a new member of Parliament, even though I was from a different political tradition. Walter wrote in his book, *People, Parliament and Politics* — and how typical of the man is that title — that Parliament without question is the most important institution in the state. That was in spite of his devotion to the Hawthorn Football Club.

He was an active member of Parliament. It should be remembered that when he was first elected the seat of Hawthorn included a large part of Richmond. He was a committed marginal seat campaigner. Walter and

Alwynne told me — and many of us here can relate to this — that he systematically doorknocked his electorate, starting again after every election, seeking to turn a marginal seat into a safe one. He was committed to serving the community and was involved in over 50 community groups. I had occasion to welcome his advice when he was head of the Gandel Charitable Trust. Every year we met at the Anzac Day service organised by Jewish ex-servicemen and women.

Former Governor-General Sir Zelman Cowen described Walter Jona as wise, tolerant, fair, painstaking and thoroughly reliable. It was a marvellous tribute to a great community-minded parliamentarian. I offer my condolences to his wife, Alwynne, and his extended family.

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I am honoured to rise to make a brief contribution on the life of Walter Jona. He was a man who lived his life with joy, interest and enthusiasm. He was a man of compassion and decency; a man of understanding. He was a man who listened and respected others' opinions. He was a man of strong commitment who never shirked from the job at hand. Whether it was his work in improving prisons and the lives of prisoners or his other community work and community roles, he had a passion that education and training were the way to improve the lives of others.

Other members have referred to his book. I read it with great interest. The things that came through to me were not only his compassion, his community involvement and his love of family and this country but also his tenacity, his work ethic and his putting others before himself.

Other members have referred to the time they first became aware of Walter Jona and his work, and many have referred to his legislation on seatbelts. My first knowledge of Walter Jona perhaps was not quite as pleasant as those of other members. I was newly arrived in this country, and I had been down to Wilsons Promontory with a car full of children. It was hot and sticky — I think it was about 107 degrees Fahrenheit — with sunburnt children and sand everywhere.

As we were driving back from Wilsons Prom I was pulled over by a policeman. I did not have my seatbelt on. I tried of course to talk my way out of it. He said, 'Don't blame me, blame the politicians'. I was getting quite passionate, and I said, 'Who do I write to?', and he said, 'Walter Jona'. That was my first knowledge of Walter Jona, but I agree it was a very wise law. At that time I was pretty hard up.

An honourable member — Did you get off?

Mrs FYFFE — No, I did not get off — I tried very hard, though.

Listening to the tributes in this house gives us cause to reflect on how we operate as parliamentarians and what our legacy will be. Will it measure up to Walter Jona's? Walter Jona was a man who believed in social justice and a man who lived according to his beliefs. He was an example to us all; a man who lived his life well. I offer my sincere sympathies to Mrs Jona and their extended family.

Ms THOMSON (Footscray) — It is an honour to rise on this condolence motion for Walter Jona. I too attended the service at Temple Beth Israel. I did not know Walter very well at all. I wish I had had the opportunity to know him well. My first knowledge of him, I guess, was when he was a minister and I was a staffer for a member of the opposition. When our paths would cross in the corridor he would always be extremely courteous. He was a minister. He had no reason to talk to a lowly electorate officer for a member of the opposition, but he would always stop and say hello.

My first memories of Walter Jona are of a gentleman. He was very much a gentleman. They are in short supply these days, but in every sense of the word that is what he was.

At that stage I did not know that Walter Jona was Jewish; I did not find that out until later. In fact, it was Walter Jona who pointed out to me that I was the first Jewish member of Parliament and the first Jewish minister since he was in Parliament. I think he was saddened by that. He would have liked to see more people from the Jewish community take up and be active and participate in political life. One of the traditions of Jewish life is giving back to your community. Walter did that in spades, and he probably put the rest of us in this chamber to shame with his level of activity.

At the service for Walter one of the things that was mentioned, I think by Rabbi Morgan, was that he saw himself as a parliamentarian, not a politician. Maybe that — the notion of being a parliamentarian — is something that we have to recreate. I saw a little bit of him later when my son was preparing for his bar mitzvah at Temple Beth. Often Walter would be at the service that I was at every Saturday for six months, because that is what you have to do when your son is preparing for his bar mitzvah. When occasionally our paths would cross, the thing that I noticed most about Walter was his energy. He never seemed to stop. Even when he was sitting there contemplating what was

happening in the synagogue, you half wondered if he was not doing a list for what he had to do next.

The other thing referred to in the service that I think is important was the partnership of Alwynne and Walter: it was not just about Walter but about the support that Alwynne gave him in everything he did. It is a tribute to both of them that members on both sides of this house have stood up in great numbers to honour this man. People are very cynical about politics and politicians and the roles we play, but you cannot be cynical about Walter Jona. He certainly was committed to issues and to making a difference. It was not about Walter Jona the man and it was not about his status or his ego; it was about the difference that he could make to community life. I think that can be seen in the work that he did for the many organisations he was involved in.

Although he was a man who touched my life only a little and only briefly, he certainly made me very proud of being a Jewish member of Parliament and contributing to life in this Parliament and of being able to follow in his footsteps. I certainly think he has made Victoria a much safer place to live, with his contribution to seatbelt legislation. Members have talked about his legislative program and his commitment to social justice, to prison reform and to the kinds of issues that at the time were vitally important in changing our perception of how we should treat prisoners and the rights and respect we should show them, including their capacity for rehabilitation, which was certainly not high on the agenda before then.

I rise to pay tribute to Walter Jona for his contribution to this place and his contribution to various community groups. I am not going to say anything about the Hawthorn Football Club, because I do not support Hawthorn; but his contribution to the Hawthorn community, to the Victorian community and to progressive Judaism has been extraordinary. To Alwynne I say, 'You, together with Walter, have made a magnificent contribution to Victorian life. Congratulations to the both of you — and long life'.

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — I rise to make some brief comments out of respect for Walter Jona. He was one of those special politicians who come and go through this place who have the ability to make friends and gain the respect of both sides of Parliament, who make a significant contribution to the Victorian community and who then depart the place with a great deal of dignity — as indeed he did.

I noted the comments by the Leader of the House about the opposition by the Council for Civil Liberties in relation to the compulsory wearing of seatbelts. Around

that time I had had my licence for only a short period of time. One of the great practices at that time, of course, was having the great liberty of being able to drive with your girlfriend having her arm around your shoulder. It was a very common practice in those days — —

Mr Wells — In the country.

Mr MULDER — In the country it was.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MULDER — I can recall, when that legislation came in, the sense of detachment in having my girlfriend — now my wife — shackled to the bench seat on the other side of my car!

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MULDER — However, I also recall back in those earlier days being involved in a very serious accident on the way to a game of football at Gellibrand River. For a long time after that accident I wore the scars and bruises of that legislation in the form of a seatbelt imprint across my right shoulder and my chest. I have no doubt that had it not been for the introduction of compulsory seatbelts I would have been seriously injured in that crash and possibly have lost my life.

On the Road Safety Committee we often talk about the silver bullet we are always looking for in relation to the next wave of road safety reform in the state of Victoria. We seem to continually come up with small initiatives that could save a handful of lives, but the silver bullet we speak about is the initiative that could save hundreds of lives on Victorian roads.

I say to Walter's family that a silver bullet was fired by Walter back in the 1970s when he introduced legislation into Parliament for the compulsory wearing of seatbelts in Victoria. There is no doubt that there are thousands of families out there today who are not heartbroken, who have not been broken up, who have never experienced trauma and who have never suffered a loss of life because of the initiative and the absolute intestinal fortitude he showed at the time in taking that legislation forward. I pass on my condolences to his family and his extended family.

Motion agreed to in silence, honourable members showing unanimous agreement by standing in their places.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I move:

That, as a further mark of respect to the memory of the late Honourable Walter Jona, AM, the house now adjourn until 8.00 p.m. today.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 4.03 p.m.

The SPEAKER took the chair at 8.03 p.m.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Public sector: debt

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Under a Brumby government — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask government members to come to order.

Mr BAILLIEU — Under a Brumby government will net public sector debt increase or decrease?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — It is nice to know that, with the week or so that we have been away from parliamentary sittings, the opposition leader has had all of that time to prepare a question, and the question has been written straight out of the Prime Minister's office.

We have a great record in terms of public works infrastructure in this state. We have tripled capital works in this state. If you look at what we have done in schools, if you look at what we have done in education, if you look at what we have done in roads, you see that we are spending \$3 billion per year on public sector capital works in this state compared to the just \$1 billion per year that was spent under the former Kennett government.

You see, Speaker, what the Leader of the Opposition is really saying in his question today is Liberal Party code for the Liberal Party wanting to spend less on schools — —

Mr Baillieu — On a point of order, Speaker, the question — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition's point of order will be heard in silence.

Mr Baillieu — The question was simple: will debt be going up or going down under a Brumby government?

The SPEAKER — Order! I bring the Premier back to the question.

Mr BRUMBY — When the Labor government was elected in Victoria following the defeat of the Kennett government net debt as a share of the economy was 3.1 per cent. Today it is around 1 per cent — the lowest level of debt in 50 years — and by the end of the forward estimates period net debt — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — I know you do not like the answer, and I know you do not understand the numbers.

Mrs Shardey interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Caulfield!

Mr BRUMBY — By the end of the forward estimates period, as the Leader of the Opposition would know from looking at the budget papers, net debt as a share of gross state product will be 2.9 per cent. So the question is: is 2.9 per cent less than or higher than 3.1 per cent?

We are proud of our record in capital works. We are proud of the fact that we rebuilt the Austin Hospital when the Liberal Party opposite promised to privatise it.

Mr Baillieu — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is clearly debating the question and not answering the question: will net debt increase or decrease? Where is it going — in which direction?

The SPEAKER — Order! I believe the Premier was answering the question regarding net debt.

Mr BRUMBY — The point is that under our government — under the Labor government in Victoria — we build schools; we do not sell them off. We build hospitals; we do not close them down. We build rail lines; we do not close them down. We have done all of that with a AAA credit rating, and a level of real debt which is the lowest today that it has been in 50 years of our state's history.

Mr McIntosh — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is clearly debating the question. It is a very simple question: is debt going to go up or down? Yes or no? Up or down?

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order from the member for Kew. The Premier was clearly speaking of debt levels. The member for Kew knows that taking a point of order is not an opportunity to repeat the question. The Premier, to conclude his answer.

Mr BRUMBY — I have concluded.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Premier has concluded his answer.

Government: initiatives

Mr DONNELLAN (Narre Warren North) — Can the Premier outline to the house recent initiatives to improve early childhood education and development, strengthen communities and enhance democracy and accountability?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I thank the honourable member for his question. Over the last week I have announced a number of initiatives to improve the way in which we deliver services in Victoria. Last week I announced the creation of the new Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. If you look at recent research from around the world, you will see the research is overwhelming about the importance of early investment in things like preschools, kindergartens, best start and maternal and child care. If you look back over the last seven years you will see we have had to repair all early childhood development because of the cuts under the former Kennett government, and we have done that. We created the Office for Children, and we have now established —

Mr K. Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Bass!

Mr BRUMBY — We have now established the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Now all of the services which go to provide those early childhood services to young people are contained in the one department —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr BRUMBY — Including kinders. The Liberal Party policy was to transfer kinders. The Liberal Party's policy was a thought bubble; that is what it was. It was a thought bubble about creating kindergartens. What we have done is shift all of the services to provide a comprehensive program for young people in this state.

I also announced the creation of the Department of Planning and Community Development. That is about

addressing the issues of livability to ensure that we continue to be the most livable state in Australia. Members will remember that in the 1990s people left this state in droves; they were leaving at the rate of 10 000, 20 000 and 30 000 people a year. The fastest growing capital city in Australia today is Melbourne, and we have to plan for that. What we have done with the Department of Planning and Community Development is bring together all of those elements from the Department for Victorian Communities plus planning so we can have strong, livable communities and more affordable housing going forward. These things are about looking forward and not looking back, as is the case under the Liberal Party.

Today I announced a raft of further reforms to make our government and our Parliament more accessible, and the executive more accountable. We have a great record in this area. Again we can remember back to the 1990s and remember all the reforms we have had to make, such as the independence of the Auditor-General, restoring the role of the Director of Public Prosecutions to the state constitution, reforming FOI laws, proportional representation in the Legislative Council, more questions in question time — all of those things. There are more opportunities for members to contribute to debates. These are all things we have done. But we need always to see whether we can do more and whether we can do things better than we have done them in the past. Today I announced a series of further reforms to build confidence in democracy, to make the executive more accountable and to make this Parliament more accessible.

From next year I will be tabling annually a statement of legislative intent. At the moment we have one statement every four years from the Governor. This will ensure that at the beginning of each parliamentary year there will be a forward statement of legislative intent. We will make further reforms to the Freedom of Information Act. We are already processing 50 per cent more requests than under the former government, and we are dealing with 96 per cent of them successfully. We will also make funding available to the Parliament for the live webcasting of Parliament, which will be audio from the Legislative Assembly and from the Legislative Council.

We will also be putting in place new measures to provide increased accountability in relation to ministers' overseas travel. For all of the trips that are taken overseas there will be a full statement on the internet recorded in the quarter after the quarter in which the travel took place. Victoria's economy is the size of the economy of Ireland or Singapore. It is important that ministers travel overseas to promote the

state and to attract investment. We are taking steps to ensure that more information will be available to the public. We will also be making some changes to the way in which details concerning board remuneration are publicised, and we will be releasing the bands of remuneration for all the boards which report to the government.

Finally, can I say that we have got an excellent record in this area, but we can always do more; we can always do better — for example, our budgets are judged by Access Economics to be the most transparent in Australia. We want to provide national leadership in this area, and I believe we are providing national leadership in this area. It is a far cry from where we were a decade ago. We have made the Parliament more accessible, and we have made the executive more accountable. These reforms today go further and position Victoria as a leader in all of these areas in open and accountable government.

Water: north–south pipeline

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the Premier's public commitments to enact all of the policies which the government took to the election in November last year, and I ask: given that one of the policies was to oppose the piping of irrigation water from northern Victoria to Melbourne, is the government going to honour that commitment by abandoning the north–south pipeline, or is this the first broken promise of the Brumby government?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — It is an extraordinary thing that The Nationals, who purport to represent the interests of rural communities, would oppose a project which is going to see \$200 million a year invested in the northern part of the state each year for the next five years, with \$9 out of every \$10 of that coming from the government and/or from the citizens of Melbourne.

In addition it is going to create 75 gegalitres of new water, which conservatively will add another \$200 million worth of economic activity to that region. Here we have The Nationals, who purport to represent the interests of rural areas, opposing an investment proposal which will see something like \$400 million worth of additional activity in the north of the state at virtually no cost to that region.

When you ask The Nationals why they oppose that project, they cannot say, because The Nationals say it is all right to send water over the border to New South Wales, it is all right to send water from the east of the state to the west of the state and it is all right to send

water down the Murray River to Adelaide — you can do all of those things — but the one place you cannot use water in is Victoria. You can send it to New South Wales and send it to South Australia, but you cannot use it in Victoria.

The leading citizens and investors of northern Victoria strongly support this proposal. All the big investors — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — I would not put — —

The SPEAKER — Order! We will not have conversations across the table. I ask the member for Benalla to cease interjecting in that manner, and I ask all other members — government members, opposition members, members of The Nationals and the Independent member — to cooperate in the smooth running of question time.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRUMBY — I did not want to put The Nationals in the category of leading citizens. The fact of the matter is that leading individuals and companies from that region have long proposed investment in the region. I would encourage members on the other side of the house to have a good look at what is in the medium and long-term interests of our state.

The fact of the matter — and I would have thought it was self-evident — is that we have river systems in Australia which are fully allocated and fully committed. The only way we can create new water is by investing in irrigation infrastructure. If you have a look around the world — or if you have not been able to do that, have a look on the internet — you find that when other countries and other governments are looking to create new water, when they have exactly the same environmental challenges as we have in Australia and their river systems are fully committed, what they do is invest in water savings.

It is no different to the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline project, where at the moment 100 gegalitres of water is released from that system and only 10 gegalitres gets through to farmers. Ninety gegalitres is lost. The Nationals have supported that project, which is saving 90 gegalitres of water. This project is exactly the same, with the savings split three ways — between irrigators, the environment and Melbourne. You can look backwards, like The Nationals usually do, or you can take the medium-term view: what is good for the state, what is good for northern Victoria, what is going to generate jobs and what is in the future interest?

This is the right policy. You are seeing a fair bit of competition in the marketplace at the moment, with the Liberal Party and The Nationals competing in rural seats for members. People who have an eye to the future of this region know that this is the right project for the region and the right project for Victoria.

Aboriginals: justice agreement

Mr SCOTT (Preston) — My question is to the Attorney-General. Can the Attorney-General update the house on steps the government has taken to improve leadership and reduce overrepresentation in the justice system for indigenous Victorians?

Dr Sykes interjected.

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

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) — No-one can pretend that we can undo some 200 years of disadvantage in only 8 years, but on first coming to office this government certainly knew it had to make a real start in making reparation for the damage of the past. We also knew, however, that the only way to do this effectively was, in genuine partnership with indigenous Victorians, to design programs by and for local communities and to make it quite clear that we were prepared to be in it for the long haul.

Over the last seven years we have certainly laid the foundation for enduring change in this state, and we have done that in partnership with the Koori community, the Aboriginal community, through the landmark Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement. Whether we are talking about — —

Mr K. Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! If the member for Bass is not enjoying the Attorney-General's answer, he can always leave the chamber.

Mr Wakeling interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Bass will stop interjecting, along with the member for Ferntree Gully.

Mr HULLS — I would have hoped that all members of this house would support the Aboriginal justice agreement. There are many parts to that agreement. Whether we are talking about indigenous night patrols, Koori bail justices or Koori mediators, the fact is that the Aboriginal justice agreement in this state is certainly making a difference.

It is all about relationships built through local, regional and statewide networks. Those relationships have reduced indigenous police contacts. If you look at what is happening at Lake Tyers with the Lake Tyers renewal project, you find that, whether it be its school breakfast program, the homework program, improved housing facilities or medical facilities, we have certainly turned around that community as far as security in the community is concerned. Indeed we have strengthened that Lake Tyers community. This has all been done at the community's request and in collaboration with the local community.

I guess one of the best stories coming out of the Aboriginal justice agreement is the Koori courts. We now have seven Koori courts, with another one to open next month, I am pleased to say. These courts certainly harness the strength of Koori communities. Anyone who has had the opportunity to sit in and have a look at how a Koori Court operates will see that the courts have the authority of elders and respected persons driving home the gravity of the offences that come before those courts. They are reigniting pride in local Koori communities, and they are dramatically reducing reoffending.

In fact at the recent Standing Committee of Attorneys-General meeting in Hobart I was very pleased to see that other states are now following Victoria's lead when it comes to Koori courts. I am also especially pleased that in Victoria we are looking at extending the Koori Court model even further. The government is now considering a Koori Court model in the County Court of this state, using the same principles of inclusion and informality whilst employing all the sentencing options available currently in the Magistrates Court. The possible expansion of the Koori Court model into the County Court would be, I am pleased to say, the first indigenous program in any Australian higher court jurisdiction.

Of course we will have conversations with the County Court about this and with Koori communities right across the state, but it is yet another example of the way in which we can work with indigenous Victorians and with indigenous Australians to write new and better chapters in our collective story.

Public transport: investment

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier, and I ask: who is to blame for overcrowded trains and a failure to invest in Melbourne's public transport system — the previous Premier or the previous Treasurer?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The fact of the matter is that over the years we have been in government we have put an unprecedented level of investment into our public transport system. We have invested in additional rail services for peak and shoulder periods; we have put in place new late-night train services; we have undertaken investment on the Middleborough Road grade separation; we have abolished zone 3; we have put in additional parking at a whole range of stations; and we have added something like 6000 extra bus services over the past 18 months.

Last year we also announced the Meeting Our Transport Challenges initiative. We announced \$10.6 billion worth of investment in our transport system, and that investment will come through and continue to improve the public transport system. We have also brought forward the tender arrangements for 10 new trains, and they will be operational by 2009.

We have seen, I think largely as a result of the significant increase in petrol prices over the last two years and the improvements we have made to the service, something like a 20 per cent increase in patronage on the rail system; and the reality is that, if you look at the regional rail system, the increase in patronage has been even higher. Despite all the criticism that the opposition has levelled at the government over recent years for the huge investment we have made in regional rail services, those services have never been so popular. People are voting with their feet and using the public transport system.

I am conscious, obviously, that there are significant pressures on our public transport system because we have seen a 20 per cent increase in patronage over the last two years. I made it very clear last week that I will be looking at all of the options for further improvements to the system, including the acceleration of some of the projects under Meeting Our Transport Challenges. I have been discussing these matters with the Minister for Public Transport, and we will be making decisions in these areas in the near future.

We will not be able to solve all of the problems, because some of these issues have very long lead times. But I believe that, with the investments we have made to date, the new trains that are coming online, the new services we have added, the additional bus services and the government's commitment to look at bringing forward and accelerating some of the initiatives under Meeting Our Transport Challenges, we can make changes which will further improve our public transport system in Victoria.

Children: early childhood outcomes

Ms BEATTIE (Yuroke) — My question is to the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. Can the minister outline for the house the government's commitment to improving outcomes in early childhood?

Ms MORAND (Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development) — I thank the member for Yuroke for her question. Firstly, may I say what an honour it is to have been appointed by the Premier as the Minister for Children and Early Childhood Development. I am very much looking forward to working in this priority area for the government.

As the Premier said in answer to an earlier question: we have listened to the research, we understand the research and we understand that the best investment you can make is in early childhood development. We know that learning starts from day one, and we know that good early childhood outcomes are the foundation for a good outlook in life and good lifelong learning.

Victoria has already achieved a great deal since 1999. We have revitalised our maternal and child health services to ensure that 97 per cent of newborn to one-year-olds receive a health check. We have invested in 55 integrated children's centres, with another 40 announced in the last budget. Kindergarten participation rates in Victoria have averaged 95 per cent over the past five years, and this is well above the national average. We have also made kindergarten effectively free for the children of health-care card holders from 1 July this year. In fact our increased investment in kindergartens since 1999 is 138 per cent, and that is a very significant investment in this important area.

But there is always more to be done, and that is why earlier this year we launched Victoria's plan to improve outcomes in early childhood as part of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) national reform agenda. The national reform agenda provides a very significant and important opportunity for the states, the territories and the commonwealth to work together to significantly improve a range of outcomes. They include the proportion of children who are born healthy, the proportion of children acquiring the basic skills for life and learning and the proportion of women with children aged under five participating in the workforce. Our plan contains 53 actions and is backed up by a \$136 million investment over four years.

But we know we can go further and faster with commonwealth support, and that is why we are calling

on the commonwealth to invest in this area, as agreed to at COAG. Specifically we want to work for Victoria to target disadvantaged children aged under three, to improve information about our children's development and to increase the contact time for four-year-olds in kindergarten.

In conclusion, a lot has been achieved, but there is so much more that we can do and that can have a profound impact on a child's individual welfare and development and the community as a whole. I really look forward to working in this area.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before I call the Leader of the Opposition, I believe the member for Warrandyte is a new father. I think this is an opportune time to congratulate him and his wife on the birth of their new daughter.

Water: dams

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Will the Premier commit to building at least one new major dam for Victoria?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — We have a very clear plan for water for this state. It is a \$4.9 billion plan. It is a 150-gigalitre desalination plant, and it is a food bowl modernisation project that will deliver 225 gigalitres of water, including 75 gigalitres for Melbourne. All of that will add more than 225 gigalitres in total to Melbourne's water supply. That is equivalent to a 50 per cent boost in available supply for the people of Melbourne. This will be the biggest increase in water supply that this state has seen in decades, and it will make the security and availability of water in our state an economic strength.

It is a very different plan to that of our political opponents. The Leader of the Opposition asked me about a dam. The only proposal that I am aware of in relation to a dam was the Leader of the Opposition's plan for a dam on the Maribyrnong River. It was more like a puddle which would collect 6 gigalitres of water. The Leader of the Opposition does not like that fact. He also had a proposal for a desalination plant, which was going to be 50 gigalitres. The government is providing 225 gigalitres of new water for Melbourne, which will come on stream through 2010 and 2011.

Mr Baillieu — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the question again. Despite his commitments this morning with regard to parliamentary accountability, he is not answering the question. The government had a clear plan in October — it ditched that. It had another clear plan,

according to the Premier. I can only conclude that he is not ruling out a new dam.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! If the member for Burwood and the member for Polwarth could carry on their conversation outside the chamber, the rest of the chamber could get on with question time. That is an open invitation to both the member for Burwood and the member for Polwarth.

I uphold the point of order and ask the Premier to answer the question.

Mr BRUMBY — We will not be putting a dam on the Maribyrnong, which the Liberal Party promised. We have made our water policy very clear for this state. Our water policy is based on a \$4.9 billion investment on a desalination plant and on the food bowl project. We do not propose to build new dams in Victoria.

Mrs Shardey interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! Would the member for Caulfield like to leave the chamber to continue her discussion?

Mr Crutchfield interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for South Barwon is warned.

Mr O'Brien interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Malvern is also warned.

Consumer affairs: property financing companies

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — My question without notice is directed to the Minister for Consumer Affairs — and I congratulate him on his achievement of high office. I refer the minister to the recent collapse of several property financing companies and the financial losses inflicted on many Victorian families, and I ask: what measures can the Victorian government take to address this problem?

Mr ROBINSON (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — I thank the member for Keilor for his question and for his good wishes, and the good wishes that have been expressed to me from members on all sides of the chamber in recent days. It is a great honour to be promoted.

The member for Keilor has raised a very serious issue. It pertains to the spate of collapses of property financing companies across Australia in recent times. In late 2005 we saw the collapse of the Westpoint group of companies, and some 4000 investors and their \$320 million of funds went under. Earlier this year we saw Fincorp, a company, let it be said, that was established by a former vacuum cleaner salesman, take some \$300 million belonging to 1100 investors. ACR followed shortly after, with 7000 investors and \$330 million. We have subsequently had the collapse of a smaller company, Bridgecorp.

These collapses have had a catastrophic impact upon many thousands of Australian families, including hundreds in Victoria. Many of them are mum and dad investors who, sadly, will be lucky to recover some of their investments, and many will probably not recover any at all. And sadly the situation may yet get worse, because it is widely understood that a number of these companies already operate under considerable pressure. Should there be — we hope there will not — an interest rate rise tomorrow, it is very likely that the pressure will mount even further on these sorts of companies.

The common denominator in these collapses has been that the advertisements which have been placed by these companies are grossly misleading: they portray a level of security which is simply non-existent. Indeed a number of the companies have been targeting investors, many of them elderly and retirees, in a very deliberate way, so a disproportionate number of people affected are retirees.

The Brumby government — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr ROBINSON — I have been practising that line! The Brumby government has a very clear view on this matter. We believe that consumers deserve to be protected — it is a pretty essential principle — especially when they are investing large sums of money. We believe, furthermore, that advertisements should truthfully reflect the risk of the product. It does not matter whether that principle is applied to finance products or to WorkChoices advertisements; there should be truth in advertisements.

I want to assure the member for Keilor that I intend to engage the commonwealth government very directly on this matter. That is because, inasmuch as the power to scrutinise and monitor these companies and the products they offer is a power that ought to be exercised by the commonwealth government, it should be exercised on the basis of the many previous agreements

and cross-vesting arrangements which have been made between Victoria and the commonwealth. It is rightly the case that Victoria expects and requires the commonwealth to properly exercise its responsibility in this matter.

I am disappointed that the commonwealth in recent times has shown a great reluctance to be involved in bringing about any reform in this field and continues to allow companies to offer advertisements in a very loose fashion. I will be seeking to engage the commonwealth government on this matter and remind the commonwealth of its responsibilities. I will also be working with Consumer Affairs Victoria to explore all manner of forums which will allow us to exert pressure to achieve the necessary reforms.

In closing, too many mum and dad investors have been burnt by dodgy advertisements from companies in this field. We believe consumers deserve to be protected, and we wish to work with the commonwealth to ensure that that is what happens.

Schools: drought support

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the government's \$2.9 million schools drought relief package, which was announced in March this year and is designed to provide support services for families struggling through the drought, and I ask: why is the government discriminating against the families of Catholic and independent schools by refusing to grant their struggling families access to this funding package?

Mr BRUMBY (Premier) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. My understanding of the \$2.9 million that was made available is that that funding was made available to students in the government school system, reflecting the fact that the state has a basic and fundamental responsibility for the government school sector.

In relation to non-government schools, I should say that since we have been in government in this state we have increased funding to the non-government school sector by a massive 60 per cent. If the Leader of The Nationals is suggesting that we have not been supportive of non-government school funding, that is totally incorrect. We are providing 60 per cent more funding than was provided when the Leader of The Nationals was last part of the Kennett coalition government in this state.

We have also dramatically increased the education maintenance allowance. We have close enough to

doubled the allowance for primary students — and I think it is 60 per cent for secondary students. All students in the system get the benefit of that. I should say that in relation to the total funding for drought, this year we have provided drought funding — —

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the Premier is debating the issue. This is a narrow point about a drought funding package for struggling families that are struggling no matter what schools the children go to.

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr Ryan — Why are the Catholic and independent —

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr Ryan — kids unable to get the money?

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of The Nationals knows that that is not the way to take a point of order and that to enter into debate on a point of order is most disorderly. I ask the Premier to continue his answer.

Mr BRUMBY — I should say more generally that we have been, as a government, very supportive of families in drought-affected areas. The quantum of assistance — the total assistance — from the state which is being made available for support and relief during the current period of drought is now in excess of \$150 million. That \$150 million is in excess of our requirements under the commonwealth-state drought funding arrangements.

It is a far cry from the sort of assistance that was provided back in the 1990s, when Victoria went through a number of droughts. We are providing more generous assistance. We are significantly increasing funding to non-government schools; we have significantly increased the education maintenance allowance, for which all parents in non-government schools are eligible; and of course in the budget before last we introduced the School Start bonus, and that is payable to all parents of students in government and non-government schools.

Health: funding

Mr CRUTCHFIELD (South Barwon) — My question is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister outline to the house recent examples of how the government is supporting health services across Victoria?

Mr ANDREWS (Minister for Health) — I thank the member for South Barwon for his question and acknowledge his interest in high-quality health services in his local community. Can I say at the outset that when it comes to resourcing our public hospital system, this government has a proud record of investment and achievement. Since coming to government we have boosted recurrent funding for our health and hospital services by a whopping 96 per cent. This government is fundamentally committed to giving our health services the funding they need to treat more patients and to provide better care. What is more, this government has invested in the biggest health capital works program in the history of this great state.

What does that investment mean? What that investment means is that this year our public health system will treat 500 000 more patients than were treated in 1999. What that investment means is that Victoria's emergency departments are ranked by none other than the commonwealth government as no. 1. What that investment means is that last year we had funding for 132 000 episodes of elective surgery, around 15 000 more episodes of elective surgery than in 1999, when we came to government. So what that investment means is that in every respect this government is providing our health services with the funding they need to treat more patients and provide better care.

But we do face serious challenges, and the Premier has outlined some of those challenges in recent times. They are the challenge of an ageing community, the challenge of chronic disease, the challenge of tackling cancer, and sadly, the challenge of a commonwealth government that steadfastly refuses to enter into a true and meaningful partnership with this government and other state and territory governments across Australia.

As honourable members would know, there was a time when under the Australian health-care agreement we had a genuine partnership — a fifty-fifty partnership. Sadly today we have a situation where this government contributes 60 per cent of health funding and the commonwealth government shamefully contributes just 40 per cent of funding — and sliding. That is not a genuine partnership, a genuine joint effort to meet common challenges. That is not a genuine partnership. What we need is joint effort. What we need is common purpose and common effort to meet common challenges. What we most definitely do not need is last-minute, desperate election stunts like we have seen in Tasmania in recent days. What Victorian families need out of Canberra is good health policy, not bad health politics.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the — —

Honourable members interjecting.

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

Dr Naphine — Been there, done that; don't want to do it again!

On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is debating the issue. The question was about what initiatives the state government was taking. He is now debating the issue, and I ask you to bring him back to order.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister had strayed into a Tasmanian decision, but he had at the time the member for South-West Coast took the point of order come back to talking about Victorian health services and the needs of Victorian families. I perhaps suggest to the minister that his answer must relate to Victorian government business.

Mr ANDREWS — In conclusion, this government has a proud record of giving our health services the resources they need to treat more patients and provide better care. That is our record and that is our commitment, but I am the first to acknowledge that there is more to be done, and a meaningful partnership with the commonwealth is central to that. Let me finish with this point: we have achieved a lot; there is more to be done, and make no mistake, this is the government to do it.

CONFISCATION AMENDMENT BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) introduced a bill for an act to amend the Confiscation Act 1997 to clarify the operation and scope of provisions relating to exclusion orders and related appeal provisions, to make miscellaneous amendments relating to interests in property which may be subject to orders under that act and for other purposes.

Read first time.

LAND (REVOCATION OF RESERVATIONS) BILL

Introduction and first reading

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

That I have leave to bring in a bill for an act to provide for the revocation of reservations of various parcels of land, revoke related Crown grants in relation to two of those parcels and for other purposes.

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — Could I ask the minister for a brief explanation of the bill — in particular, which pieces of land are being referred to?

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — The Land (Revocation of Reservations) Bill will revoke partly or wholly various permanent reserves to facilitate various government commitments and also, as part of an ongoing rationalisation of public land — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BATCHELOR — In the bill. The bill will identify various parcels — at Lake Condah, South Melbourne, Daylesford and Beechworth, that is where.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Water: north–south pipeline

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

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

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

By Dr SYKES (Benalla) (124 signatures)

Greater Bendigo: performance

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

City of Greater Bendigo residents' petition to the Legislative Assembly of Victoria

We believe the council is not providing quality leadership or governance for the city. It has alienated itself from residents and is not effectively and efficiently meeting the purpose,

objectives, roles and functions of a council as set out in the Local Government Act. Of particular concern is its failure to: be impartial, transparent and accountable; effectively direct the chief executive officer; respect and act on behalf of the electorate; foster community cohesion; provide timely information to the community; meet the requirements of the Local Government Act; deal capably with major projects. The council's poor community satisfaction results verify our concern.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria have put into effect one or all of the following to improve local government:

Dismiss all City of Greater Bendigo councillors and appoint a commissioner until new elections can be arranged.

Conduct an open independent public inquiry into the City of Greater Bendigo council and its administration or undertake other appropriate investigations.

Conduct an open independent public inquiry into the Local Government Act and the operations of the local government department.

By Ms ALLAN (Bendigo East) (1036 signatures)

Nuclear energy: federal policy

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the commonwealth government's promotion of a nuclear industry in Australia and the strong likelihood that Victoria will be selected as a site for the construction of a nuclear power facility.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria reaffirm the opposition of the Victorian government to the creation of a nuclear industry in Victoria, including the construction of a nuclear power plant.

By Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) (42 signatures)
Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) (15 signatures)

Monash Freeway: noise barriers

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the citizens of Mulgrave and Wheelers Hill at the state of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the excessive traffic noise levels on Monash Freeway which are affecting health and stress levels of citizens and impacting negatively on our families and social life.

Noise levels significantly exceed the outdoor limits as recommended in the road traffic noise strategy (EPA).

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria approve the necessary funds to replace existing fencing/noise barriers along Monash Freeway from Springvale Road entrance up to Wellington Road exit, with more efficient noise barriers as recommended in VicRoads proposal in year 2004.

By Mr ANDREWS (Mulgrave) (484 signatures)

Port Phillip Bay: channel deepening

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

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

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

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

The petitioners request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria ensure that the proposal to deepen shipping channels is rejected, and that alternative solutions making better use of a mix of interstate rail from existing deepwater ports and sea transport are engaged. We also request that the Minister for Planning makes public findings of the EES independent panel, due for release in February 2005, as soon as the panel provides its report to government.

By Mr DIXON (Nepean) (574 signatures)

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

By Mr DIXON (Nepean) (3520 signatures)

Abortion: legislation

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the undersigned residents of Victoria draws the attention of the house to proposed amendments to the Crimes Act which will ensure that no abortion can be criminal when performed by a legally qualified medical practitioner at the request of the woman concerned.

The implementation of this legislation will allow abortions to be legal in Victoria right up to birth. This will only increase the thousands of children who die needlessly each year through abortion and will add to the existing social problems in Victoria resulting from such a high abortion rate.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria vote against amendments to the Crimes Act that will decriminalise abortion in the state of Victoria.

By Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) (11 309 signatures)

Tabled.

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

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Pascoe Vale be considered next day on motion of Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale).

Ordered that petitions presented by honourable member for Nepean be considered next day on motion of Mr DIXON (Nepean).

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

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Review 2006

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) presented annual review, together with appendices.

Tabled.

Ordered to be printed.

Regulation review 2006

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) presented regulation review, together with appendices.

Tabled.

Ordered to be printed.

Alert Digest No. 10

Mr CARLI (Brunswick) presented *Alert Digest No. 10 of 2007* on:

- Crimes (Decriminalisation of Abortion) Bill**
- Gene Technology Amendment Bill**
- Grain Handling and Storage Amendment Bill**
- Justice and Road Legislation Amendment (Law Enforcement) Bill**
- Legal Profession Amendment (Education) Bill**
- Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation Amendment Bill**
- Royal Children's Hospital (Land) Bill**
- Summary Offences Amendment (Body Piercing) Bill**

together with appendices.

Tabled.

Ordered to be printed.

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 — Orders under s 17D granting leases over:

- Howard Glover Reserve (two orders)
- Kardinia Park Memorial Swimming Pool Reserve
- Kardinia Park Reserve (three orders)
- Sandringham Beach Park
- Seaford Foreshore Reserve

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 — Notices under s 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rules 172/2006, 53, 54, 82

Melbourne Cricket Ground Trust — Report for the year ended 31 March 2007

Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE — Report 2006 (*in lieu of report tabled on 1 May 2007*)

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

- Cardinia — C110, C112
- Casey — C101
- Colac Otway — C56
- Greater Geelong — C96
- Horsham — C32
- Kingston — C68, C92
- Loddon — C20

Murrindindi — C12

Port Phillip — C66

Towong — C22

Wellington — C42

Whitehorse — C57 Part 2

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992 — SRs 82, 83

Building Act 1993 — SR 85

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 — SR 84

Estate Agents Act 1980 — SR 79

Heritage Act 1995 — SR 80

Magistrates' Court Act 1989 — SR 86

Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 — SR 81

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994:

Ministers' exception certificates in relation to Statutory Rules 55, 86

Minister's exemption certificate in relation to Statutory Rule 61

Surveillance Devices Act 1999 — Report of the Special Investigations Monitor under s 30Q.

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

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances (Amendment) Act 2006 — Sections 9(2), 12 and 15 — 1 August 2007 (*Gazette G30*, 26 July 2007)

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent on 24 July to:

Accident Towing Services Bill
Building Amendment (Plumbing) Bill
Crimes Amendment (DNA Database) Bill
State Taxation Acts Amendment Bill.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Program

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

That, under standing order 94(2), the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 4.00 p.m. on Thursday, 9 August 2007:

Grain Handling and Storage Amendment Bill

Legal Profession Amendment (Education) Bill

Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation Amendment Bill

Summary Offences Amendment (Upskirting) Bill.

Members will see in the list I have read a couple of features that need commenting on. Firstly, there are four bills for this parliamentary week. The government has limited the ask on the government business program to four bills in recognition of the expected time that was taken for the condolence speeches and adjournment for the late Walter Jona and the fact that members are discussing the government business program at almost 9.20 at night. In those circumstances, and given the available time during the parliamentary week, which has barely commenced in terms of government business but has almost concluded its first day, we have to be realistic about needing a shortened government business program.

As I indicated to the other political parties and the Independent, if we were by some chance to get through these four bills before 4 o'clock on Thursday, it would be the government's intention to then proceed with the Royal Children's Hospital (Land) Bill, not as part of the government business program or subject to the guillotine but just as the next order of business. To be realistic about it, that is unlikely to happen, given the nature of the four pieces of legislation that are on the program and in light of the fact that members are yet to adopt the government business program and, at the end of the first day of the parliamentary week, are yet to commence government business.

The other piece of information that I draw to the attention of members is that the government business program now includes the Grain Handling and Storage Amendment Bill rather than the Planning and Environment Amendment Bill, which was foreshadowed to the other political parties and the Independent at the end of last week. I had relayed to the other political parties and the Independent this change of plan. The government is implementing that change of intention. The government business program is different in that respect only — that it includes the Grain Handling and Storage Amendment Bill rather than the Planning and Environment Amendment Bill.

What we are doing with the Planning and Environment Amendment Bill, by way of explanation to the house, is that there may be some amendments that need to be made to the bill because of the machinery-of-government changes that have been announced by the government. Rather than rush that

process and announce a change to the government business program at the end of the parliamentary week, I took the decision to announce the change at the beginning of it so that those members who have an interest in preparing for the Grain Handling and Storage Amendment Bill will be able to do so by the end of this parliamentary week.

It is envisaged that we will deal with that on Thursday, unless of course debate on the other pieces of legislation collapses before then. It is worth reminding members, however, that the Grain Handling and Storage Amendment Bill was second read on 18 July. So there has been adequate time to prepare for this bill being debated in this parliamentary week, given that that second reading took place more than the requested two weeks ago. Notwithstanding the late change, it should be able to be accommodated by the Parliament in this parliamentary week.

The SPEAKER — Order! Before calling the member for Kew I point out to members that the daily program that they have in their possession was produced early this morning before the change that the Leader of the House has been explaining took place, so the running sheet has not been updated.

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — We should be in no doubt as to what the government is doing here. Due to grammatical errors, spelling errors and the incorrect naming of government departments, the Planning and Environment Amendment Bill has to be pulled. While the Leader of the House has all the resources that government provides — the big cars, the big incomes and all the staffers to do all of the business that government ministers seemingly flap around and do — the most important thing to note is that the opposition is given few resources to come to grips with government legislation.

I am very grateful for the practice that has been adopted, which is that we are notified on a Thursday evening of the government business program for the coming week. As a result of that the shadow ministers have to prepare their bills reports, which are then circulated to shadow cabinet, which meets on Monday to consider them. Recommendations then go to the parliamentary party on Tuesday, when we meet before each sitting week.

It is not just simply a case of shuffling these bills around on the deck. It shows a complete lack of consideration for the democratic process to say blithely, 'We will just remove one bill because we have stuffed it up, and we will shove in another bill and it will be okay. You have had the bill and have been able to deal

with this matter over a long period of time, so she'll be right, mate'. The fact is that, with few resources, the opposition will find it incredibly difficult to deal with this. This bill has not yet been reported to shadow cabinet, nor has it been reported to the party room, because it was not on the government business program. All of that will now have to be done. It is not a simple process.

However, there is a paucity of bills on the government business program. What we have is these four bills on the program because of the government's error in relation to one bill. Rather than just pulling that bill out and fixing up the problem, it is going to substitute another bill. I have no doubt that we will complete the debates on those four bills satisfactorily, and I expect there will be a great deal of padding by government members.

Certainly I am not aware of what will happen with the Grain Handling and Storage Amendment Bill, because a decision will not be made until Thursday morning. There will be a special meeting of the parliamentary Liberal Party to consider this bill on Thursday morning. The Leader of the House has indicated that the grain handling bill will not come on until Thursday, which will provide enough time for the opposition to deal with this.

I mention a couple of other matters. There are two other bills that have been on the government's business program since the beginning of this year. We have the Senate Elections Amendment Bill. I reiterate what I said in the previous sitting week that this is enabling legislation, and we are getting very close to a Senate election. I understand the government does not like the proposal, but it is doing it because there is a relationship with the commonwealth. I would have thought that it is a simple bill and it could be passed by this house reasonably quickly.

I also note the Water Amendment (Critical Water Infrastructure Projects) Bill, which was passed by this house earlier this year. The bill was apparently so critical to the government's water infrastructure proposals that the former Premier announced that he may have to recall Parliament to consider it. The legislation was amended by the upper house. I would have thought, given the importance of this bill to the government, that that bill could have come before the house. But those bills remain on the notice paper, even though there is little action needed.

In conclusion, in relation to the Royal Children's Hospital (Land) Bill, I am grateful. I have no doubt we will probably complete the bill by 4.00 p.m. on

Thursday in any event. With those remarks, the opposition will not be opposing the government business program.

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — On behalf of The Nationals, I advise that we will not be opposing the government business program. But it is interesting to note the start we have had this week, even with the change in the leadership of the government. Last Thursday, as is the normal practice, we were notified of the bills that we were to debate this week. We were notified of four — they were the Planning and Environment Amendment Bill, the Summary Offences Amendment (Upskirting) Bill, the Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation Amendment Bill and the Legal Profession Amendment (Education) Bill. We were also told that the Royal Children's Hospital (Land) Bill would be put in reserve in case there was time. That was fine, and our party discussed it on Monday night.

On the way down here today I spoke with the whip and he informed me that there was going to be a little bit of a change to the program — that is, the Planning and Environment Amendment Bill would not be debated first today, but rather the Summary Offences Amendment (Upskirting) Bill would be debated. That was fine, we were all prepared for that. At 7.00 p.m. the Leader of the House informed me that the Planning and Environment Amendment Bill would be dropped altogether from the program but that the Grain Handling and Storage Amendment Bill would be included. The Nationals are very keen to see that bill debated, but unfortunately we would have liked a little bit more time. As the Leader of the House has given a guarantee that that will not be debated until Thursday, it gives us time to prepare. As you know, Speaker, we travel long distances to come down here. We do not bring all our files down. Again, we have been caught short in relation to this in that not all our files are down here.

Mr Lupton interjected.

Mr DELAHUNTY — We do not use faxes any more; we can go even better than that.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr DELAHUNTY — That's right. We have got all the mod cons — carrier pigeons, email and all those sorts of things! But the reality is that it is not a good start for the new leadership. We have had a mishmash of legislation, the order of which has changed rapidly.

Again, we were very keen to debate the Water Amendment (Critical Water Infrastructure Projects) Bill

2006, but again it is not on this government's business program. I think the government is reluctant or maybe even scared to debate it. The Minister for Community Development is at the table. I would like to see him show a bit of leadership in regard to this and bring the debate on.

Mr Batchelor — It is on the notice paper.

Mr DELAHUNTY — It is on the notice paper, but it is not on the list of bills to be debated this week. As the member for Kew said, it was considered of critical importance to debate the bill quickly in the Parliament. Earlier this year it went to the Legislative Council. It has come back to this place with amendments and has sat on the notice paper ever since. We are wondering what the government wants to hide in relation to water. The government has ducked and weaved around water all this year, and it is disappointing from The Nationals point of view, as we represent rural and regional Victoria, because we want to debate this bill.

Mr Batchelor interjected.

Mr DELAHUNTY — We represent them very strongly. We are not uncomfortable with the government business program and the possible inclusion of the Royal Children's Hospital (Land) Bill. The member for Shepparton is eagerly awaiting that debate; she is prepared. If that bill is to be brought on, we are happy to debate it.

Also, the Grain Handling and Storage Amendment Bill is a very important bill for us in relation to country Victoria. In the area that I represent we have probably had the best start to the year for 20 years in relation to grain, and we need to make sure that all the grain handling equipment and storage facilities are up to standard and that legislation is prepared to assist in that process. Spring rains are going to be critical to make sure that happens. With those few words, The Nationals will not be opposing the program.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Darfur Australia Network: forgotten people project

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — I want to thank a not-for-profit community organisation that works tirelessly to raise awareness about the continuing tragedy in the Darfur region of Sudan. The Darfur Australia Network assists in the resettlement of Darfuri refugees and works to

build solidarity between the Australian people and the people of Darfur. The network is run by newly arrived members of the Darfuri community and other concerned volunteers from around the state.

When I recently visited the Darfur Australia Network to announce the success of its application for a Victorian volunteer small grant, the volunteers were busily knotting small pieces of coloured material. This, I was told, was part of their forgotten people project. On 17 October 2007 the Darfur Australia Network will remember the forgotten people of Darfur. Three million knotted squares of material, representing the 3 million citizens displaced by this crisis, will be incorporated into an art installation. The colourful material symbolises the colourful clothes of Darfuri women. The aim of this project is to raise awareness about the scale of the crisis in Darfur and to raise funds to help support the victims of this crisis. Everyone is welcome to contribute to the installation by providing knots. It is a truly wonderful and significant initiative.

I express thanks to the Darfur Australia Network and its many volunteers. I look forward to seeing the completed art installation in October and hopefully peace in the Darfuris' homeland.

Hon. John Murray

Dr NAPHTHINE (South-West Coast) — The Honourable John Murray was Premier of Victoria for three years from 8 January 1909 until 18 May 1912. He also served as the member for Warrnambool in the Legislative Assembly for 31 years from 1885 until his death in 1916, which included three very interesting years both before and after Federation. In addition to his three years as Premier he held a number of ministerial appointments.

Tragically his gravesite in the Warrnambool Cemetery has fallen into disrepair. This is clearly a very historic grave and should be properly maintained. I was surprised to find that while the Victorian Heritage Register lists a number of graves of significance, the grave of the Honourable John Murray is not listed, nor is it protected by a heritage overlay. Therefore I call on the government to list this grave and the graves of all former premiers on the Victorian Heritage Register; to provide an ongoing source of funding, perhaps through the Community Support Fund, to properly maintain these historic gravesites; and to immediately provide funding to undertake urgent repairs to the historic gravesite for John Murray.

John Murray had a colourful history in this house. He is described as being involved in red-hot liberalism,

supporting Henry George's land tax, Irish Home Rule, one-man one-vote, female franchise and the local Framlingham Aboriginal community. He opposed the Boer War, although he was — —

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

San Donato Festival

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park) — I am pleased to inform the house about the 31st San Donato Festival held at St Luke's Church in Lalor on Sunday, 5 August. The San Donato Festival is held each year in the tradition of thousands of such religious festivals in towns and villages right across Italy. Like those festivals, the San Donato Festival is also a cultural one, open to the entire community. On this occasion participants travelled from as far as way as Tatura and Shepparton to attend the festival.

I wish to draw the particular attention of the house to the colourful procession that took place during the festivities and the inspiring choral performance of the Friulano Choir, not to mention the Bellini musical band. The highlight of the festival was the operatic performances in the church hall. Accompanied by the music of the Bellini band, famous operatic songs from among the greats of Italian composers, such as Puccini and Verdi, were heard to the rapturous joy of the audience.

The festival would not have been possible without the sheer dedication of the chief organisers, Donato and Maria Polvere, who have in their own quiet way organised this beautiful festival, as they have for every single festival since its inception 31 years ago. The committee is also ably supported by many in the community who work tirelessly to ensure that this festival, held on an annual basis, is enjoyed by our locals and by those from afar.

Victorian Environmental Assessment Council: river red gum forests report

Mr WELLER (Rodney) — The recently released draft report of the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council's river red gum forests investigation has sent shock waves through the rural communities of Cohuna, Koondrook, Nathalia, Barmah and Picola. If implemented, the recommendations in the report will have a disastrous impact on residents along the Murray River whose livelihoods depend on the timber, grazing and duck hunting industries.

It is estimated that the loss of 80 per cent of the river red gum timber industry will cost 90 jobs, plus \$13 million in output, \$3.1 million in income and \$6.5 million in value-added regional economic activity every year. The impact of reduced duck hunting would result in a loss of 19 jobs as well as \$2.8 million in output, \$600 000 in income and \$1.1 million in value-added economic activity. The restriction of cattle grazing would result in a loss of 16 jobs and \$1.5 million in output, \$530 000 in income and almost \$800 000 in value-added economic activity.

If implemented, the report's recommendations would result in a total loss of 125 jobs in our river red gum region. There would also be a total loss of \$17.3 million in output, \$4.2 million in income and \$8.4 million in value-added economic activity across the region every year. I implore the government to seriously consider its position on this report.

Paraguay: Victorian consular office

Mr LANGUILLER (Derrimut) — I congratulate the Republic of Paraguay on the opening of its consular office in Victoria. Paraguay has identified Victoria as a great place to live and do business and a place that has a strong, viable economy. The government's strong commitment to research and innovation, particularly in the area of agriculture, is, as I understand it, one of Paraguay's interests, and that is why it has established offices in the state.

This interest was evident with the ready-to-work attitude of the Paraguayan delegation which recently attended Melbourne, headed by Mr Federico Gonzalez Franco, the Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Paraguayan delegation met with the then Premier, the Honourable Steve Bracks; the former Minister for Industry and State Development in the other place, Mr Theophanous; the former Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment; the Minister for Agriculture; Professor German Spangenberg, the research director, plant genetics and genomics at La Trobe University; Neil Bibby, the chief officer of the Country Fire Authority; and Dr Barry Carr, director of the Institute of Latin American Studies also at La Trobe University. I had the privilege of accompanying the Paraguayan delegation to all of these events.

I also congratulate Mr Reinaldo Pereira, who has been appointed Consul General of Paraguay in Australia and New Zealand. Mr Pereira, who has been the Honorary Consul of Paraguay in Victoria for the last eight years, will, I am sure, continue to be a great contributor and consular representative for Paraguay. The success of

this visit was a reflection of the work done by the Consul General. I conclude by once again congratulating the republic of Paraguay and its Consul General, Reinaldo Pereira.

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

Public sector: debt

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — This statement condemns the Premier, in his former role as Treasurer, for allowing Victoria to slide back to being a second-tier economy with a ticking time bomb of soaring new public sector debt and interest payments. The state government's total non-financial public sector debt is set to increase from \$3.5 billion in 2002 and \$4.8 billion last year to an alarming \$15.3 billion in 2011 — a more than fourfold increase in debt, which takes Victoria halfway back to the bad old days of crippling debt levels under the Cain and Kirner governments.

Labor ignores rapidly increasing debt and pays no heed to the potential consequence of putting Victoria's future at risk. We are in prosperous times of windfall GST revenues and record levels of state taxes. Further, the interest bill on Victoria's escalating state debt is set to soar to an estimated \$1.1 billion in 2011, taking valuable taxpayers money away from vital government services and infrastructure, such as front-line police resources, and cutting hospital waiting lists, maintenance to school buildings and, in particular, water projects.

State budget papers show that the overall public sector interest bill is forecast to climb to \$1.137 billion per annum in 2010–11, up by more than \$500 million or 81 per cent since 1999, and an estimated increase of \$375 million or 49 per cent compared to the current 2006–07 — —

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

Elizabeth Anthony

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — I would like to read a statement that has been prepared by a work experience student I had the pleasure of having with me for a week recently. She says:

My name is Elizabeth Anthony —

she is from Mentone Girls Grammar School —

and I have recently spent an exciting and fun-filled week with Janice Munt on work experience.

I have a knee condition that prevents me from playing sport and doing a lot of exercise. Last year our school spent two weeks in the city to discover Melbourne. For the duration of this time I spent them in a wheelchair. Both my friends and I were astonished at how hard it was to use public transport, especially trams, for people with a disability. You are only able to get on low-lying trams and tram stops that have raised platforms. The low-lying trams don't come very often and we were often late to our meeting spot.

We also conducted a survey on how accessible the city of Melbourne was for people with a disability, with results showing that most people thought that there was room for improvement. We also noticed that people would look at me differently and most people would assume that I was unable to think for myself. This is not true ... Those weeks taught my friends and I that people shouldn't be stereotyped just because of their appearance.

Please consider investing in more low-lying trams and more tram stops that are accessible for wheelchair users, as this would make our city of Melbourne a much better place for everyone.

Thank you, Elizabeth, for bringing this to our attention, and my best wishes for your future.

Robert Johnston

Mr O'BRIEN (Malvern) — Monday, 23 July 2007, marked the passing of a significant figure in the Victorian Liberal Party, Robert John Johnston. Robert did not hold elected office as a member of Parliament, but his contribution to the Liberal Party could not have been greater had he done so. Membership of the administrative committee and chairing the constitutional committee were among the many important volunteer roles that Robert performed for his party. But rather than titles it was the strength of Robert's personality, together with the common sense of his arguments, that made him such a force to be reckoned with.

Four of Robert's great passions were his school, his profession, his party and his faith — that is, Marcellin College, the Victorian bar, the Liberal Party and the Catholic Church. I had the good fortune to come to know Robert through our shared links; in fact Robert moved my admission to practise as a barrister and solicitor. On that note, Robert would be disappointed in me if I did not take this opportunity to make a political point and record the serious concern with which he viewed the political nature of many of the judicial appointments by the current Attorney-General.

However, the greatest of all of Robert's passions was his family. At the recent thanksgiving mass Robert's daughter, Stephanie, and his brother, Michael, summed up Robert's life as he had lived it: with eloquence, warmth, passion and good humour. To Robert's wife, Suzanne, and his daughters, Lisa, Stephanie and

Edwina, I pass on my sincere condolences and those of the Liberal Party.

Southmoor Primary School: kitchen garden program

Mr HUDSON (Bentleigh) — Recently I had the pleasure of taking part, with Stephanie Alexander, in the opening of the kitchen garden program at Southmoor Primary School. Southmoor has a great record in incorporating healthy eating and environmental awareness into all aspects of the school curriculum. It has already established a vegetable and herb garden which provides fresh produce for lunches in the school canteen. As a result Southmoor is one of the first schools in Victoria to be selected to participate in the Stephanie Alexander kitchen garden program, with a grant of \$62 000 from the state government.

Southmoor has taken up this initiative with great energy and imagination and has generated around \$100 000 in in-kind donations of materials, equipment and labour. The result has been the complete transformation of an old and decrepit toilet block into a warm and sumptuous kitchen with an outside balcony. A feature of the kitchen is a beautifully hewn native timber bench which forms the servery to the outside eating area. Great credit for this development is due to the school, parents and staff, ably led by principal Marie Kick and school council president Geoff Binns. Special mention should be made of the generous donations to the kitchen made by a wide range of companies, the most significant of which has been from D'amani, an arm of Reece Pty Ltd.

Stephanie Alexander and her foundation should be congratulated for their role in initiating the kitchen garden program with the state government under the previous Minister for Education, Minister Kosky. Congratulations to all at Southmoor on a 5-hat kitchen garden performance.

Floods: Gippsland

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — The clean-up continues in Gippsland East following the devastating floods that occurred in June, but there are significant issues still remaining. In recent weeks I have spoken with a number of primary producers who have been unable to access recovery grants because more than 51 per cent of their income is not derived from the land. These people have to incur the same costs for restoration of fences and other infrastructure, and removal of debris, yet they are unable to access government assistance.

I have also spoken to many business operators, from cruise operators in Lakes Entrance to bait shop owners in Bairnsdale and vegetable haulers in Maffra, as an example. Their businesses have been affected almost totally albeit indirectly by the floods. They need just the same financial assistance as other businesses to get through this hard period, but they do not fit the criteria administered by Rural Finance Corporation.

On a positive note, the bridge to Licola will be opened this week. These have been trying weeks for the residents of the Licola community, who will no doubt be pleased that access will be restored to their community. But there still needs to be more government action to amend the criteria of eligibility. Many roads and other infrastructure are yet to be repaired. I mentioned in previous weeks the need for investment in flood-damaged rivers through the catchment management authorities. These issues must be addressed. I call on the government to ensure that this investment is undertaken so that recovery from the floods will be complete.

BATS Theatre Company: *Rumors*

Ms GRALEY (Narre Warren South) — There are several very accomplished community theatre companies in my electorate, and one of these is BATS Theatre Company. This group recently celebrated its 18th birthday with a terrific rendition of *Rumors*, the contemporary Neil Simon comedy about an anniversary party for the deputy mayor of New York. It is a comedy of misunderstandings and misinterpretations as the party guests work overtime to explain and cover up for an injured host, a missing wife and a complete dearth of any other householders.

The male party guests, played by Darren Calder, Richard Green, Bill Irvine and David Lawson-Smith, all interacted fantastically and constructed an atmosphere of confusion and total mayhem to great effect. Green's final act monologue had me in tears of laughter. Their wives, played by Kate McManus, Amara Jensen, Melanie Foster and Leah Anderson, were also excellently cast. Each individually stole the show at different times with their immaculate delivery of Neil Simon's inimitable lines. The arrival of the long arm of the law, played by Bob Halsall and Miranda Mayle, created panic approaching hysteria for the other characters, and all 10 actors on stage together worked hard and successfully to maintain the necessary level of tension towards the end of the play.

It was a great show and a great night's entertainment, with special acknowledgement to the director, Bronwyn Egan, for her wonderful efforts in bringing a play of

this magnitude together. Also, recognition should be given to the indefatigable Susan Bergman, who as production coordinator accomplished a multitude of challenging feats in delivering this show to the communities of Melbourne's south-eastern growth corridor. I am well aware that BATS Theatre Company is guided by a tireless volunteer committee, of which Jenny Black is president —

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

Donald Mackay

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — To acknowledge the 30th anniversary of the murder of Donald Mackay I place on record the words of Lesley Hicks, a lifelong friend of Barbara Mackay:

On 15 July 1977 a defining moment occurred in Australian history — the murder in Griffith, New South Wales, of local businessman and would-be politician Donald Mackay. This political assassination remains only partly solved and his body has never been found. The event catapulted Don's wife, Barbara, into an unrelenting media spotlight that rarely left her for years to come. Previously relatively unknown outside Griffith, she was an involved wife of a public-spirited husband, raising four children, active in the Uniting Church and working part time as a physiotherapist.

Don's disappearance was clearly connected with his courageous attempts to expose organised marijuana-growing rackets in the district. Some men served sentences in Victoria for conspiracy and carrying out his assassination, but those who gave the orders were never brought to justice.

But Barbara herself, because of her courage, faith and outstanding gifts as a communicator, became a person of wide influence, greatly loved and admired in her own right. A thoughtful Christian, Barbara Mackay spoke and wrote often about the underlying sickness of society of which drug abuse, violence and corruption are symptoms. She died aged 65 in February 2001. Like Don she was a truly great Australian.

The continuing thoughts of many Australians remain with the Mackay children, Paul, Ruth, Mary and James.

Sri Lankan study centre: 15th anniversary

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — The Sri Lankan Study Centre for the Advancement of Technology and Social Welfare, formally known as SCATS, is a non-profit organisation established in Victoria by a pioneering group of academics and professionals with the objective of promoting Sri Lanka's technical competence in selected fields and implementing educational, cultural and social welfare projects for the benefit of all Sri Lankans living here and overseas. SCATS is celebrating its 15th anniversary on 16 September with an awards night at the University of

Melbourne. I congratulate SCATS on its 15 years of continuous service and wish it all the very best of luck.

At present SCATS is involved in several projects. The first phase of the Australia Sri Lanka friendship village for tsunami victims has been completed, and the houses were handed over to the victims by Dr Greg French, the Australian High Commissioner for Sri Lanka on 11 December 2006. At present more than 250 disadvantaged students throughout the country benefit from the foster care students assistance scholarship scheme for disadvantaged children in rural areas in Sri Lanka. The SCATS computer training centres were launched a few years ago at Vijerama Secondary School, Colombo, and the International Resource Centre at Bellanvilla, an outer suburb of Colombo. A few hundred students have so far utilised these facilities. The Lady Ridgeway Children's Hospital medical equipment supply project —

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

Stud Road–Timbertop Drive, Rowville: traffic lights

Mr WAKELING (Ferntree Gully) — I wish to raise a matter of great concern with the Minister for Roads and Ports and call upon the minister to improve accessibility and safety for members of the Eastern Districts Polish Association of Melbourne, located on Stud Road in Rowville. Currently members who access the facility by public transport feel very unsafe in accessing this regional complex. Firstly, members arriving from Dandenong are forced to cross busy Stud Road. Secondly, members arriving from Knox are forced to walk on the Stud Road shoulder to access the facility.

Given the volume of and speed reached by vehicles along Stud Road, members of the Polish association have called for the installation of traffic lights at the corner of Stud Road and Timbertop Drive as well of the establishment of a footpath from the bus stop on the east side of Stud Road to the Polish club facility.

Napoleon Road–Lakesfield Drive, Lysterfield: safety zone

Mr WAKELING — I wish to raise a matter of concern with the Minister for Roads and Ports and call upon the minister to establish a keep-clear zone on Napoleon Road at Lakesfield Drive in Lysterfield. Recently an electronic pedestrian crossing was installed near this busy intersection. Consequently when students are utilising this crossing south-bound vehicles are

banked up across Lakesfield Drive, preventing vehicles from turning right out of Lakesfield Drive onto Napoleon Road.

Residents have called for the installation of a keep-clear zone to allow for greater movement of vehicles, particularly during the morning and afternoon peak school times. Residents have requested the construction of a keep-clear zone similar to that currently in operation at the corner of Kelletts Road and St Lawrence Way in Rowville.

Public transport: Murrindindi shire

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — I rise to thank the Brumby government on behalf of the communities in the shire of Murrindindi for providing \$311 000 under the Transport Connections program, which aims to get the best utilisation of available resources in the area to provide solutions to transport difficulties. Transport needs are very serious in the area, as highlighted by a significant petition from the shire which I was asked to present to the Parliament — but unfortunately it was not worded correctly, so I was unable to do so.

It was about improving transport links to Melbourne, and in particular links between the towns in Murrindindi shire and also to other services for residents around the area. The Transport Connections program will provide an opportunity to communities like Narbethong, Marysville, Buxton, Taggerty, Thornton, Eildon, Alexandra, Yea, Kinglake, Kinglake West, Toolangi, Flowerdale and Strath Creek to plan for better connections to enable people who are transport-disadvantaged in these communities to access these services.

During 2006 the former Rural and Regional Services Development Committee travelled Victoria, and at public hearings right across the state we heard about the importance of using existing infrastructure to provide better connections to tertiary education and training and to leisure activities for young people in order to retain and attract young people to rural and regional areas. Towards the end of the hearings the statewide Transport Connections program was announced, and it was roundly applauded by people right across the state as a way of addressing some of these issues. I commend the many community members for their actions.

Agriculture: funding

Mr CRISP (Mildura) — I was pleased to welcome the federal Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Mr McGauran, to Mildura recently, where he

announced two significant funding boosts to two major agricultural industries that will assist in gaining entry to the important Chinese market. The first announcement was \$1.33 million for the treatment of Fullers rose weevil, a pest of significance for Sunraysia growers, as it has impeded commercial access to China. Australian citrus gained access to China some time ago, but due to the problems with Fullers rose weevil, very little Sunraysia citrus has made it to this important market. I acknowledge the work done by the Murray Valley Citrus Board and Sunraysia citrus growers when meeting Australian trade and quarantine officials, and also the solid support of the federal member for Mallee, John Forrest.

The second announcement was \$680 000 for controls and measures to deal with China's pests of concern in the Australian table grape industry. This funding will allow research to be undertaken ahead of bilateral talks with China later this year. The Chinese market requires stringent quarantine adherence, and this funding will assist in meeting these criteria. I would like to acknowledge the hard work done by the Australian Table Grape Growers Association, particularly Mr Nick Muraca and its chief executive officer, Jeff Scott, and their dedication to the table grape industry and lobbying of the federal government for this assistance.

International Criminal Court: prosecutions

Mr SCOTT (Preston) — I rise to support the work of the International Criminal Court in bringing to justice those who have committed crimes against humanity. While at first glance this may not seem to be a matter for the Victorian Parliament, there are many Victorians who have been victims of crimes against humanity, including the systematic use of rape as a tactic of war, the kidnapping of children for use as child soldiers and the extra-judicial murder of family members as part of genocide and other war crimes. The court has jurisdiction over four groups of crimes: the crime of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression.

I note that one individual has already been charged by the court, and while this person was alleged to have committed a most serious crime — that of conscripting and enlisting children under the age of 15 and using them to participate in active hostilities — he has rightly been accorded the presumption of innocence.

I hope that the successful prosecution of serious international war criminals will bring some peace of mind to the victims of these most serious crimes. I also hope that the successful prosecutions of such persons will act as a deterrent and limit the war crimes that

blight many countries in the world into the future. For too long thugs and murderers have been able to hide from justice.

Andrew Bairstow

Mrs FYFFE (Evelyn) — I rise to speak about a wonderful young man, Andrew Bairstow. Andy, as he is affectionately known by his friends, is 24 years old and suffers from Down syndrome. I have known Andy and watched him grow in the Yarra Junction community ever since he played in the under-10 football team with my sons. The Yarra Junction junior and senior football clubs have been fantastic in their support of this outstanding young man, gaining a special exemption for him to play in the under-12 and under-14 teams for several years.

After not having played competitive football for some years, the call came out last Saturday for Andy to pull on the boots. Yarra Junction was pitted against longstanding arch rivals, Powelltown, and the team was short of players. Like a true clubman, Andy did not hesitate and responded to the call-up in superb fashion. He ended up booting six goals, including one that nearly brought the clubhouse down with a thunderous cheer as he majestically snagged a goal from deep in the pocket, hard up against the boundary line.

Inspired by Andy's performance, the Yarra Junction reserves ran over the top of Powelltown. The final score was Yarra Junction, 37 goals 22 points; Powelltown, 1 goal 4 points. Andy was chaired off the field by his mates to rapturous applause. After delivering an inspired individual performance on Saturday, Andy was back at work on Monday. He works five days a week in a supported employment program run by Eastern Outsource. To get there he travels by himself from Yarra Junction.

Congratulations to Andy, Yarra Junction Football Club and Andy's family, especially his mum, Julie. Andy is a true inspiration to all of us.

Hon. John Cain, Sr

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — Today I pay tribute to a truly great Victorian, former Premier, the Honourable John Cain, Sr. Fifty years ago, on 4 August 1957, John Cain, aged 75, passed away while visiting Townsville in Queensland. John Cain first became Premier on 14 September 1943. His ministry only lasted four days as a result of the Leader of the Country Party, Albert Dunstan, cementing a coalition with the United Australia Party. The subsequent election in 1945 saw the Labor Party gain four seats from the Country Party,

and on 21 November 1945 John Cain became Premier again. This term lasted until 8 November 1947. This was a turbulent time in Victorian politics with the then Country Party manipulating Parliament through a balance of power process.

John Cain, Sr, was subsequently again elected Premier on 6 December 1952, with the ALP winning the Legislative Assembly in its own right for the first time. The Cain government remained in office until the party split of 1955. The third Cain government fell on 19 April 1955.

John Cain was first appointed as a minister in the Prendergast government in 1924 and then in the Hogan government. As a minister and as Premier he was dedicated to the underprivileged and to social change. He represented the then Legislative Assembly seat of Jika Jika. He lived in the same house in Northcote all his political career, and he enjoyed being seen as an average citizen. I commend John Cain's career to the house.

Tamil community: fundraising

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — Last Friday night I had the pleasure of being the guest of the Tamil community of Victoria in the presence of the Governor of Victoria, David de Kretser. Mixing with the Tamil community from all over Melbourne was an eye-opener and a revelation to me. It was a pleasure to be there and listen to clergymen who have been in Sri Lanka and other eminent people in non-government organisations who spoke about the things that take place there. I can see why the Tamil community here is so fervent about fundraising and trying to help their families and friends back in Sri Lanka and assisting them with education, health care and housing.

It is an important situation, and it was pointed out that evening that the Tamil community —

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Water: north–south pipeline

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — The issue I have is for the Minister for Water — and I am delighted he is in the chamber. The issue I am asking him to deal with is

a request to stop the north–south pipeline project, which is in fact a breach of the government's own central region strategy of 2006 and a breach of the government's commitments. The minister may be aware of community outrage against the proposal. There have been meetings all over country Victoria expressing opposition. On Thursday at lunchtime at Parliament there will be a meeting at which the minister can see firsthand, if he wishes, the outrage against this proposal.

I particularly wish to draw the minister's attention to a meeting held in Yea on 26 July. I refer to a report in the *Alexandra, Eildon and Marysville Standard of* Wednesday, 25 July, which says:

The final question of the night, from Yea farmer and businessman Neil Beer, summed up the communities' feeling that water should not be taken from the Goulburn River to Melbourne while there is not enough water in our own catchment.

It notes that the member for Seymour sat mute throughout that entire meeting. I further want to draw the minister's attention to a report of the Melbourne augmentation program and the Sugarloaf interconnector. The document is a technical report dated June 2007, which at page 2 makes the following observation:

The Sugarloaf interconnector is designed to transfer a maximum of 100 GL/yr from the Goulburn River ... to the Sugarloaf Reservoir ... On average it is expected that 75 GL/yr will be available for transfer.

I draw the minister's attention to the fact that the interconnector pipe's capacity will be 100 gegalitres a year. This calls into question the government's claim within its own propaganda. Page 8 of *Our Water Our Future* says of the interconnector:

It will deliver up to 75 gegalitres of new water annually to Sugarloaf Reservoir in Melbourne.

However, on the other hand, the government's own documentation is claiming that the capacity will be 100 gegalitres a year and it is expected on average there will be 75 gegalitres a year. I would be very keen for the minister to explain those particular discrepancies.

The minister needs to understand that the irrigators are outraged about this proposal. Country communities all the way down the line — as far down as the electorate of Seymour — are also equally outraged. The government should have built a dam or a desalination plant, upgraded the eastern treatment plant or fixed leaks in the Melbourne system — anything but this proposal to take water away from the irrigators for Melbourne.

Energy: rebates

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — Tonight I wish to raise an issue for the Minister for Energy and Resources. The issue I raise is an important issue that relates to financially vulnerable people in my electorate of Ballarat West, and in fact right across Victoria, in relation to paying for their heating and energy bills.

I do not think I have to remind anybody how cold this winter has been so far. In some parts of the state temperatures have dropped to below zero. I know people in Ballarat and Ballarat West have extremely warm hearts, but sometimes their feet get a bit chilly. In conditions such as we have experienced recently heating is vital. It is conditions like these that remind us how essential are the services of gas and electricity. I therefore call upon the minister to take immediate steps to ensure that vulnerable energy consumers having difficulties paying their bills do not have their gas or electricity supply disconnected.

There are lots of people, particularly across rural and regional Victoria, who are under enormous financial strain as a result of years of drought. There are also many people who are struggling — members of the opposition do not know about struggling people — to meet the financial demands of caring for a family. The burden of accommodation costs and rising fuel prices means that there are times when families fall short, and then there is an interest rate increase. When the bills come in, many people find themselves in a position where they simply cannot afford to pay them all. To think that individuals in this situation might then have to suffer further hardship as a result of electricity or gas disconnection is simply horrendous.

As a government we should ensure that vulnerable people are protected. This is why I call upon the minister to ensure that energy retailers are sensitive to the financial hardships of their customers and that they act appropriately when dealing with customers who are unable to pay their bills due to financial strain.

Stawell-Warracknabeal Road: upgrade

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — As part of The Nationals campaign 'If you invest in country roads, you save country lives', I seek urgent funding commitment from the minister for roads to upgrade part of the dangerous Stawell-Warracknabeal Road. The local council and community have tried unsuccessfully for many years to have the Sheep Hill section upgraded to make it safer. Because it is a shortcut to the Western Highway, it is used by numerous B-doubles, other semitrailers, truck and trailer combinations and cars

each day. The biggest concern, though, is the passenger and school buses that negotiate it daily. A V/Line coach operator gives the Sheep Hill section of the road the dubious distinction of being the worst stretch of highway used by his buses, which travel most of western Victoria. An experienced bus driver of almost 20 years describes it as one of the worst roads he has ever seen.

About 15 kilometres south of Warracknabeal the road is quite narrow for a distance of approximately 9 kilometres. It has gravel edges and no line markings. In dry weather rising dust blankets the air, lowering visibility to almost nil, and stones shower passing vehicles. It is so bad that the coach operator replaces at least two windscreens every month. But the danger increases in wet weather. The road is too narrow for large vehicles like trucks and coaches to pass safely. As a result they are reduced to a crawl on soft edges to avoid a serious accident. The local community believes the softness of the road edges exposes inexperienced drivers to the risk of crashes or rollovers. They are concerned that it will take a fatal accident for the government to hear their concerns and upgrade the road. I share their concerns. The road has been an ongoing problem for more than five years, and it is not designed for the traffic that it currently carries.

In 2003 a Royal Automobile Club of Victoria report found that 35 lives could be saved every year if \$240 million was spent on upgrading C-class roads such as Stawell-Warracknabeal Road to a safe standard. Therefore I ask the minister to urgently allocate funding to make this road safe in the interests of the Yarriambiack shire, its motorists, transport operators, passengers and particularly the schoolchildren who travel on buses on that road.

Coburn Primary School: bike shed

Mr NARDELLA (Melton) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs. The action I seek is that he consider funding the application by the Coburn Primary School for a \$5000 bike shed under the Go for Your Life bike shed seeding grants program.

The program is about funding 40 schools to design and install, build or upgrade their bike sheds and to encourage young students to ride to school as well as walk to school. The bike sheds provide a secure place for them to park their bicycles. It is all about increasing the physical activity of our young people and promoting healthier living. Hopefully young people will stay active and keep that activity going throughout their lives. The grants can be used to design and build

bike sheds, to convert existing sheds or to purchase proprietary sheds to be used by the schools. The bike shed seeding grants are also about strengthening communities and getting people out of their cars.

A really interesting statistic is that when I went to school in the 1970s — and the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs was probably born in the 1970s — around 80 per cent of students used to walk or ride their bicycles to school.

Ms Overington — I did.

Mr NARDELLA — The member for Ballarat West said, 'I did'. She is a 1970s girl, and the honourable member for Mordialloc is in that category. But now that is down to around 20 per cent. That is having an effect on young people's obesity levels and on their health. The secure bike sheds are about being part of the solution by reversing that trend. The program will invest around \$2.9 million over four years to try to do that.

As part of the grants program surveys will be conducted to compare the situation before the bike sheds are upgraded or built with the situation afterwards to see if healthy habits can be put in place by the kids. I urge mums, especially mums who drive their kids to school, which is part of what is occurring now, to also get on bikes and ride with their kids to and from school. That would be much healthier than getting in the car and contributing to the traffic problems that are occurring at the moment.

Middleborough Road, Box Hill: grade separation

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I raise with the Minister for Roads and Ports the results of an investigation by the Victorian Ombudsman which have confirmed a series of failures by VicRoads and the Environment Protection Authority that have left local residents in Box Hill exposed to long hours of loud noise during the Middleborough Road grade separation project. Both VicRoads and the EPA are now saying that they are reviewing what happened and are developing or improving their guidelines. I ask the minister to make sure that proper guidelines are implemented so that no other residents will in future have to endure what Box Hill residents have suffered on this project.

Much of the suffering of the residents occurred because of government delays and the government's broken promise to consult with residents. The Bracks government promised the project during the 2002 election but delayed it for over three years and then

rushed to cut corners on the design and planning to get the project under way before the 2006 election. The Ombudsman began an investigation after I lodged a complaint in February this year on behalf of local residents who had suffered loud and painful noise 24 hours a day for days on end and who had struggled to get any help from VicRoads or the EPA.

In a letter to me dated 26 July the Ombudsman found that high noise occurred at night time despite a VicRoads work management plan strategy to limit high noise to daylight hours; that residents were not sufficiently informed about the option to be relocated during periods of high noise; that the EPA noise guidelines referred to by VicRoads and its contractors were not the appropriate guidelines to follow for a major road/rail construction project like the Middleborough Road project; that the EPA did not have statutory authority for approval of the project; that there are no statutory limits for noise levels for construction works like the Middleborough Road project; and that guidelines are required to help determine what constitutes unreasonable noise emissions from construction works.

These findings by the Ombudsman are a vindication of the concerns of local residents, who were treated with contempt by the government and by VicRoads and who received little help from the EPA. It is reasonable for members of the community to accept some level of noise and other disruption in the public interest. However, the level of suffering inflicted on residents by this project shows that the Labor government and its bureaucracy have little true care for protecting individuals and their families.

It is too late to undo or stop the damage and hurt that has been suffered by those residents in Box Hill, but I ask the minister now to make sure that VicRoads acts to implement guidelines that will prevent this happening in future, and to use his good offices to ensure that the EPA adopts appropriate guidelines and that they are suitably enforced on any future similar projects.

Road safety: hoons

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The action I seek is the minister's continued support and action to ensure police enforce the government's hardline stance on hoons in the Cranbourne electorate.

I applaud the government's no-tolerance approach to hoons, and I note that since the government's tough new anti-hoon legislation came into effect on 1 July

2006 police have seized over 2200 cars. This is in stark contrast to the Liberal Party's stance, with the opposition spokesman, the member for Kew, publicly stating that he thought hooners should be let off with a warning for their first offence rather than police being given the power to seize their cars on the spot. He is entitled to his views, but they are not in the best interests of the community.

Hooners are a menace to my local community. This is an issue which is regularly raised by my constituency, especially in Carrum Downs, Langwarrin, Cranbourne and Cranbourne West. Last year I conducted an electorate-wide survey. I also hold regular meet-and-greet sessions within the electorate, and time after time I hear of residents' concerns about unsocial hooning behaviour in their neighbourhood. It is also pleasing to hear from the many residents in my electorate who have applauded the Labor government's anti-hoon laws, as locally over the last 12 months hooning behaviour has declined following the introduction of the government's legislation.

I am also pleased to note that the Labor government has launched a statewide hoon hotline on the CrimeStoppers number so members of the public can report hoon behaviour and further enable police to target areas in which hooners are active. Hooners put their own and other people's lives at risk by excessively speeding and doing burnouts. They show a complete disregard for the safety of pedestrians and fellow motorists, and their behaviour demonstrates that they are out of touch with the rest of the community.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I indicate to the member for Cranbourne that unfortunately in the adjournment debate he cannot ask for something to be continued. If, however, he is asking the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to ensure police enforce the hardline stance on hooners in the Cranbourne electorate, I will allow the matter.

Mr PERERA — That is what I am asking for, Deputy Speaker.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! I thank the member for clarifying that.

Mr PERERA — I ask the minister to reject the call to soften our stance on these tough, anti-hoon laws, and I seek his continued support and action to ensure we put the brakes on hoon driving.

Ferntree Gully Road: triplication

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — I would like to raise a matter of concern for the Minister for Roads and Ports.

The action I seek is that the minister release a timetable to the residents of Monash and Knox for the construction of the triplication of Ferntree Gully Road from Jells Road through to Stud Road. It was a Labor Party promise at the last election that this triplication would go ahead.

Mr Nardella interjected.

Mr WELLS — It is interesting that the member for Melton has already scoffed. It sounds like it will be another broken promise.

Mr Nardella interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for Melton should cease interjecting, and the member for Scoresby should cease listening.

Mr WELLS — It is a two-lane road each way from Wheelers Hill to Scoresby in Knox. The significance of this road is that it is heavily congested; at peak time it is bumper to bumper. However, when EastLink comes on line — I suspect that will come on line earlier than expected — the congestion will increase significantly with the traffic coming off EastLink onto Ferntree Gully Road.

Residents will remember when the member for Polwarth came out during the campaign in November 2006. It was the Liberal Party, thank goodness, that was the first to make the commitment that this triplication would go ahead. Of course the Labor Party did not have any ideas for the outer east, so it jumped on the website, had a look at what the shadow Minister for Transport had promised and then said it would slot that one in. It is important to note that the Labor Party was following the member for Polwarth in saying that this triplication had to go ahead.

As I mentioned at the start of this matter, we are seeking an outline of how this road is going to be built, and we want to know the timetable. That is the action I seek from the minister. We do not want another broken promise added to the list. We all remember the broken promises in the outer east: only Labor would save Waverley Park — a broken promise; the transport feasibility study for Rowville — another broken promise; the tramline to Knox — another broken promise; and no tolls on the Scoresby freeway — yet another broken promise. We do not want to add to the list of broken promises to the outer east. We want the triplication of Ferntree Gully Road from Jells Road to Stud Road to go ahead so we do not need to raise it as another issue. We call on the minister as a matter of priority to outline his timetable for the triplication of this road, which was a very important election promise.

Cycling: Hell Ride

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — The matter I raise this evening is for the attention and action of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. The action I seek is that he enforce our road laws on the Hell Ride on Beach Road each weekend. It is now almost a year since James Gould was knocked over and killed on a pedestrian crossing on Beach Road, Mentone. An inquest has been held into his death, and our state coroner, Graeme Johnstone, has said as a result of his inquiries into Mr Gould's death that large groups of cyclists running pedestrian red lights are a recipe for disaster.

It is also now nearly a year since I walked down to the pedestrian lights where Mr Gould was killed. I went there a week after he died, and the flowers were still placed on the spot. It was a Sunday morning, and the tragedy was still fresh in all our minds. I stood and watched as a local family, including children, pushed by to cross the road on the exact same crossing. The pedestrian lights turned red. The cyclists rode straight through. This was, we should remember, a week after Mr Gould lost his life. He used to walk past my house regularly, and I remember him quite clearly. Occasionally we would give each other a wave. He was a fit gentleman with a spring in his step.

On 30 July I opened the *Herald Sun* to once again see a picture of this pedestrian crossing, which is a major access point for locals and non-locals alike to get down to the Mentone Life Saving Club and Mentone Beach to enjoy family fun on the sand, splash in the shallows, walk the dog or attend the regular surf lifesaving carnivals and other events that draw very large crowds. In the paper I saw a photo of cyclists riding straight through a red light on this crossing, once again with pedestrians nearby. What does it take for these riders to learn? While the great majority of cyclists are responsible and do the right thing, locals are becoming increasingly incensed at those who do not.

I have written to and spoken with local police, and they are aware of this problem. But more needs to be done. We, the locals, are tired of the Hell Ride and tired of rogue cyclist behaviour. We ask only for the road rules and our safety to be respected. As Ellie Gould said in an article in the newspaper of that day, it is going to happen again if something is not done about it. I would prefer not to wait until something does happen. I have seen this with my own eyes. I would not be a responsible local member of Parliament if I did not raise this for the attention of my minister for the wellbeing and protection of my local residents and to safeguard the good name of all of cyclists who use

Beach Road for sport and recreation and do the right thing.

I ask the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to take whatever action is necessary with Victoria Police or other arms of government to bring this under control.

Princes Highway West: upgrade

Mr MULDER (Polwarth) — The matter I wish to raise is for the attention of the Minister for Roads and Ports and concerns his phoney visit to Colac on 1 August. The action I seek is for the minister to put his lousy hand in his lousy pocket and match the Liberal Party's commitment to fund the upgrade of Princes Highway West and to stop engaging in political stunts to help Labor's dud federal candidate for Corangamite, Darren Cheeseman.

The minister's visit to Colac was an embarrassment for the new Premier. Civic leaders were called from across the state to attend what they believed was going to be a major funding announcement. It turned out to be nothing more than a cheap political stunt. If the visit was important enough to invite politicians, members of G21, the mayors and chief executive officers of 17 councils and local business representatives and to call on the media to attend, then certainly there should have been some commitment given by the Minister for Roads and Ports to start the upgrade of Princes Highway West.

On arriving late, the minister claimed that he had been held up in discussions relating to the resignation of the Premier. However, locals think it had more to do with the lousy condition of the Princes Highway. Certainly, the information provided by the minister did nothing to bring any joy to the assembled guests, who were, I am told, looking for some indication that the state government would honour its responsibilities and fund the duplication of the Princes Highway.

But the gathering realised the whole exercise was a stunt to boost support for Darren Cheeseman. All that was missing was a donation box at the door. I believe that the dumbcluck Labor candidate said it all when he stated in the *Colac Herald* that he agreed that the Princes Highway was vital to the south-west region's economy, that he was absolutely convinced the project needed to proceed but that he had not yet been convinced one way or another about who should fund it. Such is the federal candidate whom the minister was there promoting.

Perhaps Mr Cheeseman was hedging his bets. After all, federal Labor's spokesman for transport and roads,

Martin Ferguson, said in February this year when commenting on the issue that the buck stops with the state government. He said he knew his responsibilities and that was not one of them. Surely the minister should have counselled Mr Cheeseman to just smile and say absolutely nothing. After all, the whole idea of the visit was to put the heat on the federal government in the run-up to the election and to fire up the attendees to do the same. All that it did was completely, utterly and totally embarrass the new Premier. Do not send him back unless he comes with a cheque in his hand!

Housing: long-term leases

Mr SCOTT (Preston) — I wish to raise an issue for the attention of the Minister for Consumer Affairs. The issue relates to protecting the rights of residential tenants who wish to have leases of over five years. I am requesting the minister to take action to have his department investigate improving the regulatory framework that applies to tenants who are renting for periods over five years.

Recent Australian Bureau of Statistics and other statistical data indicate that more young people and families are renting rather than buying a home. This growth in persons who are and will be long-term renters creates significant issues for young people in the midst of important life stages like family formation and marriage.

In other countries with large numbers of long-term renters leasing is more common, yet in Victoria any lease of over five years is not covered by a number of important regulatory protections. This situation is at first glance illogical. It deserves investigation and, where necessary, to be changed. In conclusion, I hope the minister can take this action to ensure that the interests of my constituents continue to be well served by the Brumby government.

Responses

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Community Development) — The member for Ballarat West once again demonstrated her concern and compassion for the disadvantaged members of her electorate. She raised with me the issue of energy customers who, as a result of financial hardship, are having difficulty paying their bills. The member for Ballarat West is particularly concerned that people in this situation risk having their power or their gas disconnected. This is a very important issue, particularly during winter, as the member so graphically highlighted.

The member for Ballarat West described power as an essential service, and it certainly is that. Disconnection of power over winter when temperatures are low is in no-one's interests, and it is particularly harsh for those who are disadvantaged. Because of action taken by this government Victorian law requires energy retailers not only to have hardship policies but also to submit these policies to the Essential Services Commission for approval.

It is with great pleasure that I report that the Essential Services Commission has now addressed and approved the financial hardship policies of all the energy retailers that are licensed to provide electricity and gas here in Victoria. These retailers are also required to publish their gas and electricity hardship policies on their internet websites in order to provide greater transparency for customers. So if you want to know what your energy retailer's hardship policy is, all you need to do is go to its website, and it should be there for you and anybody else to see.

Victoria is the first state in Australia to have legislation which requires energy retailers to produce best practice hardship policies. Financial hardship policies outline details of payment plans, government support services and financial counselling, as well as the energy-saving measures that can be taken to reduce power bills and ease the financial burden. In Victoria energy retailers must provide customers in hardship with options for bill payments, home energy audits and the replacement of electrical or gas appliances. These measures are about recognising that energy retailers have social obligations because they act as providers of essential services.

This is just one of the many ways in which protections have been secured for the benefit of all Victorians by a Labor government. This is why Victoria has the strongest protection for consumers of essential services anywhere in Australia. For example, in Victoria energy retailers are now obliged to pay a customer \$250 per day if the customer is wrongly disconnected. Of course the prospect of that penalty has significantly reduced the number of gas and electricity disconnections here in Victoria. In fact disconnections are at a 20-year low.

In Victoria we have also provided legislation prohibiting late-payment fees and requiring energy retailers to publish market electricity and gas offers on their websites. If you want to take advantage of the competitive market, you can go to the energy retailers' websites and see what the various competing rates are. Victoria is the only state to have abolished these late-payment fees. All other states impose them. They

impose payments of up to \$11 for missing a single payment, and some can charge interest on top of that.

In Victoria we offer a range of concessions for customers experiencing difficulty paying their bills, including the utility relief grant, which provides one-off assistance for domestic customers who are unable to pay their utility bills due to a temporary financial crisis. Of course there is the longstanding winter energy concession, which offers the holder of an eligible health-care card a 17.5 per cent reduction in mains gas and electricity expenses incurred in the winter months of May through to November each year. If people want to get more details of these winter relief concessions, they can do so by going to the Department of Human Services website.

Victoria is doing more than any other state to ensure that vulnerable customers are protected, and we intend to keep it that way. Victoria's customer protection standards will not be sacrificed as the regulation of retail energy goes national. We will continue to ensure that the interests of consumers in this state are comprehensively protected into the future, not just in Ballarat West but right across Victoria.

Mr MERLINO (Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs) — The member for Melton raised the issue of a bike shed grant for a school in his electorate. I thank the member not only for his request but also for the regular lobbying that he does on behalf of sporting clubs in his electorate. Whether it is the country football and netball program, the community facilities funding program or the very popular sports uniform grants, the member for Melton is always keen to alert his local clubs to the grants available to help them grow stronger and, more importantly, raise participation levels, which is what all of those sport and recreation grants are about.

In this instance the program the member referred to is the Go for Your Life bike shed seeding grants. This is a \$400 000 program that offers \$5000 grants to schools to construct new bike storage facilities or improve existing storage facilities. The program was developed after it was found that the provision of secure bike storage dramatically increased the number of students riding to school on a daily basis: if you provide the kids with secure storage and protect the bikes from the weather, it dramatically increases the number of young people who ride to school. That can only be a good thing, because, as the member for Melton said, the current percentage of children walking or riding to school is a shadow of its former self. The drop from 80 per cent to 20 per cent in only three decades is quite amazing.

The Brumby government is set on reducing this trend. As we all know, being actively involved in a sport like cycling, when it is done properly, helps with our health and wellbeing. Along with the bike shed grants, we will also seek to reverse this trend through a bicycle giveaway program that will see Victorian students share in 1000 free bikes through the revamped Ride to School program run by Bicycle Victoria. The bikes will be provided to year 6 students to help them make an active transition to secondary school and to help them make using active transport methods a lifelong habit. What often happens is that they are quite active while they are in primary school, but as soon as they get to secondary school they no longer ride their bikes to school.

The Brumby government is committed to creating more opportunities for Victorians to get healthy and active. We will continue to place it as one of our key priorities. I assure the member for Melton that the application by Coburn Primary School is being strongly considered. I look forward to announcing the successful schools very shortly.

Mr ROBINSON (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — The member for Preston raised an issue for my attention in relation to residential tenants who are seeking protection when renting beyond five years. The member has a well-known and longstanding interest in residential tenancy issues. He has done some great work over a number of years, as did his predecessor in the field. I acknowledge that work and assure him that I am more than happy to work with him and Consumer Affairs Victoria to ensure that we get the right policy settings to deal with what is a developing trend in Victoria for longer term residential tenancy leases.

He made the point that Victoria is catching up with the rest of the world, where this is more of an oncoming feature. We need to adjust the policy settings in Victoria to take account of this emerging trend, and I assure him we will do just that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The minister, to refer matters raised by the members for Brighton, Swan Hill, Box Hill, Cranbourne, Scoresby, Mordialloc and Polwarth.

Mr ROBINSON — A number of members have raised matters for the attention of ministers, and I will be pleased to refer those on.

Ms Asher — On a point of order, Deputy Speaker, the Premier made a statement that this Parliament would be more accountable, but I note that nothing has changed. The new Minister for Water, for example, is not in the chamber to answer my — —

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for Brighton is well aware that that is not a point of order. Ministers are not required to attend the adjournment debate.

The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 10.37 p.m.

