

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Wednesday, 4 October 2006

(Extract from book 13)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

Professor DAVID de KRETSER, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

The ministry

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Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrections	The Hon. T. J. Holding, MP
Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Planning	The Hon. R. J. Hulls, MP
Minister for Aged Care and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs	The Hon. Gavin Jennings, MLC
Minister for Education and Training	The Hon. L. J. Kosky, MP
Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Commonwealth Games	The Hon. J. M. Madden, MLC
Minister for Gaming, Minister for Racing, Minister for Tourism and Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs	The Hon. J. Pandazopoulos, MP
Minister for Health	The Hon. B. J. Pike, MP
Minister for Energy Industries and Minister for Resources	The Hon. T. C. Theophanous, MLC
Minister for Consumer Affairs and Minister for Information and Communication Technology	The Hon. M. R. Thomson, MLC
Cabinet Secretary	Mr R. W. Wynne, MP

Legislative Assembly committees

Privileges Committee — Mr Cooper, Mr Herbert, Mr Honeywood, Ms Lindell, Mr Lupton, Mr Maughan, Mr Nardella, Mr Perton and Mr Stensholt.

Standing Orders Committee — The Speaker, Ms Campbell, Mr Cooper, Mr Helper, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Loney and Mrs Powell.

Joint committees

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Cooper, Ms Marshall, Mr Maxfield, Dr Sykes and Mr Wells. (*Council*): The Honourable S. M. Nguyen and Mr Scheffer.

Economic Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Delahunty, Mr Jenkins, Ms Morand and Mr Robinson. (*Council*): The Honourables B. N. Atkinson and R. H. Bowden, and Mr Pullen.

Education and Training Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Eckstein, Mr Herbert, Mr Kotsiras, Ms Munt and Mr Perton. (*Council*): The Honourables H. E. Buckingham and P. R. Hall.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Duncan, Ms Lindell and Mr Seitz. (*Council*): The Honourables Andrea Coote, D. K. Drum, J. G. Hilton and W. A. Lovell.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms McTaggart, Ms Neville, Mrs Powell Mrs Shardey and Mr Wilson. (*Council*): The Honourable D. McL. Davis and Mr Smith.

House Committee — (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr Cooper, Mr Leighton, Mr Lockwood, Mr Maughan and Mr Smith. (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), the Honourables B. N. Atkinson and Andrew Brideson, Ms Hadden and the Honourables J. M. McQuilten and S. M. Nguyen.

Law Reform Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Beard, Ms Beattie, Mr Hudson, Mr Lupton and Mr Maughan. (*Council*): The Honourable Richard Dalla-Riva, Ms Hadden and the Honourables J. G. Hilton and David Koch.

Library Committee — (*Assembly*): The Speaker, Mr Carli, Mrs Powell, Mr Seitz and Mr Thompson. (*Council*): The President, Ms Argondizzo and the Honourables Richard Dalla-Riva, Kaye Darveniza and C. A. Strong.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Buchanan, Mr Dixon, Mr Honeywood, Mr Nardella and Mr Smith. (*Council*): Ms Argondizzo, Hon. C. D. Hirsh and Mr Somyurek.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr Clark, Ms Green and Mr Merlino. (*Council*): The Honourables W. R. Baxter, Bill Forwood and G. K. Rich-Phillips, Ms Romanes and Mr Somyurek.

Road Safety Committee — (*Assembly*): Dr Harkness, Mr Langdon, Mr Mulder and Mr Trezise. (*Council*): The Honourables B. W. Bishop, J. H. Eren and E. G. Stoney.

Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee — (*Assembly*): Mr Crutchfield, Mr Hardman, Mr Ingram, Dr Napthine and Mr Walsh. (*Council*): The Honourables J. M. McQuilten and R. G. Mitchell.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Assembly*): Ms D'Ambrosio, Mr Jasper, Mr Leighton, Mr Lockwood, Mr McIntosh, Mr Perera and Mr Thompson. (*Council*): Ms Argondizzo and the Honourable Andrew Brideson.

Heads of parliamentary departments

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

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

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Dr S. O'Kane

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

Speaker: The Hon. JUDY MADDIGAN

Deputy Speaker: Mr P. J. LONEY

Acting Speakers: Ms Barker, Ms Campbell, Mr Cooper, Mr Delahunty, Mr Ingram, Mr Jasper, Mr Kotsiras, Mr Languiller, Ms Lindell, Mr Nardella, Mr Plowman, Mr Savage, Mr Seitz, Mr Smith and Mr Thompson

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The Hon. S. P. BRACKS

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party and Deputy Premier:
The Hon. J. W. THWAITES

Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Leader of the Opposition:
Mr E. N. BAILLIEU

Deputy Leader of the Parliamentary Liberal Party and Deputy Leader of the Opposition:
The Hon. LOUISE ASHER

Leader of The Nationals:
Mr P. J. RYAN

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:
Mr P. L. WALSH

Member	District	Party	Member	District	Party
Allan, Ms Jacinta Marie	Bendigo East	ALP	Languiller, Mr Telmo Ramon	Derrimut	ALP
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Asher, Ms Louise	Brighton	LP	Lim, Mr Hong	Clayton	ALP
Baillieu, Mr Edward Norman	Hawthorn	LP	Lindell, Ms Jennifer Margaret	Carrum	ALP
Barker, Ms Ann Patricia	Oakleigh	ALP	Lobato, Ms Tamara Louise	Gembrook	ALP
Batchelor, Mr Peter	Thomastown	ALP	Lockwood, Mr Peter John	Bayswater	ALP
Beard, Ms Dympna Anne	Kilsyth	ALP	Loney, Mr Peter James	Lara	ALP
Beattie, Ms Elizabeth Jean	Yuroke	ALP	Lupton, Mr Anthony Gerard	Prahran	ALP
Bracks, Mr Stephen Phillip	Williamstown	ALP	McIntosh, Mr Andrew John	Kew	LP
Brumby, Mr John Mansfield	Broadmeadows	ALP	McTaggart, Ms Heather	Evelyn	ALP
Buchanan, Ms Rosalyn	Hastings	ALP	Maddigan, Mrs Judith Marilyn	Essendon	ALP
Cameron, Mr Robert Graham	Bendigo West	ALP	Marshall, Ms Kirstie	Forest Hill	ALP
Campbell, Ms Christine Mary	Pascoe Vale	ALP	Maughan, Mr Noel John	Rodney	Nats
Carli, Mr Carlo	Brunswick	ALP	Maxfield, Mr Ian John	Narracan	ALP
Clark, Mr Robert William	Box Hill	LP	Merlino, Mr James	Monbulk	ALP
Cooper, Mr Robert Fitzgerald	Mornington	LP	Mildenhall, Mr Bruce Allan	Footscray	ALP
Crutchfield, Mr Michael Paul	South Barwon	ALP	Morand, Ms Maxine Veronica	Mount Waverley	ALP
D'Ambrosio, Ms Liliana	Mill Park	ALP	Mulder, Mr Terence Wynn	Polwarth	LP
Delahunty, Mr Hugh Francis	Lowan	Nats	Munt, Ms Janice Ruth	Mordialloc	ALP
Delahunty, Ms Mary Elizabeth	Northcote	ALP	Napthine, Dr Denis Vincent	South-West Coast	LP
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Doyle, Mr Robert Keith Bennett	Malvern	LP	Overington, Ms Karen Marie	Ballarat West	ALP
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Garbutt, Ms Sherryl Maree	Bundoora	ALP	Perton, Mr Victor John	Doncaster	LP
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Green, Ms Danielle Louise	Yan Yean	ALP	Plowman, Mr Antony Fulton	Benambra	LP
Haermeyer, Mr André	Kororoit	ALP	Powell, Mrs Elizabeth Jeanette	Shepparton	Nats
Hardman, Mr Benedict Paul	Seymour	ALP	Robinson, Mr Anthony Gerard	Mitcham	ALP
Harkness, Dr Alistair Ross	Frankston	ALP	Ryan, Mr Peter Julian	Gippsland South	Nats
Helper, Mr Jochen	Ripon	ALP	Savage, Mr Russell Irwin	Mildura	Ind
Herbert, Mr Steven Ralph	Eltham	ALP	Seitz, Mr George	Keilor	ALP
Holding, Mr Timothy James	Lyndhurst	ALP	Shardey, Mrs Helen Jean	Caulfield	LP
Honeywood, Mr Phillip Neville	Warrandyte	LP	Smith, Mr Kenneth Maurice	Bass	LP
Howard, Mr Geoffrey Kemp	Ballarat East	ALP	Stensholt, Mr Robert Einar	Burwood	ALP
Hudson, Mr Robert John	Bentleigh	ALP	Sykes, Dr William Everett	Benalla	Nats
Hulls, Mr Rob Justin	Niddrie	ALP	Thompson, Mr Murray Hamilton Ross	Sandringham	LP
Ingram, Mr Craig	Gippsland East	Ind	Thwaites, Mr Johnstone William	Albert Park	ALP
Jasper, Mr Kenneth Stephen	Murray Valley	Nats	Trezise, Mr Ian Douglas	Geelong	ALP
Jenkins, Mr Brendan James	Morwell	ALP	Walsh, Mr Peter Lindsay	Swan Hill	Nats
Kosky, Ms Lynne Janice	Altona	ALP	Wells, Mr Kimberley Arthur	Scoresby	LP
Kotsiras, Mr Nicholas	Bulleen	LP	Wilson, Mr Dale Lester	Narre Warren South	ALP
Langdon, Mr Craig Anthony Cuffe	Ivanhoe	ALP	Wynne, Mr Richard William	Richmond	ALP

CONTENTS

WEDNESDAY, 4 OCTOBER 2006

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
<i>Notices of motion: removal</i>	3541
<i>Adjournment</i>	3547
<i>Photographing of proceedings</i>	3581
NOTICES OF MOTION.....	3541
PETITIONS	
<i>Water: farm dams</i>	3541
<i>Ambulance services: Riddells Creek</i>	3541
<i>Ferntree Gully Primary School: historic buildings</i>	3541
<i>Public transport: Geelong</i>	3542
<i>Mornington: activity centre</i>	3542
<i>Water: irrigators</i>	3542
<i>La Trobe University: Shepparton campus</i>	3542
OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE	
<i>Report 2005–06</i>	3542
MELBOURNE 2006 COMMONWEALTH GAMES	
<i>Special purpose financial and overall summary reports</i>	3543
HEALTH SERVICES COMMISSIONER	
<i>Report 2005–06</i>	3543
PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS	
<i>Reports 2005–06</i>	3543
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE	
<i>Private investment in public infrastructure</i>	3543
EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE	
<i>Effects of television and multimedia on education in Victoria</i>	3543
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE	
<i>Incidence and prevention of pedestrian accidents</i>	3543
COUNTY COURT	
<i>Report 2005–06</i>	3543
DOCUMENTS	3543, 3590
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
<i>Member for Frankston: representation</i>	3549
<i>Nepean electorate: government record</i>	3550
<i>Cheltenham East Primary School: achievements</i>	3550
<i>Hayley Wallis</i>	3550
<i>Parliament: staff</i>	3550
<i>Country Fire Authority: enterprise bargaining agreement</i>	3551
<i>Chelsea Seagulls</i>	3551
<i>Police: numbers</i>	3551
<i>Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Bentleigh: 2061, A Space Idiocy</i>	3552
<i>Treasurer: questions on notice</i>	3552
<i>Hospitals: Moe</i>	3552
<i>Schools: Gippsland East electorate</i>	3553
<i>Vic Marks</i>	3553
<i>Supreme Court: jurisdiction</i>	3553
<i>Whitehorse Club: gala dinner</i>	3554
<i>Avila College: debutante ball</i>	3554
<i>Hazel Edwards</i>	3554
<i>Drought: cloud seeding</i>	3554
<i>Bellarine Living and Learning Centre: Young Mums Art project</i>	3554
<i>Housing: Caulfield electorate</i>	3555
<i>Uniting Church: fifth synod</i>	3555
<i>Schools: Yan Yean electorate</i>	3555
<i>Diabetes: kidney disease test</i>	3556
<i>Brendan O’Kane</i>	3556
<i>State Emergency Service: Melton units</i>	3556
GRIEVANCES	
<i>Office of Police Integrity: procedures</i>	3557
<i>The Nationals: policies</i>	3559
<i>Rural and regional Victoria: government assistance</i>	3561
<i>Liberal Party: public transport statements</i>	3564
<i>Schools: government record</i>	3566
<i>Liberal Party and The Nationals: policies</i>	3569
<i>Government: financial management</i>	3571
<i>Members: retirements</i>	3574
<i>Liberal Party: policies</i>	3574
STATEMENTS ON REPORTS	
<i>Education and Training Committee: effects of television and multimedia on education in Victoria</i>	3576, 3581
<i>Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2006–07</i>	3577
<i>Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: private investment in public infrastructure</i>	3578
<i>Road Safety Committee: incidence and prevention of pedestrian accidents</i>	3578
<i>Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee: retaining young people in rural towns and communities</i>	3579, 3580
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE	
<i>Gaming: regional caps</i>	3581
<i>Housing: Wendouree West neighbourhood renewal</i>	3582
<i>Rural and regional Victoria: government initiatives</i>	3583
<i>Schools: funding</i>	3583, 3585
<i>Gaming: public lotteries licence</i>	3584, 3587, 3588
<i>Hospitals: government record</i>	3587
<i>Government: financial management</i>	3588, 3589
SUSPENSION OF MEMBER	3589
SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE	
<i>Alert Digest No. 12</i>	3590
SERIOUS SEX OFFENDERS MONITORING (AMENDMENT) BILL	
<i>Second reading</i>	3590
<i>Remaining stages</i>	3596
WATER (GOVERNANCE) BILL	
<i>Second reading</i>	3596
<i>Circulated amendments</i>	3606
<i>Remaining stages</i>	3607
VALEDICTORY STATEMENTS.....	3608

CONTENTS

ADJOURNMENT

<i>Law Reform Committee: regulatory efficiency</i>	
<i>legislation</i>	3625
<i>Midfield Meat International: apprentices</i>	3626
<i>Hospitals: rural and regional</i>	3627
<i>Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve:</i>	
<i>funding</i>	3627
<i>Schools: Bulleen electorate</i>	3628
<i>The Nationals: Gippsland East candidate</i>	3628
<i>Rail: Wodonga bypass</i>	3629
<i>Schools: Yan Yean electorate</i>	3629
<i>Brauer College: science block</i>	3630
<i>Telecommunications: mobile phone towers</i>	3630
<i>Responses</i>	3631

Wednesday, 4 October 2006

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of motion: removal

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to advise the house that under standing order 144 notices of motion 105 to 106, 194 to 204 and 301 will be removed from the notice paper on the next sitting day. A member who requires a notice standing in his or her name to be continued must advise the Clerk in writing by 2 o'clock today.

NOTICES OF MOTION

Notices of motion given.

Mr MILDENHALL having given notice of motion:

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, I would like you to rule on the notice of motion just given by the member for Footscray. He said he would move it on the next day of sitting. My understanding is that the member for Footscray has announced that he will not be contesting the election, and it would therefore seem to me that he will not be able to do what he said he would do.

Mr Loney — On the point of order, Speaker, I believe the member for Mornington is anticipating something that is listed later on the notice paper, which concerns a motion regarding the sitting of the house which has not yet been determined.

The SPEAKER — Order! I do not uphold the point of order. A further notice paper will be printed for the house, and it is quite possible the house may sit again.

Further notices of motion given.

Mr LUPTON having given notice of motion:

The SPEAKER — Order! I think the last part of that notice was out of order.

Further notices of motion given.

PETITIONS

Following petitions presented to house:

Water: farm dams

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of citizens of Victoria concerned that the farm dams legislation has created an inequity whereby:

the inherent property right to the use of the water that falls on farmland was removed (this common-law right was introduced from the British Parliament on the proclamation of the state of Victoria); and

that no compensation was made available to those landowners who lost that property right.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria review the farm dams legislation in order to overturn these inequities.

By Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) (497 signatures)

Ambulance services: Riddells Creek

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the residents of Riddells Creek draws to the attention of the house the need to enhance health care by providing access to improved ambulance services.

The petitioners therefore request the Legislative Assembly of Victoria to base an ambulance resource in the immediate township of Riddells Creek to improve the health outcomes of our community.

By Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) (1002 signatures)

Ferntree Gully Primary School: historic buildings

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of the municipality of Knox draws to the attention of the house the Association for the Preservation of Ferntree Gully Primary Schools Historic Buildings.

The association's objective is to ensure that the original Ferntree Gully Primary School teacher residence and classroom both built in 1883, the classroom built in 1901 and a third classroom built in 1937, are retained and maintained in good condition for the benefit of the local community.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

retain the buildings aforementioned for use by the local community;

that funding be available by the government of Victoria to ensure that the buildings are preserved and maintained in recognition and respect of our past heritage and for the benefit of future generations.

By Ms ECKSTEIN (Ferntree Gully) (84 signatures)

Public transport: Geelong

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of residents of, and visitors to, the Geelong region draws the attention of the house to the urgent need to bring public transport services in the region up to useable standards, particularly in the light of rising oil prices.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria ensure that, within 12 months of the forthcoming election, the government of the day will provide:

a 15-minute bus service frequency during the day, and a 30-minute frequency in the late evening, for Geelong urban buses;

urban bus services until midnight;

hourly bus services to Torquay and towns on the Bellarine Peninsula, with half-hourly services at peak times;

effective connections with other buses and with trains;

the return of bus stops to the centre of Geelong city;

disabled access to platforms 2 and 3 at Geelong station.

By Mr TREZISE (Geelong) (1028 signatures)

Mornington: activity centre

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the residents of Victoria draws to the attention of the house the opposition of the residents of Mornington to the final draft structure plan for the Mornington activity centre.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria call on the Mornington Peninsula Shire to withdraw these plans until it can prove to the government the community acceptance.

By Mr COOPER (Mornington) (182 signatures)

Water: irrigators

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the following residents of northern Victoria draws to the attention of the house our condemnation of a proposal by the Bracks Labor government to pipe precious water from the already stressed Goulburn irrigation system to Bendigo and Ballarat without any consultation of stakeholders.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria ensure that no water be purchased from distressed irrigators in the Goulburn system for urban use in Ballarat and Bendigo. The petitioners further request that Coliban Water and Central Highlands Water exhaust all water-saving options in their own system first, and as a last resort if water is needed from the Goulburn system, the urban authorities fund water infrastructure projects to generate equivalent water savings for their needs.

By Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) (3077 signatures)

La Trobe University: Shepparton campus

To the Legislative Assembly of Victoria:

The petition of the residents of Victoria points out to the house that the state government has committed \$2 million to La Trobe University in order for it to establish a stand-alone campus in Shepparton. Recently La Trobe University announced that it is reviewing its regional operations. It has called for submissions to this review by 6 October 2006. Pending this review, the planned campus has been placed on hold.

The petitioners therefore request that the Legislative Assembly of Victoria ensure that the said \$2 million committed by the state government remain allocated to the Shepparton region. This funding should remain in order for a university campus to be established in Shepparton should La Trobe University decide to abort a stand-alone campus in the Shepparton region.

By Mrs POWELL (Shepparton) (1817 signatures)

Tabled.

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

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Shepparton be considered next day on motion of Mrs POWELL (Shepparton).

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Ferntree Gully be considered next day on motion of Ms ECKSTEIN (Ferntree Gully).

Ordered that petition presented by honourable member for Caulfield be considered next day on motion of Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield).

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

OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE**Report 2005–06**

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Agriculture), by leave, presented report.

Tabled.

MELBOURNE 2006 COMMONWEALTH GAMES

Special purpose financial and overall summary reports

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Agriculture), by leave, presented Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games special purpose financial report and Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games Corporation overall summary report for period 15 July 1999 to 31 August 2006.

Tabled.

HEALTH SERVICES COMMISSIONER

Report 2005–06

Ms PIKE (Minister for Health), by leave, presented report.

Tabled.

PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS

Reports 2005–06

Mr LONEY (Lara), by leave, presented reports of Department of the Legislative Assembly and Department of Parliamentary Services for 2005–06 and report of 150th anniversary celebrations.

Tabled.

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, I note that this morning four reports have been tabled by leave by ministers under standing order 176, which is headed ‘Documents not presented under an act’. I also note that under standing order 173 some 215 documents are being tabled today under various acts of Parliament. Yesterday a similar number of reports were tabled under various acts of Parliament. I ask that a review be undertaken by you, Speaker, in relation to these standing orders to prevent what is patently and blatantly an abuse of this Parliament and its processes. With respect, Speaker, we could have a report with regard to the operation of these standing orders, because at the moment they are failing the people of Victoria.

The SPEAKER — Order! Thank you!

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Private investment in public infrastructure

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

Tabled.

Ordered that report and appendices be printed.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Effects of television and multimedia on education in Victoria

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) presented report, together with appendices, minutes of evidence and extracts from the proceedings.

Tabled.

Ordered that report and appendices be printed.

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Incidence and prevention of pedestrian accidents

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) presented report, together with appendices and minutes of evidence.

Tabled.

Ordered that report and appendices be printed.

COUNTY COURT JUDGES

Report 2005–06

Mr HULLS (Attorney-General) presented report by command of the Governor.

Tabled.

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Accident Compensation Conciliation Service — Report for the year 2005–06

Adult, Community and Further Education Board — Report for the year 2005–06

Alexandra District Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Alpine Health — Report for the year 2005–06

Ambulance Service Victoria — Metropolitan Region — Report for the year 2005–06

Audit Act 1994 — Report of the Auditor-General — Report on the Annual Financial Report of the State of Victoria, 2005–06 — Ordered to be printed

Austin Health — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Australian Grand Prix Corporation — Report for the year 2005–06

Bairnsdale Regional Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Ballarat Health Services — Report for the year 2005–06

Barwon Health — Report for the year 2005–06

Barwon Region Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Bass Coast Regional Health — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Bayside Health — Report for the year 2005–06

Beaufort and Skipton Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Beechworth Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06

Benalla and District Memorial Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Bendigo Health Care Group — Report for the year 2005–06

Boort District Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06

Casterton Memorial Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Central Gippsland Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06

Central Gippsland Region Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Central Highlands Region Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Child Safety Commissioner — Report for the year 2005–06

Cobram District Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Cohuna District Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06

Colac Area Health — Report for the year 2005–06

Coliban Region Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Consumer Affairs Victoria — Report for the year 2005–06 — Ordered to be printed

Country Fire Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Dental Health Services Victoria — Report for the year 2005–06

Djerriwarrh Health Services — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

East Gippsland Catchment Management Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

East Gippsland Regional Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

East Grampians Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Eastern Health — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Echuca Regional Health — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06

Education and Training, Department of — Report for the year 2005–06

Emerald Tourist Railway Board — Report for the year 2005–06

Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Energy Safe Victoria — Report for the period 10 August 2005 to 30 June 2006

Equal Opportunity Commission — Report for the year 2005–06 — Ordered to be printed

Film Victoria — Report for the year 2005–06

Financial Management Act 1994:

Report from the Minister for Agriculture that he had received the 2005–06 annual report of the Murray Valley Citrus Board

Report from the Minister for Environment that he had received the 2005–06 annual report of the Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability

Reports from the Minister for Health that she had received the 2005–06 annual reports of:

Ballarat General Cemeteries Trust

Cheltenham and Regional Cemeteries Trust

Chinese Medicine Registration Board

Chiropractors Registration Board

Dental Practice Board

Dunmunkle Health Service

Geelong Cemeteries Trust

Health Purchasing Victoria

Lorne Community Hospital

Manangatang and District Hospital

- Mental Health Review Board
- Nathalia District Hospital
- O'Connell Family Centre
- Omeo District Health
- Optometrists Registration Board
- Osteopaths Registration Board
- Pharmacy Board
- Physiotherapists Registration Board
- Podiatrists Registration Board
- Timboon and District Healthcare Service
- Tweddle Child and Family Health Service
- Wyndham Cemeteries Trust
- Reports from the Minister for Planning that he had received the 2005–06 annual reports of the:
- Architects Registration Board
- Heritage Council
- Surveyors Registration Board
- Reports from the Premier that he had received the 2005–06 annual reports of:
- Shrine of Remembrance
- VITS Languagelink
- First Mildura Irrigation Trust — Report for the year 2005–06
- Food Safety Council — Report for the year 2005–06
- Freedom of Information Act 1982* — Report of the Attorney-General on the operation of the Act for the year 2005–06
- Geelong Performing Arts Centre Trust — Report for the year 2005–06
- Gippsland and Southern Rural Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)
- Gippsland Southern Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)
- Goulburn-Murray Rural Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06
- Goulburn Valley Health — Report for the year 2005–06
- Goulburn Valley Region Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06
- Greyhound Racing Victoria — Report for the year 2005–06
- Harness Racing Victoria — Report for the year 2005–06
- Health Services Act 1988* — Report of the Community Visitors for the year 2005–06 — Ordered to be printed
- Hepburn Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06
- Hesse Rural Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06
- Heywood Rural Health — Report for the year 2005–06
- Human Services, Department of — Report for the year 2005–06
- Infertility Treatment Authority — Report for the year 2005–06
- Infrastructure, Department of — Report for the year 2005–06
- Inglewood and Districts Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06
- Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, Department of — Report for the year 2005–06
- Intellectually Disabled Persons' Services Act 1986* — Report of the Community Visitors for the year 2005–06
- Judicial College of Victoria — Report for the year 2005–06
- Justice, Department of — Report for the year 2005–06
- Kerang District Health — Report for the year 2005–06
- Kilmore and District Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06
- Kooweerup Regional Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)
- Kyabram and District Health Services — Report for the year 2005–06
- Kyneton District Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06
- Latrobe Regional Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06
- Legal Practice Board — Report for the period 1 July 2005 to 11 December 2005
- Legal Practitioners Liability Committee — Report for the year 2005–06
- Library Board — Report for the year 2005–06
- Lower Murray Urban and Rural Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06
- McIvor Health and Community Services — Report for the year 2005–06
- Maldon Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06
- Mansfield District Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06 (three documents)
- Maryborough District Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)
- Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games Corporation — Report for the year 2005–06
- Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Trust — Report for the year 2005–06
- Melbourne Health — Report for the year 2005–06
- Melbourne Water Corporation — Report for the year 2005–06
- Members of Parliament (Register of Interests) Act 1978* — Cumulative Summary of Returns — 30 September 2006 — Ordered to be printed

- Mental Health Act 1986* — Report of the Community Visitors for the year 2005–06
- Mercy Public Hospitals Incorporated — Report for the year 2005–06 (three documents)
- Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board — Report for the year 2005–06
- Moyne Health Services — Report for the year 2005–06
- Mt Alexander Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06
- Museums Board — Report for the year 2005–06
- National Gallery, Council of Trustees — Report for the year 2005–06
- National Parks Act 1975* — Report on the working of the Act for the year 2005–06
- North East Water — Report for the year 2005–06
- Northeast Health Wangaratta — Report for the year 2005–06
- Northern Health — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)
- Numurkah District Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)
- Nurses Board — Report for the year 2005–06
- Orbost Regional Health — Report for the year 2005–06
- Otway Health and Community Services — Report for the year 2005–06
- Peninsula Health — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)
- Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre — Report for the year 2005–06
- Port of Hastings Corporation — Report for the year 2005–06
- Port of Melbourne Corporation — Report for the year 2005–06
- Port Phillip and Westernport Catchment Management Authority — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)
- Portland District Health — Report for the year 2005–06
- Prince Henry's Institute of Medical Research — Report for the year 2005–06
- Professional Standards Council Victoria — Report for the year 2005–06
- Public Prosecutions — Report of the Director, Committee and Office for the year 2005–06
- Public Transport Ticketing Body — Report for the year 2005–06
- Queen Elizabeth Centre — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)
- Queen Victoria Women's Centre Trust — Report for the year 2005–06
- Regional Development Victoria — Report for the year 2005–06
- Roads Corporation — Report for the year 2005–06
- Robinvale District Health Services — Report for the year 2005–06
- Rochester and Elmore District Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06
- Rolling Stock Holdings (Victoria) Pty Limited — Report for the year 2005–06
- Rolling Stock Holdings (Victoria-VL) Pty Limited — Report for the year 2005–06
- Rolling Stock (VL-1) Pty Limited — Report for the year 2005–06
- Rolling Stock (VL-2) Pty Limited — Report for the year 2005–06
- Rolling Stock (VL-3) Pty Limited — Report for the year 2005–06
- Royal Children's Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06
- Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06
- Royal Women's Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06
- Rural Ambulance Victoria — Report for the year 2005–06
- Rural Finance Corporation — Report for the year 2005–06
- Rural Northwest Health — Report for the year 2005–06
- Sentencing Advisory Council — Report for the year 2005–06
- Small Business Commissioner — Report of the Office for the year 2005–06
- South Gippsland Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06
- South Gippsland Region Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06
- South West Healthcare — Report for the year 2005–06
- Southern and Eastern Integrated Transport Authority — Report for the year 2005–06
- Southern Cross Station Authority — Report for the year 2005–06
- Southern Health — Report for the year 2005–06
- Special Investigations Monitor — Report of the Office for the year 2005–06
- State Services Authority — Report for the year 2005–06
- Stawell Regional Health — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)
- Sustainability and Environment, Department of — Report for the year 2005–06
- Sustainability Victoria — Report for the year 2005–06

Swan Hill District Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06

Tallangatta Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Terang and Mortlake Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06

Terrorism (Community Protection) Act 2003 — Report by the Chief Commissioner for the year 2005–06

Tourism Victoria — Report for the year 2005–06

Tricontinental Holdings Ltd — Financial statement for the year 2005

Upper Murray Health and Community Services — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Victoria Legal Aid — Report for the year 2005–06

Victoria Police — Report of the Office of the Chief Commissioner for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Victoria State Emergency Services Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Victoria Trade and Investment Office Pty Ltd — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Arts Centre Trust — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Communities, Department of — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Electoral Commission — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Energy Networks Corporation — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Health Promotion Foundation — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Victorian Industry Participation Policy — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Institute of Forensic Medicine — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Institute of Forensic Mental Health — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Institute of Teaching — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Law Reform Commission — Report for the year 2005–06 — Ordered to be printed

Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Privacy Commissioner — Report of the Office for the year 2005–06 — Ordered to be printed

Victorian Qualifications Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Rail Heritage Operations Pty Ltd — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Rail Track — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Regional Channels Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Victorian Urban Development Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

V/Line Passenger Corporation — Report for the year 2005–06

V/Line Passenger Pty Ltd — Report for the year 2005–06

Wannon Water — Report of the year 2005–06

West Gippsland Healthcare Group — Report for the year 2005–06

West Wimmera Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06

Western District Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06

Western Health — Report for the year 2005–06

Western Region Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Westernport Region Water Authority — Report for the year 2005–06

Wimmera Health Care Group — Report for the year 2005–06

Wodonga Regional Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Yarram and District Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Yarrowonga District Health Service — Report for the year 2005–06 (two documents)

Yea and District Memorial Hospital — Report for the year 2005–06

Young Farmers' Finance Council — Report for the year 2005–06.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Adjournment

Mr CAMERON (Minister for Agriculture) — I move:

That the house, at its rising, adjourn until a day and hour to be fixed by the Speaker, which time of meeting shall be notified in writing to each member of the house.

Mr COOPER (Mornington) — It is an appropriate time for this house to consider this motion in the context particularly of what was raised some moments ago by the Leader of The Nationals with regard to the inability of this house to scrutinise some very important documents that have been presented to it today. I believe more documents are going to be presented to the Parliament after this house has risen.

This is an abuse of the system. Whilst the government may not be worried about scrutinising such documents, the opposition and The Nationals certainly are. We are now confronting a situation where this house is going to rise, as far as ordinary business is concerned, at 4.30 p.m. today when the guillotine will be applied to legislation. Yet, as the Leader of The Nationals earlier said, today over 200 annual reports have been lodged in this house and yesterday a large number were lodged as well. This does not give any member of this house the opportunity to raise issues about any of those reports.

I protest at the way this has happened and the fact that the Parliament is now effectively going to be closed down until February next year, by which stage some of these issues, which should be matters of moment both for this Parliament and the people of Victoria, will be dead and buried. They certainly will be very stale, if not dead and buried.

This is an abuse of the system and this Parliament. My reason for standing right now is not so much to oppose the motion that has been moved by the minister but simply to protest on behalf of opposition members of this Parliament and the people of Victoria who effectively are having their representation by their members in this place truncated in a very unfortunate way.

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — I also want to take the opportunity not to oppose the motion before the house but to protest at the huge number of reports that have been tabled both yesterday and today. That denies the people of Victoria and this Parliament the opportunity to adequately scrutinise and question those reports.

I also link that with the motion moved by the member for Sandringham earlier today about the lack of scrutiny with ministers not coming into the house during the adjournment debate. Frequently just the minister at the table responds to all the matters raised by members. That is an abuse of the forms of the Parliament. When members raise important issues they expect ministers to respond. Night after night we see just the minister at the table responding. The notion is that members, on behalf of their constituents, should be able to raise issues that are of concern to them and they should be able to get a response from ministers.

I take this opportunity to protest at the long delay when there will be no scrutiny of those important reports that were tabled yesterday and today and to reinforce the fact that this government has been abusing the privilege of the adjournment debate by not coming in and responding to matters raised by members of this house.

Mr STENSHOLT (Burwood) — I support the motion. I am just amazed by the hypocrisy of and the crocodile tears shed by the members for Mornington and Rodney in saying that agreeing to the motion would deny a proper scrutiny of the many annual reports that have been tabled.

Let us get some facts on the matter. The people working for the state of Victoria have laboured long and hard to produce these reports well ahead of time. They ought to be commended, rather than having stunts such as littering the lawns of Parliament House, as the Leader of the Opposition did yesterday. The reports have been delivered weeks in advance of the statutory time and they are available to be looked at and for scrutiny by the Parliament and our constituents and able to be commented on publicly. This is something to be commended, and we ought to support the public sector here in Victoria rather than having the opposition and The Nationals denigrating the efforts of our great public sector here in Victoria.

Mr Cooper interjected.

Mr STENSHOLT — You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You have been here long enough — —

The SPEAKER — Order! Through the Chair.

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, the member for Burwood has just made an allegation that I have been denigrating the efforts of public servants. That is an absolute fallacy, it is a lie, and I ask him to withdraw.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member is engaging in debate.

Mr STENSHOLT — I was actually talking about the Liberal Party denigrating the efforts of the public sector. Members of the Liberal Party are the ones who actually want to sack people in the public sector; they are the ones who actually did so last time — —

Mr Cooper interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Mornington.

Mr STENSHOLT — The fact that these reports have been put before Parliament is a virtue; it is not something to be ashamed of. It is a fact that these people have worked very hard. The Parliament ought to commend them on the fact that these reports are available to be looked at and scrutinised.

Mr Cooper interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I warn the member for Mornington!

Mr STENSHOLT — The member for Mornington has been unable to spend his time to look at these things, but now he has plenty of time to look at them. Usually they are put out by the end of the month and here we have them at the beginning of October. They are available to be looked at now, weeks earlier than would usually be the case. This is something to be commended. The Leader of The Nationals also ought to be ashamed of himself for the comments that he made. The fact is that these reports have been presented to the Parliament, and they have been presented in an extraordinarily timely fashion.

Mr Cooper interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have warned the member for Mornington. One more word from him and I will suspend him.

Mr STENSHOLT — These reports are available to be looked at by the Parliament and by our constituency, the people of Victoria, in the public arena. I commend this motion.

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I support the comments by the member for Mornington on the motion that we are debating and pick up on comments made by the member for Burwood. I do not think that either the opposition or The Nationals have been criticising the fact that reports have been presented to this Parliament. The comments that were made were that there should be adequate scrutiny within and outside Parliament in the lead-up to an election. The sitting of the house is an important thing that we should be doing. There must be real scrutiny of government.

The issue is that because we have fixed terms we know exactly when an election will be held. Because of the manipulation of the sitting dates — the fact that this month we are sitting for only two days really and we sat only one week last month — these reports have to be presented in Parliament this week. Because Parliament will be prorogued at the end of today, there is no opportunity for many of the reports and the relevant authorities that have put the information forward to be scrutinised by this place. That is a real travesty of the democratic principles of this state.

In the future we must address this and make sure that there are adequate sitting dates in the lead-up to the fixed date of the election. There should be criticism of the government and the sitting of the house as has been put forward in this instance. I do not think it is adequate, and I do not think the system as it has

developed is a good one. I fully support fixed terms of Parliament, but we must make sure there is adequate scrutiny in the months before the election date. With those comments I support the comments by the opposition on this motion.

Ms BEATTIE (Yuroke) — I rise to support the government's motion. As has previously been said, we have fixed-term elections now, and if it were not for the government's intervention these reports would not have been tabled. It is a slight on the public service that the opposition has brought up these reports. This is about stunts. We saw a similar stunt yesterday out in the gardens, when the Leader of the Opposition stood there with all the reports and did not take the trouble to read them. Instead he brushed over them and walked away when he could have taken up the reports and read them. The Leader of the Opposition did not even want to read them; he wanted to use them as part of a stunt.

The member for Mornington made the point that we will not be back until February. I say that is anticipating what is going to happen. It is up to the next government to decide when it is going to come back, not for the member for Mornington to anticipate it. The opposition has not taken the trouble to do the work and instead has gone the way it has for the past four years. It will sit there whining and moaning, but it is too lazy to put in the work. From day one of this 55th Parliament it has not put in the work. Here we are on the last day of the Parliament and the opposition still does not want to work.

The government's motion is a good one, and if it were not for the intervention of the government, these reports would not have been tabled. It is a slight on the public service that the people over there just do not want to put in the work. They are looking for an excuse for their own laziness and lack of productivity and will use anybody as an excuse.

Motion agreed to.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Member for Frankston: representation

Dr HARKNESS (Frankston) — In my inaugural speech in early 2003 I committed to standing up for Frankston, and over the last four years the Frankston community has achieved so much. I have worked closely with many residents and local community members over the last four years, and together we have built a stronger community and healed much of the damage inflicted by the previous government.

During my time in office I have made a very conscious effort to be as open and accessible as possible and to implement a range of exciting and innovative projects and initiatives. For me it has been very important to build a positive community, which was rarely seen in Frankston during the sad and sorry years of Liberal representation.

One of the key projects over the last four years has been the push for the Frankston Regional Aquatic Health and Wellness Centre, and much progress has been made there. The Premier recently announced the relocation of one of the FINA world championships pools for the proposed centre, and I am continuing with my efforts to also secure additional state funding. The water minister also visited Frankston last month to announce that the Frankston reservoir site will be retained in public hands for generations to come.

Into the future I will remain focused on further strengthening our local community and delivering a range of initiatives and services. Frankston is now a great place to live and raise a family. At the end of the month, when I become a first-time father, I will feel confident that this child will grow up in a stronger Frankston community thanks to the efforts of the Bracks government. It is indeed an honour to represent this wonderful community, and I look forward to doing so into the future.

Nepean electorate: government record

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — I wish to take this opportunity before the election to tell the government once again about the things which are important to my electorate and which, disappointingly, largely have not been addressed.

The eastern treatment plant at Carrum should be upgraded to A-class and a target date set for the closure of the Gunnamatta outfall. The outfall should not be extended 2 kilometres out to sea at a cost of \$65 million. With the delay of the channel deepening project the government should take the opportunity to have an up-to-date independent analysis done on the economic effects of the dredging on the Mornington Peninsula.

Travelling from Rosebud to the city via the Mornington Peninsula part of the Met costs \$24 return. That is an outrageous amount. An environment effects study needs to be undertaken on options to relieve traffic congestion on Point Nepean Road, which on many days has to handle 30 000-plus vehicles, often on only two lanes. Pensioners are outraged that this government,

which is flush with funds, has made them pay \$80-plus for their car registration.

The government should also come clean on why the obstetrics service at Rosebud Hospital has been reviewed. Before the election it should tell us the outcome of its review. Due to a lack of front-line police, the Rosebud police station, which is a 24-hour station, had to be closed recently on a Saturday night. We need to get police off working parties and committees and get them back on the beat, and back onto the police in schools program as well.

These are the issues that the Nepean electorate will vote on, and out-of-town Labor and Greens candidates will not understand or solve these issues.

Cheltenham East Primary School: achievements

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — I would like to congratulate Cheltenham East Primary School for its victory in the state final of the Wakakirri National Story Festival at Vodafone Arena. Sixty-five students performed a dance called 'A Spark in the Dark'. The dance routine tells the story of a bushland scene devastated by bushfire and its regeneration. Cheltenham East came first in a field of 14 to advance to the national final on 9 December. Congratulations to the students and to teachers Deb Ash and Kerrie Jamieson, and to Leisel Ward, a parent, for their great work. Best wishes for 9 December.

Hayley Wallis

Ms MUNT — Hayley Wallis from Kilvington Girls Grammar School, who was a delight to have with me as a work experience student, writes:

I have been catching the train to and from school every day since I was nine, and I have seen many of the positive adjustments made to our Victorian public transport system.

I heard from many different people that it was the aim of the Victorian government to phase out the older trains by the time we had visitors from overseas for the Commonwealth Games, so that our impression upon them would be of a modern and very livable city. The older dirty trains are now only used in off-peak times, which happen to be the times at which myself and many other school students travel. A better option would be to totally phase out these trains so no-one will have to go through the unpleasant experience of travelling on the older trains.

Parliament: staff

Ms MUNT — I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff of the Parliament for their help and assistance over the past four years. They

do a great job. I really appreciate it, and I thank them very much.

Country Fire Authority: enterprise bargaining agreement

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — Since July last year the Country Fire Authority has been negotiating an enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) with the United Firefighters Union, which represents 450 paid CFA career firefighters. The proposed agreement will adversely affect CFA volunteers. Over 58 000 volunteers are at the heart of the CFA's success in protecting the lives and property of country Victorians. Volunteers quite rightly do not want the union dictating CFA policy via an EBA.

If this agreement is endorsed, the CFA will be unable to place or transfer the career firefighters who support our volunteers without union agreement. Only professional firefighters will be allowed to provide paid volunteer training. The introduction of new personal protective clothing and equipment that meets Australian standards will continue to be delayed. The vetoing of contracts that benefit volunteers and the blocking of efficiency gains will continue. At the moment the CFA is almost out of stocks of foam to fight structural fires. Attempts are being made to bring in new foam compounds, but the union continues to oppose and obstruct the introduction of the new material. Deputy Speaker, you may ask who is running the CFA.

Volunteers are simply asking that in matters affecting both parties, volunteer and career firefighters are able to consult with the CFA as equals. I urge the Bracks government to protect the rights of volunteers by ensuring that the union does not use this EBA to overstep the mark. Our magnificent volunteers may be the casualties.

Chelsea Seagulls

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — On Sunday, 24 September, the mighty Chelsea Seagulls won the premiership in the Mornington Peninsula Nepean Football League. The Chelsea firsts won their first premiership flag for 16 years. The game was played with great spirit and the never-say-die determination of the Chelsea Seagulls saw a great final result. The weather on the day gave us gale force winds and a burst of teeming rain, but the sun was out to shine on the victorious team at the very end.

My congratulations to all players, coaching and training staff and the club administrators. It has been a terrific year. In particular I would like to mention Colin

Caffyn, the president of the Chelsea Seagulls, and also Tim Scott-Branagan, who was the playing coach up until a very nasty accident mid-season, so the premiership has been a really fabulous result for him and his coaching and his enthusiasm and support for his young team. Congratulations also to Brett Bowey who played his final game in the grand final and was awarded the Victorian Country Football League medal for best on ground. Congratulations to all the players. It was a fabulous game to watch and I am hoping that on this coming Saturday night their presentation night will be a great buzz.

Police: numbers

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — This statement condemns the Bracks government for failing to properly resource Victoria Police, which has resulted in front-line policing being placed under enormous strain. A leaked Victoria Police internal memo clearly contradicts the police minister's continuing public statements that our police force is well resourced, and casts grave doubts upon his credibility. The memo shows that although police are into only their third month of the current financial year, the region five budget position has already been described as 'desperate'. As a result, overtime has had to be severely cut:

... even if that means that a time line mandated by policy cannot be met.

The document also states that in some cases police stations will need to be shut due to a shortage of police. The document confirms the current critical shortage of front-line police and further supports the contents of leaked documents released five weeks ago which reveal that 748 police have been taken off the front line over the past two years.

The Bracks Labor government is so focused on wasteful glossy advertising, rhetoric and spin that it is losing all sense of reality and is neglecting to ensure sufficient front-line police numbers.

Local police have raised concerns with me that due to the crisis in front-line police numbers they could face disciplinary charges if they shut the police stations. That is because if they did so they would be committing an offence under the Firearms Act by locking down weapons but leaving the stations unattended. The leaked memo demands some immediate and straightforward answers from the minister. He must explain to the Victorian community how this mess has developed.

Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College, Bentleigh: 2061, A Space Idiocy

Mr HUDSON (Bentleigh) — Recently I had the pleasure of attending the performance of *2061, A Space Idiocy* at Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College in Bentleigh. *2061* is a lively, fast-moving comedy and was presented with great zest by the girls of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart.

The play is set aboard a starship bound for the far-flung planet of Zenos. Its major passenger is Princess Barbie, who must marry the local prince and so prevent intergalactic war. On the voyage things go terribly wrong, exacerbated by the dark forces on the ship who want to prevent the wedding and the bumbling of the captain's inept son, Spotsworth Cook. The story reaches its climax with an attempt at a grand wedding on the planet Zenos.

Over 80 students participated in the production of this wonderful spoof of *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek* and other sci-fi series, strongly supported by teachers and parents at the school. Stand-out performances were given by Fareeah Saifullah as Captain James Cook; Dina Amin as his son, Spotsworth; Laura Colaianni as Mr Spook; Rachel Lampe as Navigator Airhart; Rachel Adams and Cassie Sercia as Major Zulu and Lieutenant Aurora; Brydie Boyle as Helmsman Bertrand; Chloe Jones as Princess Barbie; cleaning ladies Hazel and Ethel, played by Michelle Anderson and Sarah Beadle; and the Fluoro Androids SPC123, IXL321 and Homebrand, played by Crystal Goetz, Giulia Poletta and Abbey Mehrten. Congratulations to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart College.

Treasurer: questions on notice

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — Victorians by now are well aware that the Bracks government's promise to be open and accountable is simply empty rhetoric. However, I think most Victorians would be shocked to know of the contempt with which the Treasurer treats the Parliament and the electorate and how he suppresses even the most basic factual information about Victoria's taxation system.

For months now the Treasurer has failed to answer questions on notice seeking straightforward information such as the number of land tax and stamp duty payers with properties in various value ranges; the number of employers with payrolls in various value ranges; the number of people who have lodged notifications of property that is liable for the new land tax on trusts; how much duty has been paid on the transfer of second-hand motor vehicles; how much

stamp duty has been paid on properties that qualified for the first home bonus; and how many assessments have been issued for special land tax. Indeed, so far the Treasurer cannot or will not even answer questions asking how many property owners pay land tax in Victoria, how many employers pay payroll tax and how many property transfers are liable to stamp duty each year.

The Kennett government published much of this basic information each year in the State Revenue Office's annual reviews, and ministers answered questions on notice in the Legislative Council promptly. But this no longer happens. The Bracks government has turned this Parliament into a muzzled and dumbed-down vestige of its former self that is probably the least democratic Parliament in Australia. When voters go to the polls on 25 November they are entitled to ask themselves not only why Labor is going to such lengths to prevent informed public debate about tax reform but also whether they really want to re-elect a party that would inflict on Victoria four more years of vacuous platitudes and spin.

Hospitals: Moe

Mr MAXFIELD (Narracan) — I rise this morning to comment on the fact that the Leader of the Opposition, as the state president of the Liberal Party, presided over the closure of the Moe hospital. I think it would be appropriate if the Leader of the Opposition came to Moe and explained to the community down there why it was that the government he had an active role in closed the Moe hospital as well as sacking many teachers and removing many government jobs right across the area. The people of Moe have not forgotten the betrayal that the Liberal Party inflicted on their community.

This government bought back our hospital from private hands, and we are rebuilding it. We have now delivered a cancer unit so that people do not have to travel to Melbourne for their cancer treatment but can receive it in Gippsland. We have seen a massive increase in funding for our hospitals and a massive increase in the number of nurses that have been employed. We are rebuilding our health system. We do not want the architects of the destruction of the health system in the Latrobe Valley back in charge so that they can cut again. They have already proposed significant spending initiatives that will involve cuts to health and cuts to education —

Mr Wells interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for Scoresby!

Mr MAXFIELD — Those in Moe deserve an answer as to why it was done.

Schools: Gippsland East electorate

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — I raise an issue of great concern to schools across my electorate. It appears that many schools will face a major reduction in funding for disability and handicap support in the next school year. This reduction will in some cases be of the order of 50 per cent and involve hundreds of thousands of dollars. The funding model has also been criticised for its lack of transparency in not showing how each individual student's level of impairment and funding allocation is assessed. Some almost identical applications are treated differently. I call on the government to guarantee that schools will get the financial support they need to make sure they can deliver the integration aides and other assistance for the most disadvantaged students in our education system.

Considering the state's financial position and the billions of dollars in cash that has been raked in through stamp duty, GST, the pokies and fines, it is abhorrent that the government cannot or will not adequately support the most disadvantaged in our education system. These students have learning difficulties because of autism, intellectual disabilities or other handicaps. Funding for integration aides and other learning assistance for these students is absolutely essential. That a Labor government which prides itself on supporting public education cannot or will not make sure it can fund this assistance for our school system is a disgrace.

Vic Marks

Mr LANGDON (Ivanhoe) — Today I pay tribute to Mr Vic Marks, who was born on 13 March 1917 and sadly passed away on 3 September 2006. Vic Marks was a remarkable Victorian whom I had the privilege to know for some 20 years. Vic was a devoted family man and was much loved by his late wife, his children and grandchildren. Vic's community involvement started in his local area. Due to his tireless lobbying and the support of the then City of Heidelberg, tree protection overlays were established on the Victoria Cross estate in Macleod West. Through this involvement Vic joined the Warringal Conservation Society in 1986. He became president in 1987, a position he held for 15 years. Vic also attended almost every council meeting over the past 20 years as an observer.

Vic Marks was honoured by the Banyule City Council with a minute's silence and a plaque and a tree planting in his honour. Vic demonstrated that with passion, commitment and hard work all of us can play our part in protecting the environment. Through his good humour and dedication he instilled confidence and inspiration in many of us. Vic's indelible legacy is an enhanced local environment with more open space, flora and fauna protection and a conservation society with members who are still strongly passionate about conservation and a sustainable future for generations to come. I had the great pleasure of honouring Vic with a 150th anniversary celebration certificate on 1 July this year.

Supreme Court: jurisdiction

Mr THOMPSON (Sandringham) — Limitations on the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court by the Liberal government were heavily criticised by the Labor Party while it was in opposition. Interestingly the rhetoric of the Labor Party has not been matched by its actions while in government. Section 85 of the Constitution Act, which provides the Supreme Court with jurisdiction in all matters unless it is varied in accordance with the constitution, was varied regularly by the Cain-Kirner governments in relation to approximately 300 acts between 1982 and 1992.

Despite this, the Kennett government was heavily criticised by the Labor Party for introducing legislation that varied the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court through the use of section 85 statements. Premier Steve Bracks is reported to have stated when opposition leader that a future Labor government would scrap more than 200 pieces of legislation that stopped Victorians from appealing against government decisions in the Supreme Court. The Minister for the Arts is reported to have said that the legislation was unprecedented in Australia and no doubt in the rest of the world, and that it was a savage and cynical attack on the democratic notion of judicial review.

Since coming to power in 1999 the Bracks government has passed over 94 pieces of legislation which vary the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court through the use of section 85 statements. The Bracks government has also amended acts which vary the operation of section 85, yet there has been no alteration to section 85 in the Constitution Act. I think it is lamentable that the Bracks government, despite its high rhetoric, has demonstrably failed to implement and fulfil what it undertook to do when in opposition, and that stands as further testimony to its inability to turn its rhetoric into reality.

Whitehorse Club: gala dinner

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — On Saturday, 23 September, I joined 1200 members of the Whitehorse Club for the annual gala dinner dance, which was a joyous celebration of Italian culture. There are more than 300 000 first-generation and second-generation Italians living in Victoria, and their contribution to the state cannot be overstated. They have brought their verve and panache to the fields of politics, arts, academia, social services, business, sport and of course hospitality, to name but a few.

Organisations such as the Whitehorse Club play a vital role in promoting and maintaining Italian culture in Victoria, and the evening was an important way of sharing with Australians of all backgrounds and celebrating the benefits that a culturally diverse society can deliver for all. As with previous evenings spent with the club, I had a wonderful time, and I wish the Whitehorse Club continued success in the future.

Avila College: debutante ball

Ms MARSHALL — On 23 September I also attended the Avila College debutante ball at Rembrandts with the mayor of the City of Monash, Joy Banerji, and Laurie Leyman from the Make-a-Wish Foundation of Australia. We received 25 debutantes and their partners and were given a brief introduction to their dreams and goals before being shown their dancing skills with a well-choreographed routine. Like their families and friends, we were very proud to see such a wonderful group of young adults on this very special night.

Hazel Edwards

Ms MARSHALL — On 27 September I joined the Minister for the Arts, the mayor of the City of Whitehorse, Sharon Ellis, and the wonderful and talented author Hazel Edwards at the Vermont South Community House in the Forest Hill electorate to listen to Hazel reading her book, *There's a Hippopotamus on Our Roof Eating Cake*. Hazel wrote this book 28 years ago, and it is enjoyed as much today as it was when it was first written. We were joined by 20 children from the Vermont kindergarten along with my three-year-old daughter, Charlotte, and all sat spellbound listening to the story.

The Bracks government recognises that reading with a child assists in providing them with an essential building block for learning.

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

Drought: cloud seeding

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — The north of the state is now into its seventh year of below-average rainfall. Irrigation storages are severely depleted and irrigation farmers are on severe restrictions, with Goulburn irrigators currently on 21 per cent of entitlement and Campaspe irrigators still on zero entitlement.

It is not just the farmers who are hurting as they send their stock to the abattoirs in record numbers. Jobs in the food processing industry, the transport industry and the myriad small businesses that service the farming industries are now very much at risk, with potential serious consequences for the whole of the Victorian economy. Desperate times require desperate measures. Cloud seeding is a proven technique that was developed by the CSIRO in the 1970s and that has since been refined by further work in the United States. It is used regularly by the hydro-electric authority in Tasmania, and it is claimed to increase rainfall by up to 15 per cent.

Given that our irrigation storages are severely depleted, that the farmers in the north of the state are desperate, that the price of water has now reached record levels, that the whole of the state will be affected by the shortage of water and that cloud seeding is a proven technique used in both Tasmania and the United States, I call on the government to immediately make the necessary arrangements to ensure that cloud-seeding aircraft are in the air as soon as any rain-bearing clouds appear on the horizon of catchment areas.

Bellarine Living and Learning Centre: Young Mums Art project

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine) — A couple of weeks ago I was pleased to launch the Bellarine Living and Learning Centre's Young Mums Art project. The young mums group is now in its third year. It has received financial support from the Department of Human Services and also ongoing support from the Bellarine Living and Learning Centre.

The group was established to help reduce isolation that young mothers may be experiencing. The group enables the women to learn new skills and to develop friendships in a supportive and safe environment whilst their children are cared for in an adjoining playroom. The young women have achieved an enormous amount over the last two years, some having taken up study courses and developed work skills and leadership skills.

Recently they also developed and performed a play about their own experiences titled *Eyes Wide Open*. It was a fantastic performance, which we got to see on the day of their project launch.

One major achievement of the group has been the completion of its arts project. The young women were mentored by leading Geelong artist Lianne Gough, who worked closely with the young women in developing and extending their artistic confidence and abilities. The results are fantastic, with a very personal montage of artwork created through the efforts of each member of the group.

I want to acknowledge Lianne Gough, Kylie Pollock and Julie George from the Bellarine Living and Learning Centre, and of course all the young women who embraced this project and who have achieved so much through coming together and supporting each other.

Housing: Caulfield electorate

Mrs SHARDEY (Caulfield) — The issue I wish to raise relates to the spot purchase or leasing of apartments by the Office of Housing in my electorate. Over the years I have received numerous complaints from apartment owners about the behaviour of Office of Housing tenants who have been inappropriately placed in apartments by the housing office. I appreciate that Office of Housing tenants have the right to accommodation, but owners of apartments also have the right to enjoy the amenity of their homes.

The latest complaint I have received relates to a block of nine apartments in Balaclava. It is claimed that, according to the police, the last male tenant of the Office of Housing apartment in the block had a history of violence towards women. He is apparently now in jail, following claims of drug deals and property damage to the apartment.

Given that four of the flats are occupied by single women, the question has been reasonably asked: how could the Office of Housing have placed such a character in the flat in the first place? The answer given was that the tenant was put in this flat because he wished to live in Balaclava, which is hardly a measure of the care the Office of Housing has for the community or for the safety of women in our community.

Uniting Church: fifth synod

Ms CAMPBELL (Pascoe Vale) — I cannot believe that the last speaker actually feigned concern by giving an address that should never have been given.

I rise to state how pleased I was to represent the Bracks government and take greetings from the Premier to the recent opening of the fifth synod of the Uniting Church and to welcome its new moderator. The opening of the fifth synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania, was held on Sunday, 24 September, when Reverend Jason Isileli Kioa was inducted as moderator for the 2006–09 period.

The occasion was a joyous celebration for the Uniting Church members. A range of faith leaders attended this important event. Last night I again had the pleasure of joining with Reverend Keogh and other faith leaders at a Ramadan Iftar. Pre-service singing at the Uniting Church synod was led by choirs from the Chinese, Fijian, Korean, Glen Waverley, Samoan, Indonesian and Tongan congregations.

In one of her last formal duties as outgoing moderator, the Reverend Sue Gormann welcomed us warmly. Participants in the celebration were also greeted by Mr Vince Ross, chairperson of the national Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. The theme of the synod was ‘Know your neighbour’, and the insightful preaching of the word by Reverend Jason was wonderful.

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

Schools: Yan Yean electorate

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — Today, on the last sitting day of the 55th Parliament, I want to thank the fantastic students of schools in my electorate of Yan Yean for the inspiration they have given me over the past four years during the many visits I have made to their great schools, whether government or non-government. Each school is unique and, whether large or small, offers a quality education and social experience in the 21st century.

My visits to schools have without a doubt been the best part of my job as a local MP for the last four years, and I want to thank the professional teachers and parents of these bright and intelligent young people for their role in educating our children and adults of the future. I particularly want to commend all students who have undertaken the Premier’s reading challenge at participating schools. Although the results of the numbers of books read by students are not yet final, I want to mention in particular that one parent has told me that her daughters Hannah and Amber Watt have read 329 books and 377 books respectively. Both girls are students of Whittlesea Primary School.

I look forward to presenting certificates to all successful students at participating schools, including Andersons Creek Primary School, Apollo Parkways Primary School, Arthurs Creek Primary School, Christmas Hills Primary School, Diamond Creek East Primary School, Diamond Creek Primary School, Diamond Valley College, Hurstbridge Primary School, Mernda Primary School, Panton Hill Primary School, Sacred Heart, St Andrews Primary School, Whittlesea Primary School, Yarrambat Primary School, Warrandyte High School, Warrandyte Primary School and Whittlesea Secondary College. Education is the no. 1 priority for the Bracks government, and I thank the schools of Yan Yean.

Diabetes: kidney disease test

Mr LIM (Clayton) — I rise today to bring belated attention to a silent killer of many Australian diabetics. This silent killer has the potential to detrimentally affect half the estimated 1.4 million diabetics in Australia and to take the lives of many of those 700 000 people. This silent killer is able to pass undetected and to make itself known only when it is too late to seek recourse from its effects. This silent killer is chronic kidney disease.

A recent study of type 2 diabetes in Australia found that kidney disease contributes to heart attacks, strokes, hospitalisation and possible premature death. Though diabetes is often linked to dialysis and kidney transplants, most people do not make it to these remedies. Often diabetics only discover they are dying from kidney failure when their kidneys are down to a 10 per cent function level, which is often too late for any recourse.

So why is this killer permitted to run rampant amongst Australian diabetics? It is because the federal government remains detached and disinterested about the early detection of kidney disease. While GPs are funded to care for diabetics via foot, eye and other checks, they have no funding to check on kidney function. The result is that half the patients with kidney disease are being missed and so may face early graves. The federal government should be ashamed of itself for neglecting people that need preventative measures so desperately.

Brendan O'Kane

Ms BUCHANAN (Hastings) — Like hundreds of other Mornington Peninsula residents I am praying for the full and speedy recovery of the chief executive officer of Peninsula Support Services, Mr Brendan O'Kane, a man who is making an outstanding

contribution to the health and wellbeing of mental health patients and their families.

The peninsula was shocked to hear of the terrible accident that occurred last Sunday evening at around 7.30 when Brendan was on his way home after doing some work at the office. Brendan's car was struck head on by a runaway horse that went straight through the windscreen and inflicted horrific injuries on him. Brendan's condition is currently listed as serious but stable, and I know the great staff at the Alfred hospital will provide Brendan, his partner and their two boys with health care and support that is second to none in Australia.

Brendan has been pioneering innovative mental health service delivery in the region, taking the provision of mental health support services across the Mornington Peninsula to a level of excellence never seen before. He has also been pivotal in raising awareness of mental health issues across the broader community. In three short years Brendan has turned Peninsula Support Services around, providing a quality service to clients and ensuring that the issue of mental health is now clearly and squarely on the national agenda. The support provided to an organisation I belong to, the Peninsula Carers Council, has been outstanding. When this service relocated to its current Yuille Street, Mornington, premises, space was provided to enable the council to have its base there. Consequently this vital service for carers has also thrived.

We all wish Brendan a speedy recovery. The loving thoughts of many people are with him and his family, and we look forward to seeing his smiling face and enjoying his gregarious nature in the not-too-distant future.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The member for Keilor has 20 seconds.

State Emergency Service: Melton units

Mr SEITZ (Keilor) — I would like to congratulate and express my support for the Melton unit of the State Emergency Service, particularly in its endeavours to establish a unit in the East Melton area, which is needed in my electorate.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The time for making members statements has concluded.

GRIEVANCES

The DEPUTY SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That grievances be noted.

Office of Police Integrity: procedures

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — I grieve for Victoria Police and, in particular, the process that the Office of Police Integrity (OPI) followed as part of the public fiasco that took place a couple of weeks ago. I believe and maintain that some Victorian police officers have been hung out to dry by police command, by the Bracks government and by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

I have to say at the very start that a Liberal government will not under any circumstance tolerate police taking the law into their own hands. We will not tolerate police breaking any form of police regulation. We would expect that if police took the law into their own hands or breached discipline they would be punished, whether by a court or by internal police methods.

I have serious concern about the public fiasco that took place a couple of weeks ago and the way the OPI dealt with it. The OPI was set up in October 2004, and it would be fair to say that it has achieved absolutely nothing in those two years. There have been reports that it has laid internal discipline charges against some members of the criminal investigations unit at the Springvale police station. My understanding is that the issue could and should have been dealt with by the ethical standards department (ESD). Why the OPI was involved in that issue I am not quite sure. If it is an issue of culture or of police officers stepping outside their responsibilities, then let the ESD sort it out and the officers can be dealt with appropriately.

The OPI was set up as a result of the underworld killings that had been taking place, but it was set up in such a way that the director, George Brouwer, was also the Ombudsman of this state. We Liberals argue very strongly against that, and we ask how you can possibly have an effective OPI if George Brouwer is both in charge of the office and the Ombudsman at the same time? When you have a conflict of interest, to whom do you go to sort it out? You cannot have the OPI operating independently and at arm's length from the Ombudsman's office if the same person is responsible. We do not agree with the model that has been set up.

We had a situation where, shortly after the OPI was set up, it did not have the ability to do a telephone tap. So the Bracks government had to bring back the legislation

to include a special investigations monitor (SIM), who is able to oversee telephone tapping for the OPI.

A year after that, some law enforcement assistance program (LEAP) documents were released that gained a lot of media attention. Rather than fix the problem for the long term, the Bracks government tried a short-term fix, adding another bandaid to the overall situation by establishing a commissioner of law enforcement data security — so we had one bandaid on top of another on top of another. Now we have the ESD, the Ombudsman, the OPI, the commissioner of law enforcement data security and the SIM. It has got to the stage where the police have no idea of who is supposed to be investigating what.

Let us look at the process that I referred to involving the OPI. It is my understanding that on 10 May the armed offenders squad interviewed A100 about a jewellery shop hold-up. We know that that interview was being taped using video and audio equipment. I do not have a problem if an oversight regime needs to do checks.

But my understanding is that a warrant would have to have been issued for the Office of Police Integrity to place the audio equipment in the interview room. So senior Victorian police must have known that the video and/or the audio equipment was being installed in that interview room. My information is that if you obtain a warrant to bring audio equipment into an interview room then it has to be monitored. In other words if you put it into an interview room it must feed through to another room and be monitored by either police or OPI officials.

Accusations about the assaults have been flying around. Let me put the scenario which has been put to me. If the interview was being conducted and if the alleged assault took place, then it was obviously being monitored somewhere else by police or OPI officials. If it is alleged that another assault on A100 took place two or three hours later, what action did OPI officials or senior Victoria Police take to prevent that second assault? These are questions that have been flying around among police officers and others, and I think they are pretty fair questions. You cannot have a monitoring situation and know that an assault is going to take place, and not do anything to prevent that assault taking place. Some would argue that is negligence on behalf of senior Victoria Police.

In July the OPI held a closed session, which is being called a star chamber by the Victoria Police officers who are involved with it. All the evidence and questions were put to the police officers under investigation, and we do not have a problem with that

process. The question is why, after that process had finished and no criminal or disciplinary charges were to be laid against the police officers, you would then move that process into a public hearing? In this state we have two different ways of dealing with serving police officers and criminals. The facts are very clear. A criminal is charged before being put through the public process of the court system. But under the Bracks government's OPI system police officers have to go through a public process with the media when they have not been charged. So no matter what happens in the future the reputation of those nine officers will be ruined. In this state criminals have far greater protection and legal rights than serving police officers.

Now I will turn to some of the details. We need the OPI to come forward to deny that deals were made with criminals at Port Phillip prison. If it comes out and flatly denies they ever took place, that will be great and we can move it into the public debate. Details of the first deal that were put to me were that A100 was visited by OPI officials who said to him, 'We believe you were assaulted and we have video footage of it. We need you to make a statement'. I do not have any problem with that. If someone comes forward with a complaint then you need to get a signed statement and get them to testify. But why would you then have to make a deal with the person making the complaint? If A100 goes to the police and says, 'Look, I want to lay a complaint about what the police have done to me', then a statement should be signed and charges laid and we can then move on. But if this person is not keen to do it and you have to offer inducements, then the Victorian public should become very suspicious about what has happened.

My understanding is that the OPI wrote to Victoria Police and demanded that a jacket and jewellery which A100 had on him at the time he was arrested be handed back to him as part of a deal. I understand the court case for A100 does not come up until this month. The police claim they want the jacket and part of the jewellery as evidence, so why would the OPI demand that the police hand the jacket and jewellery back to A100? It smacks of a deal because it was desperate to get A100 to sign a document. Fortunately in the end after all the argy-bargy the police dug in and won the day. They refused — of course they would have to refuse — to hand the jewellery and the jacket back to A100.

The second deal is more disturbing. A100 was asked by OPI officials if there was anything they could do to assist him. My understanding is that a deal was made where his brother was to receive high priority public housing. A couple of days ago my information was that his brother received that high priority public housing. I

wonder how the Victorian community is going to accept the news that a deal has been done with a criminal to sign a statement about an assault by police, and that in exchange the brother received high priority public housing.

The issue is not the fact that the assaults took place. If the assaults took place then we, as Liberals, argue strongly that the police should be charged if there is evidence, and should then move on because the integrity of the Victorian police force is paramount. We will support the chief commissioner, the minister and the Premier if the evidence is there for charges to be laid, whether they be criminal or disciplinary. But we have to move forward. You cannot have a situation where someone who allegedly made a complaint is then offered inducements to sign a statement. The logic does not stack up.

I believe that at the moment morale in the police force is at rock bottom, and fairly and squarely I lay the blame on the Bracks government and its OPI model. The chief commissioner has disbanded the armed offenders squad. We need to know on what evidence the squad was abandoned because the chief commissioner has consistently said the OPI hearings and investigations have been at arm's length to anything that Victoria Police is doing. If it is the case that police command had no way of knowing what the OPI investigation was leading to, why would it disband the armed offenders squad? We need to know on what evidence that happened.

My understanding now is that four police officers have been suspended and five police officers will work on non-operational duties but that the others will be assessed to go back into the armed offenders squad under its new name. So an entire squad has been disbanded in order to suspend four people. I come from the private sector and as a manager if I had a problem in my ranks it was my duty to fix it. I want to ask Victoria Police the same question. If it knew there was a problem in the armed offenders squad, what action — as managers and senior command people — did it take to fix the problem? Everyone keeps saying there is a culture problem. If there is a culture problem, as Liberals we say, 'Get in there and fix it!'. But nothing happened. So why was it that the senior command waited for the OPI to go in and sort something out? I would have thought the structure would have been to move a superintendent, or an inspector or a detective senior sergeant, whatever the case may be. But police should take internal action to sort it out if it knew what was going on.

We also want to know who was aware of the video and audio tape equipment being installed. We would like to know what information was given to the Supreme Court judge to sign the warrant. I still do not understand how if the judge was given the information that he happily signed off that the police knew an assault was going to take place and were happy for it to be videoed and audioed. If it happened the first time — allegedly — and then happened a second time and no action was taken in between the two assaults, I think people would be greatly concerned.

There has been a lot of coverage in the media about the Office of Police Integrity investigation, and that is a sad reflection on an organisation that is trying to prove to the public and to the Bracks government that it is doing a good job. We are not critical of the people who are doing the investigating. We think they do not have the required experience — obviously they do not have any experience of the Victoria Police — but this has put the OPI in a very awkward position. Last year we had Jenny's case, where 450 details were leaked by the OPI itself, the organisation that is supposed to clamp down on all of this. It has breached the law enforcement assistance program database more than anyone else.

We grieve for Victoria Police. We want this mess sorted out. We must ensure that law and order is paramount and that the morale of Victoria Police improves, although I fear it will not under this government.

The Nationals: policies

Mr MAXFIELD (Narracan) — I want to start by firstly acknowledging the wonderful support that the staff in this Parliament have given over the last four years. I have found them extremely helpful and wish to place on record my great admiration for the wonderful work they have done. I also want to mention the contribution of the Deputy Speaker, who is in the chair at the moment, over the last four years. It has been very impressive and of immense value to the Parliament and to the community as a whole, as of course has the contribution of the Speaker. We wish the Deputy Speaker all the best in his future endeavours.

Today I grieve about some threats that are posed to country Victoria. We have seen over the last few weeks and months that The Nationals are effectively and essentially hell-bent on saving their political hides. In their desperate attempt to buy or curry their way into political favour they have obviously adopted the idea that no wacky policy is too big and no amount of money is too large to promise. You have to look at the situation and at what they have promised and ask what

would be the impact of some of those promises if they ever had the capacity to negotiate an agreement with the Liberal Party to actually deliver them.

With The Nationals promises on taxation alone, promises which talk about payroll tax differentials, removing stamp duty on agricultural land and farm equipment purchased by farmers under 35, and providing 1 per cent of GST to local government, they have already potentially spent over \$1 billion in four years. We then have to consider on top of that what the Liberals are promising in tax relief.

Let us look at the issues around the so-called Country First fund that The Nationals have promised. We know about putting the country first. As a government we have put in place the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund and we have delivered strong growth in country Victoria. We have delivered a huge jump in jobs, to the point where the Bracks government has created 110 000 jobs in regional Victoria in seven years, compared to 40 000 jobs created by the Liberals and Nationals under the Kennett government.

What do we know about this Country First policy? The Nationals said it was going to cost \$1 billion, then they said it was going to cost \$1.5 billion. At the last election they said it was \$1 billion, at the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) forum in the middle of this year it was \$1 billion, but then in a media release in August it became \$1.5 billion. At a Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry infrastructure forum it came down to \$1 billion, then in a media release on 19 September it popped up again at \$1.5 billion.

This is supposed to be credible policy. They cannot tell the difference between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion — their policy flip-flops. Is it \$1 billion or is it \$1.5 billion? It is a question of what day it is and what time it is! Some members of The Nationals just have no idea about what day it is or what time it is. Perhaps it was a cloudy day and their sun dial was not working.

Let us look at some of The Nationals other so-called costed promises. They want to spend \$10 million on the Gippsland Lakes. They are promising free registration for State Emergency Service and Country Fire Authority volunteers at a cost of \$35 million per year — that makes a total of \$140 million. There is the regional payroll tax differential scenario, which makes the total of \$560 million, and there is the country medical professionals support program, at \$40 million. All of these promises add up to a total spending promise by The Nationals of \$2.5 billion.

Does anybody really believe that The Nationals can find this \$2.5 billion in funding? And we must understand that if they were to form a coalition with the Liberal Party, they would also have to deal with the wacky Liberal Party promises that are already out there — and they have already promised about \$2 billion. Suddenly we are looking at promises of \$4 billion. How can that be funded? How are they going to do that? We know the tried and true ways of the Liberal Party and The Nationals — they are, to close country hospitals, close country schools, get rid of police officers, sack nurses and sack teachers.

You have to wonder what is wrong with sensible and solid debate. What is really important here is to look at sensible policies that will deliver the sort of job growth we need in country Victoria. A good blueprint that could be used across Australia is of course the Bracks government's blueprint which has created 110 000 jobs in seven years, compared to their measly 40 000 jobs in seven years. There is a blueprint on how to look after things, and it does not contain wacky promises. Of course, when The Nationals make their promises they do not add them up and cost them properly; they just throw them out there and hope that the people of Victoria do not have a calculator. They hope the people of regional Victoria will not add them all up and try to work out what it is The Nationals are really saying.

Let us look at what is happening in regional Victoria at the moment — you have to keep in touch with what is happening. There was a rally last Monday in Mildura, I understand, which was organised by the VFF which has traditionally been regarded as the industrial wing of The Nationals. What did the VFF rally come up with? I have brought into the house photocopies of some photos that were taken at that rally, and it is really interesting to see what the farmers up there were saying.

One of the photos features a sign saying 'Forrest is just dead wood'. We have another photo of a sign saying 'Labelling lies made in Australia', with a line through it. Other signs say, 'Nats tax dodge farms'; 'Where has all the blockies gone?', and a sign that in part says, 'Feed Australia cheap crap imports ... backbone of the country Aus farmers'.

It is really sad when farmers are forced to rally like this with placards and banners. There are more: 'Bishop + Nats = Hort disaster'; 'Free trade Nats destroy Oz farms'; 'Nats Snowy rats'; 'Nats trade jihad junks good growers'; 'Nats trade Nazis' — and I will stop there. I am having trouble reading that one; it is a bit hard. On they go. It is really sad that these farmers are forced into such desperate protests and into feeling they are in a

very desperate situation and having to look at how the farming community can come together to protect their livelihoods and wellbeing.

Let us come closer to home and the issues that are very important to my area. I grieve about the potential dangers if those policies are put in place. They are policies of mad spending when there are no funds to cover them. We will see massive cuts to services. But what about water? What about thinking ahead? The Bracks government has been putting a lot of effort into its water policy. We are rebuilding the Snowy River and the Gippsland Lakes. I note with interest that The Nationals said they want to commit money to the Gippsland Lakes. It is a good cause. The Bracks government has put a lot of money into rebuilding the Gippsland Lakes. Our record is second to none. We have improved flows to the Snowy and the Gippsland Lakes by reducing Melbourne's water consumption by 22 per cent. We have increased environmental flows in rivers like the Thomson and we have already started to increase water flows into the Gippsland Lakes.

More has to be done. We still have to rebuild the Gippsland Lakes. They are the lifeblood of East Gippsland. Jobs, investment and tourism dollars created through the lakes are critically important to the livelihood and wellbeing of so many towns around the lakes. The Nationals proposal to dam rivers flowing into the Gippsland Lakes, like the Mitchell River, will be the final death knell of the lakes. We will see a very difficult and tragic situation.

Are there other opportunities for Gippsland's water supply which would not destroy the lakes, see the loss of many jobs and the closure of many country communities? There are options. The government is now looking at the issue of our power stations. The three major power stations in the Latrobe Valley consume essentially one quarter of Melbourne's water supply every year. That is good potable water that could be used for industry growth, by communities, farmers and for environmental flows to Gippsland Lakes. We could send recycled water to those three power stations.

This is something that The Nationals strongly support in Queensland. In fact The Nationals in Queensland attacked the Labor Beattie government for not moving quickly enough in getting recycled water into the power stations. Do The Nationals have the same policy in Victoria? They do not. They are opposed to the policy of putting recycled water into the power stations and freeing up billions of litres of water which could then be used to drought proof the Latrobe Valley, West Gippsland and surrounding areas. It would create

additional water that would be available for future growth. If you wanted to build a new coal-fired power station, where would you get the water from? Under The Nationals policy you would not be able to build a new power station.

The Nationals are worse than that because of their flip-flop on the water factory. It is a recycling project that will take Latrobe Valley waste water or sewage, which currently goes through an open outfall sewer in the electorate of the Leader of The Nationals, to Dutton Downs for treatment. We want to treat sewage in the Latrobe Valley and provide the recycled water to Australian Paper. That would free up additional water supplies and ensure the ongoing survival of Australian Paper.

The Bracks government has facilitated the expansion of Australian Paper. Without the water factory the expansion will not occur and the survival of Australian Paper will be at stake. If we lost Australian Paper, we would lose directly and indirectly several thousand jobs in the Latrobe Valley. It would be a massive body blow. That is why the Bracks government is putting \$50 million into the water factory. But The Nationals are opposed to it and then they support it, and then they are concerned about it and then they think it might end up connected to something else. We cannot get proper support from The Nationals for the water factory.

The Nationals are currently threatening 2000 jobs in the Latrobe Valley. They do not want us to have water so we can create a new power station in the future — and they want to threaten Australian Paper. What a poor policy position! If we proceed, for example, with the eastern treatment plant proposal which is being looked at at the moment, it would effectively create 47 billion litres of additional saved water — good potable drinking water that would be available for river flows in Gippsland and for additional industry growth so that new businesses could thrive in the Latrobe Valley and surrounding areas such as my electorate of Narracan. It would essentially provide the additional water rights that we would need for our future development and growth. That is what taking recycled water and using it in the power stations would deliver.

We are working through that and have to make sure it is viable before we proceed. However, The Nationals policy apparently says that recycled water should be piped to somebody's lawn in Melbourne. Not only would the cost of piping water to sites and homes all over Melbourne cost probably \$10 billion — and where would they get that from, other than by closing schools and hospitals? — but also that water would only be used in the summer. The power stations would have a

steady supply of recycled water which they would use all year round, therefore freeing up water to be able to be used to drought proof Gippsland.

The fact is that The Nationals do not want this additional drinking water to be made available to Gippsland. We are only proposing that recycled water be used in the power stations to free up additional drinking water to be used inside and outside Gippsland. As a result, we will have a win-win situation. Melbourne will get additional water supplies but, more importantly, Gippslanders will get 47 billion litres of additional water for our future growth — that The Nationals would deny. Not only do The Nationals want to deny us our growth but they also want to impact on the Gippsland Lakes and destroy them as a tourist mecca for all Victorians and other Australians.

It is a really sad day when we hear these wacky election promises that cannot be funded and would be achieved only if we slashed massively into health and education — and of course we would have to cut out our trains and get rid of our additional services and close lines. This is a recipe for disaster. Compare that to seven years of strong economic growth by the Bracks government. We have delivered many jobs in regional Victoria. Now for the first time in 50 years we have people moving to country Victoria. We are seeing strong growth. Some of the challenges for the Bracks government are to manage the magnificent growth delivered by the Bracks government.

Rural and regional Victoria: government assistance

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — I grieve today for country Victorians and I call on the government of the state of Victoria to assist those, so many of them, who at this time are in terrible trouble, with more trouble looming. Specifically I plead with the government to reinstate the Victorian farm business support package, which this government, to its enormous credit, delivered in Victoria in 2002–03. That package made payments of up to \$20 000 available to people who were in difficulty in farming enterprises, for whatever might have been the reason that that difficulty arose. The time has now come for the government to reinstate that Victorian farm business support package. The extent of the problems out there in our communities in country Victoria is frightening.

I am not by nature an alarmist but we truly are on the cusp of a disaster in many elements of the state of Victoria. The most recent example of this occurred only in the morning of Tuesday last week, when there was a significant frost event in the Goulburn Valley. On

Monday of this week, in company with the members for Shepparton and Benalla, I visited some properties in and around the Shepparton region.

I went to the property of Frank Rullo and his son Joe and Joe's sister, Virginia. I spent an hour or more talking with not only the Rullo family but a number of other people about the issues that now confront the Goulburn Valley in particular. As I speak, I have in my hand some of the plums which I took last Monday from the trees at the Rullo property. On first glance, when you look at them, they appear to be fine. They are small and underdeveloped as yet, but they appear to be fine. But, as Joe Rullo showed me, when you break them open in fact they are literally rotten to the core; the fruit has been destroyed.

The frightening thing is that the true extent of the disaster that struck the Goulburn Valley just last week will not be known for about another two or three weeks. The experts in the industry there tell me that we have to wait that extra time to see the degree to which the crop is affected overall. I was looking at that component of the Rullo orchards which produces plums, but of course the same problem applies across the whole realm of the stone fruit industry right through the Goulburn Valley. It applies also to the wine grapes. That was evident when I went to another property in company with the members for Shepparton and Benalla.

I want to emphasise that, albeit the disaster which has struck the Goulburn Valley, the fact is, I am afraid to say, that it is only a small element of the overall issue that we are now facing in the state. The frost event of last week struck also in the Murray Valley and north-eastern Victoria. Farmers in those areas woke to find that their production for the year had been severely damaged and, indeed, in many instances, wiped out. Many of them stood by helplessly as the frost took the temperature down to 3 degrees and 4 degrees below zero. They were simply unable to do anything to stop the problem occurring.

I make the point also that this is not just an on-farm issue. The impact upon the small business sector is utterly enormous. Amongst the group of people to whom I spoke at the Rullo property last Monday were people from labour hire firms, those people who normally engage the pickers to get the crops off the trees and the vines each year. I spoke also to people involved in working in the packing sheds. There were people there from Visy Industries, who are associated with providing packaging for the purposes of the industry. There were representatives from retailers. There were people from the service providers to the industry from all different aspects and sectors,

particularly those providing machinery. All of this is, of course, aside from the prospect of the impact on commercial businesses in and around not only the Goulburn Valley, I emphasise, but also in the Murray Valley and in north-eastern Victoria. The people in those small business sectors are now trembling at the prospect of what will flow from the enormity of the impact of last week's event upon the industry through those regions.

Members must bear in mind that now we are talking about the future of the industry, because all this comes on top of the awful events which occurred in 2003, when the frosts again struck, and in 2005, when the hail cut a swathe through the orchards. Into the mix must be put, of course, the dreadful drought which continues to affect the region around the Goulburn Valley, the Murray Valley, the north-east and other parts of that general area. All of them continue to be in the grip of drought.

The production that usually comes from the industry is applied around 40 per cent to the domestic markets, about 40 per cent to the export markets and then about 20 per cent to SPC Ardmona. Now the producers are, of course, terrified that, through the fact of their being unable to supply the fruit to those various elements of the industry, there will be import replacements which will be sourced from other parts of the world and go into the markets that these people have battled so long to develop and maintain. Justifiably they are terrified.

They are but an element of what is happening at the moment out there in our communities. Recently I was in the Sunraysia region. When you sit down in Mildura and talk to the people in the wine grape industry and the citrus fruit industry — not so much those in the table grape industry, because they seem to be going along reasonably well — they tell you that they are in terrible straits because of the issues that plague their industries at the moment. Most of them are involved in an export-oriented industry enterprise. They have a focus on being able to produce their product and send it out of Australia. There are problems with gluts in the market and issues about market access. To his great credit, the federal minister for agriculture, Peter McGauran, is doing terrific work to break open some of those markets, but the fact is that we have a real problem among the families in the Sunraysia and their capacity to cope with the issues which are now surrounding them.

In the Wimmera–Mallee region we have the insidious nature of the drought striking at the year's crops and again the situation where literally there has been little relief for these families and great industries over a

period of many, many years. I say again: the communities around those regions are absolutely trembling at the prospect of what they face over the course of the coming weeks and, indeed, the coming months.

Today's newspapers carry headlines which I suppose in a sense highlight the real issue that I want to raise here — that is, whether people out there really understand how significant this issue is for these country communities. The headline on the front page of today's *Age* is 'Heat on Bracks over stamp duty — Big state surplus sparks pre-election manoeuvring'. The article talks about a cash surplus in Victoria of \$825 million for the year — that is \$825 million which this government has available to it now. I might digress for a moment to say that that in substantial part answers the rantings of the previous speaker, the member for Narracan, with regard to funding of programs going into the next election. This government has \$825 million of Victoria's money in surplus.

That headline should be compared with the headline on the front page of today's *Weekly Times*, which quotes Ian Hastings, a highly respected grain grower in the Wimmera–Mallee region, as describing it as 'Bloody horrible'. It has this commentary from Ian Hastings:

I've seen droughts in 1967, 1982, 1994 and 2002, but this year is worse than all of these ...

I say again that this is reflective of the way in which our communities in country Victoria are being impacted upon by the effects of drought and the other aspects that I have referred to in the course of this contribution.

The issue becomes one of what the government of Victoria can do. I believe there are many things the government can do. The first thing it has to do is recognise that in the first place this is a problem it has to be able to accommodate. It is up to this government to help these people, not only now but for the purposes of future generations. That is this government's responsibility.

Certainly the federal government also has a part to play in this in relation to exceptional circumstances relief. Indeed only this morning down at the Victorian Farmers Federation breakfast at Federation Square, which was a great success, I spoke to the federal agriculture minister, Peter McGauran. He reaffirmed the fact that as soon as he receives an application from the Victorian government he will look at processing it with a view to providing interim assistance on a *prima facie* basis for six months while a full assessment is made of the exceptional circumstances.

The first thing that has to happen is that the Victorian government has to lodge it, and I understand that, to his credit, the Victorian Minister for Agriculture is gathering the material in relation to that application and that it may actually be lodged as early as Friday. As I say, Minister McGauran reiterated to me this very morning that he is ready to go and that he will deal with it forthwith as soon as the paperwork hits his desk. That is the first thing the Victorian government can do.

The second thing the government can do is make some sort of inquiry of the weather bureau as to precisely what it is looking to produce by way of warnings with regard to frost. There is enormous confusion amongst the growers in the Goulburn Valley, the Murray Valley and the north-east about whether they can rely on those warnings or not. The government should investigate that issue in concert with the weather bureau to make the situation clear.

The main thing the government can do is lend some assistance in relation to cash flows, which of course would be an immediate benefit for the people who are suffering from the sorts of problems I have been describing. The Victorian farm business support package that was delivered back in 2002–03 was, and I say this as Leader of The Nationals, a true demonstration by a government of its commitment to people in need in country Victoria. I applauded it then and I have applauded it since, and I plead with the government now to reinstate it. If pleading for it makes a difference, then I plead for it now, because people are in desperate need of it. If that package were reinstated, it would mean so much to the people who are affected by this — and it would mean so much in many ways.

The first level of assistance would be for the families themselves; but the second level would be for the many families who are very concerned that they are going to have to dismiss their staff. They are faced with having to put off people who have worked loyally for them for many years but who, under the terrible conditions which now prevail right across these regions, they cannot afford to keep on. If those grants were available, it would assist them too.

It would also assist because it would be an act of faith, if nothing else, in the future of these industries. The people whom I saw in Shepparton on Monday are young people in their 30s who are in despair over the future of their industry. That position, I know, is reflected across the various seats that I have referred to, and the members for Murray Valley, Shepparton, Benalla, Swan Hill and Lowan have all seen this. For example, the member for Rodney is struggling with irrigation issues in his area. We all see this consistently,

and we see it better than most. Although we hold only 7 of the 88 seats in this Parliament, geographically we represent more than half the total land area of the state of Victoria.

If these \$20 000 assistance grants could be provided, I believe it would be not only an enormous relief for these families in a very practical way but also an enormous emotional support. The \$4.9 million package announced so far for the Goulburn Valley is not enough. Some \$4.3 million of that is for pumping water out of the Waranga, which it is said on the grapevine was going to happen anyway. It is not enough, and we need to provide some real money to help these families.

I say to the government of Victoria that now is the time to stand up and match the rhetoric with action. It is no good talking about representing all of Victoria when people are struggling in the way they are. It is no good the Treasurer coming in here and chortling about having a war chest of \$825 million in budget surpluses while out there we have people who are almost on their knees, trying to survive. It is no good, and I do not think the people of Victoria expect anything other than that we should be giving these people some assistance, not only for now but insofar as the future is concerned.

As I said, this morning I went down to Federation Square with others and spent an hour or so involved in the Victorian Farmers Federation's initiative, and good luck to them for doing it. People lined up in their hundreds to receive the produce that comes out of country Victoria. They were all lovely people who, without fail, were well mannered and very grateful and delighted to have this produce provided to them. It was a terrific thing, but you cannot help but wonder whether people within a 5 or 10-kilometre radius of where I now stand have the faintest idea of what is happening amongst the families out there in country Victoria. They are all suffering the dreadful effects of the sorts of influences which have become apparent over the course of the last few years and, spectacularly, only last week as a result of the frost in the Goulburn Valley.

I say to the Premier and the Treasurer of this state: 'Get that war chest out of the cupboard and give it to the people who need it and need it now!'.

Liberal Party: public transport statements

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — I join this grievance debate to talk about public transport. The matter I particularly wish to raise is the continuing misinformation that is being bandied about by the Liberal Party in relation to public transport and to claims of a secret agreement to introduce fees at

railway station car parks. This is a very important matter which strikes at the heart of the credibility of the Leader of the Opposition and his transport spokesman. It comes on the back of revelations that the Leader of the Liberal Party has not put his shares into a blind trust. This matter shows unequivocally that the Leader of the Liberal Party cannot be trusted and shows that the Liberals are simply not fit to govern this state.

I will speak particularly about car parking fees. In July the Liberals released a so-called policy document called *A Fairer Deal for Motorists*. In this document — I have a copy here today — the Liberals claimed:

Steve Bracks and Peter Batchelor initiated legislation allowing public transport operators to charge for parking at railway stations and bus interchanges.

Labor's proposed \$500 a year car parking charge has been agreed with Connex. The legislation has already passed through the Victorian Parliament to allow boom gates, barriers and tolling equipment to be installed. Should Labor win the next state election this parking charge will become a reality.

That is the quote from the Liberals policy 'A Fairer Deal for Motorists'. It is a complete load of rubbish. The Liberals knew it was not true, yet they printed it and distributed it anyway. It was not an innocent, one-off mistake.

Repeated press releases from sitting MPs and candidates have followed, some of which I have seen myself, all claiming that the Bracks government is going to introduce a \$500 a year charge on commuters at railway station car parks. Recently, we have even seen fliers turning up on the windscreens of cars parked at railway stations, including in my electorate, stating:

Did you know that next year you could be paying up to \$500 a year to park your car at railway stations?

This flier was authorised by J. Sheezel, 104 Exhibition Street, Melbourne, and we all know who that is and where that is.

There is absolutely no excuse or reason for the Liberals to claim ignorance of the facts in this matter. They were put plainly and publicly in a press release from the acting transport minister following the release of this so-called Liberal policy. The acting minister said that the Bracks government had categorically ruled out charging public transport users to use station car parks. He then went on to say:

The clause relating to paid car parking in the franchise agreement expired in October 2004. It is redundant and not relevant. It is dishonest and deceitful for Mr Mulder and the Liberals to pretend otherwise.

That is right; it is dishonest and deceitful, and that is just how the Liberals are acting in this matter. I think the acting minister's press release was fairly strident, fairly clear, and did not leave much room for misunderstanding. Nevertheless, the Liberals have persisted with this lie. There must be an election coming.

But it gets worse. Not only was the clause in the franchise agreement redundant when the Liberals put out its policy, but by agreement with Connex, the clause has since been removed from the franchise agreement altogether. It is simply not there. The clause no longer exists. Anyone can see this for themselves because the updated franchise agreement is posted on the Treasury web site. If members would like to check, it is at www.tenders.vic.gov.au, and it is open for everyone to see for themselves.

But believe it or not, the story gets worse, because the deleted, redundant clause in the franchise agreement was not even initiated by the Bracks government. It was initiated by the former Kennett Liberal government in its agreement with the original franchisers. So the so-called Bracks government secret deal was merely a continuation of an agreement devised by the Liberal Party and agreed to by the Liberal Party under a Kennett government. I have here the exact wording of that 1999 agreement between the Kennett Liberal government with the original franchisees, National Express and Connex. It says:

The franchisee may charge passengers intending to use the passenger services a reasonable charge (which shall be no more than the maximum charge set by the director) to use:

Any car parking spaces at a station which the franchisee can establish to the reasonable satisfaction of the director are in excess of the number of car parking spaces at that station at the franchisee commencement date; and

Up to 50 per cent of all the car parking spaces at a station at the franchisee commencement date provided that those car parking spaces are:

- (1) situated within a fenced area that has a boom gate controlling the entry to and exit from those car parking spaces; and
- (2) staffed at all times on weekdays when trains are scheduled to stop at the relevant station ...

Those words are taken directly from the Kennett Liberal government's franchise agreements. I have no doubt in my mind that had the Kennett government been re-elected in 1999, that would have in fact been put into operation. Could it be possible that the Liberals simply forgot that the idea of a charge for secured parking at railway stations was actually their idea? I certainly did not forget. I recall those times from 1999,

which is why I have been so amazed at the sheer gall of the Liberals in this attempt to rewrite history.

Let me set the record straight once and for all. The clause in the franchise agreement relating to paid car parking was initiated by the Liberal Party and was in fact removed by the Bracks government. There is no secret deal. There are only Liberal lies, misinformation and deceit. I think that is a dreadful shame on the Liberal Party.

This sordid affair would be bad enough, but unfortunately it is merely symptomatic of the malaise affecting the general Liberal Party — a malaise which is evident throughout their statements about transport policy. This car parking saga is a pattern of behaviour and a saga of misinformation and lies — for example, the Liberals continue to argue that the government is not addressing the shortage of qualified train drivers and that the system will be short of train drivers into the future. I would like to say a few words concerning that particular piece of misinformation. It is another lie, and another example of the Liberals trying desperately to rewrite history. The Bracks government has acted decisively to address the problem of driver shortages — a situation that was once again created by the franchise agreement of the former Kennett government.

One of the first actions of the Bracks government, after appointing receiver managers to the insolvent M Train business, was to reinstate a driver training program. This program was responsible for the recruitment of 43 trainees during receivership. Since the commencement of the new franchise in April 2004, put in place by the Bracks government, 26 new drivers have graduated and a record level of 66 drivers are currently in training, of which 48 will commence driver duties during 2006. An additional 36 drivers will also commence training by the end of the year.

V/Line, which is owned by the state government, hired 57 new train drivers in the past financial year. A key plank of the government's new franchise agreements is \$1 billion in extra funding over five years to fix the problems and deliver the best possible services for public transport users.

I would also like to address some of the misinformation about regional rail. On 23 August — not that long ago — a Liberal Party press release, which I also have here, stated that the train protection warning system was faulty. This lie does two things. Firstly, it creates unnecessary panic and worry among the travelling public; and secondly, it suggests that the public transport safety regulator is negligent in allowing an unsafe system to continue. But the Liberals do not care.

They will say anything and do anything to get a vote at this time. Not content with one lie per press release, they increased their productivity and included a second — —

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Ingram) — Order! It is offensive to say a member has lied or is lying. I ask the member to refrain.

Ms MUNT — I apologise, Acting Speaker. Not content with one piece of misinformation per press release, the Liberals increased their productivity and included a second. In the same release they said there was an extended shutdown of the Bendigo line planned after Christmas 2006. The good people of Bendigo and their families around Victoria, who were planning their travel over the holiday period, were thrown into turmoil. This misinformation was reported in the local press. How many tourists, I wonder, have also been prevented from visiting Bendigo because of the political games of the Liberal Party and this press release? This misinformation got so out of control that the chief executive officer of V/Line had to issue a press release and assure people that the service will continue to run.

But it continues. The Liberal Party told people in the Latrobe Valley that their train line would be shut until mid-2007, and it repeatedly said that right up until the line reopened in late August. There were no apologies and no correcting of the record, just a move on to the next one. On 4 November 2005 the Liberal Party said that a contractor who assisted in upgrading the lines was about to sue the government — and we are still waiting. You will not find this press release on the Liberal Party web site, though. It has cleared it off and expunged the record. In the Ballarat *Courier* of 11 July 2006 the Liberal Party is quoted as saying that there was significant doubt that the trains would ever run at 160 kilometres per hour. That was proved wrong within weeks. Now we have faster services to Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo and Traralgon.

I would also like to mention, just as a little aside, the Mentone train station. Last night in this house the member for Sandringham raised the Mentone railway station and questioned the government's record on it. I would simply like to say that in the last four years the Mentone train station has had significant government funding, a Pride of Place grant to beautify the station forecourt and gardens, and has recently been announced as a premium station with extensive upgrades and works and manning from the first train to the last. That has occurred under the Bracks government.

By continuing to spread falsehoods I believe members of the Liberal Party are not only demeaning themselves but are demeaning the role of this institution. Distributing falsehoods by pamphlet at train stations and telling people they are to be subject to a fictitious parking charge is absolutely reprehensible. I challenge the Liberal Party to rebut these facts in the house. This episode says a lot about the Liberal Party. It says a lot about whether it is ready to govern. I do not believe it is ready to govern.

Last time the Liberal Party was in office the Kennett government cared enough about public transport to close 6 train lines and 26 train stations and sack countless workers from the public transport system — and that is not to say anything about health, education and community safety. Similarly, thousands of workers were sacked, hospitals were closed, schools were closed and police stations were closed.

In conclusion, most of what has been said by the opposition is misinformation. You cannot believe anything the Liberal Party says. It is not ready to govern, and it has a record.

Schools: government record

Mr DIXON (Nepean) — I grieve today for Victoria's schools, for the students in Victoria's schools and for the parents who send their children to those schools. The reason I grieve is that this government is showing huge signs of arrogance and of being out of touch. It is riding roughshod over schools and their educational programs, the complaints of parents and conditions in our schools.

The focus of this government is all about spin and brochures and winning the next election. It is not about governing; it is about doing whatever can possibly be done to win that next election. It is about hiding problems, sweeping them under the carpet and making sure they do not see the light of day. It is about not facing the truth and not admitting that there are issues that need to be addressed. It should be about facing the issues, addressing them and learning from them. But it is about blaming others. When things go wrong and the government is caught out, so often we see the spokesperson — the minister or somebody else who is responsible — hiding from the issue and blaming someone else. There have been numerous examples of that.

The major issue in our schools currently is not teaching and learning; unfortunately it is maintenance. This is a major problem that has been running for some months now throughout all communities, throughout all schools

and throughout the media. That has been highlighted with recent figures that have come out.

In 1999 this government inherited a maintenance backlog of \$130 million. In 1992 the Kennett government inherited a maintenance backlog, in 1992 dollars, of \$670 million. In the seven years of the Kennett government, with the unbelievable financial constraints, that maintenance backlog was reduced to \$130 million. Already, according to the government's own figures and the figures that have just been released, that maintenance backlog has doubled. It has doubled in the seven years of this government, and that is an absolute disgrace. It has had the money and it has had the opportunity. This year we have seen a blow-out in the budget surplus. We have seen that every single year, with GST and stamp duty rolling in, yet the very basic maintenance of our schools has been neglected.

Through a freedom of information (FOI) request I sought details of the maintenance figures the recent audit found for each of the schools in the state. I was given the shove around and was certainly not given the figures. Incredibly they came out last Friday through a selected media outlet that was able to obtain the results. In the midst of all the hype of the football grand final and the grand final parade on Friday, the figures mysteriously appeared. The figures totally vindicate the issues that I and so many school communities have been raising about the state of our schools. The figures show that there is a blow-out of \$268 million worth of unaddressed maintenance in our schools. There were 14 schools requiring more than \$1 million worth of maintenance. There is no excuse for a school to have been reduced to the state of requiring \$1 million worth of repairs.

The Minister for Education Services has come out and said, 'Some of the schools that were mentioned there will be rebuilt'. Of course they will be rebuilt, because they have been run down. They have to have over \$1 million worth of repairs. Schools like that will have to be rebuilt. The cop-out that a rebuild will solve all the problems is just a sham. The amount of money the rebuilds will take out of the capital budget will mean that all the other schools will miss out. For example, 90 schools need more than \$500 000 worth of maintenance. When will they be rebuilt?

They will be rebuilt, I presume, when the maintenance bill hits \$1 million. Therefore a whole generation of schoolchildren are being taught in run-down, decrepit school buildings and will never, ever see some part of their school in good condition. They will have to wait. Their younger brothers and sisters or their children or grandchildren will eventually get a brand-new school

because the school has fallen down around their ears. It is just false economy. It is not fair on our students and it is not fair on teachers, because in many cases these are very unsafe workplaces.

Last Monday I was out at Glenferrie Primary School with the Leader of the Opposition. It was unbelievable. Trees and bushes were growing out of the cracks and the fascia above the front door of the school. What sort of a welcome is that to a student? No wonder parents drive past that school, see the trees and the bushes and the weeds growing out of the cracks and the mortar, and ask, 'Why would I send my child to that school?'. There are great things going on in that school, but parents will not even bother going in the front door. They will go to the plethora of non-government schools in the area and not even give it a second glance. There was masonry falling down. When we went to look at the weatherboards on the year 6 classroom the Leader of the Opposition stuck his keys in to see how rotten the wood was. It was rotten all right, because as soon as he stuck his key in the weatherboard, the whole weatherboard fell off.

Ms Kosky interjected.

Mr DIXON — That was not a stunt; it just happened. It was just unbelievable. That is just one of many schools. The principal told us that that school has a maintenance bill of more than half a million dollars.

The schools say they want some sort of certainty about when their capital works issues will be addressed. Many of them are told almost at the last minute that their number has come up and they can go to master planning and on to capital works. Many schools have already spent their own money. They have given up. Their maintenance need has been huge and they have decided to spend the money they have earned and scrimped and saved and the funds parents have raised to carry out some major maintenance, because the government will not help them, only to be told, 'Next year we will replace the block that you have just spent all that money on'. I hear that time and again. There needs to be a better system than that.

Following the release last week of the FOI maintenance figures the government very conveniently announced that there would be a 20 per cent increase in the base allocation of maintenance money given to each school every financial year. Of course that is welcome, but I wonder if that would have been announced if the FOI figures had not been released. I do not think so. Every time the maintenance issue is raised there is another announcement. There is some toilet money thrown in, some extra money for this and some extra money for

that. Here we are with another announcement. It is just policy on the run. It is about trying to keep things quiet, about trying to put out little spot fires before the election and about pretending that everything is rosy in the garden.

Recognising that this is a major issue, the Liberal Party has announced that the remaining \$200 million in maintenance work that needs to be addressed in this state will be dealt with in our first term of government, because that is what schools want and what they need. Schools need some certainty as to when their maintenance needs are going to be addressed so they can get on and plan for the future.

There are a number of other issues that fit in with the general theme I am grieving about today. One that I wish to address involves the East Loddon P-12 College, where the department decided to take away a mod 5 classroom that is used for a whole range of educational activities in the school as well as a de facto community hall for that area. It is a P-12 school, and there is not clarity about what classrooms and working spaces a P-12 school is entitled to. Apparently a huge and pressing need came up at the Echuca Special School, and the East Loddon school community was told that the mod 5 classroom, community centre and meeting room was going to be taken away and sent up to Echuca.

The parents were not happy with that: it came out of the blue, they had not been consulted about it, and it was going to happen. When I was visiting schools in the Bendigo area the parents wanted me to come out to the school to see how this room fitted in with their community, how they used it, how they maintained it and looked after it, and how they maintained and looked after the rest of their school. Of course I was not allowed to go into that school, which I just cannot understand. The parents had to come down to Bendigo to meet with me and explain it to me.

This issue just grew and grew, and it was getting lots of coverage. True to form, this government said, 'The department gave us some wrong advice. We are not going to take it away anymore'. Goodness me! How can you buy that? This was two months out from an election, and it was just another one of those spot fires the government had to put out. There was no planning and no real thought given to educational values or to the uses of that building. It was about saying, 'This is a spot fire. We have been found out being tricky. Let's put the fire out and blame somebody else'. Sure enough, that is what happened. Luckily East Loddon P-12 has been given a 15-month reprieve on the use of that mod 5 on its property. I can assure the parents and community of

East Loddon that, once elected, we will not be removing that classroom and that it will be staying at the school.

Another issue I wish to bring up is the removal of the shared taxi subsidies for children who attend our schools for the deaf. I do not understand why the government has gone down this track, and I think it has made a huge mistake. This government is awash with money. We have heard again today about the increased budget surplus, the increase in gambling tax revenue and the increase in stamp duty revenue. Despite that, what has the government turned around and done? This issue is the young person's equivalent of reintroducing car registration fees for pensioners — and what a winner that is in my electorate! All I need to do is mention it. People have not forgotten, because those registration bills still keep coming in. May they keep coming in right up until November to remind pensioners of what a stingy government this is!

So the equivalent of that issue is the removal of shared taxi subsidies for deaf children. As a result their parents have been told, 'We are not going to give you the funding for shared taxi facilities that enables deaf children and children with hearing disabilities to attend special schools for the deaf or schools with annexes for deaf children attached to them'. Instead they have been told, 'We will give you an extra conveyance allowance of \$2000'. That shows that the government is totally out of touch; the \$2000 does not work. In most cases it provides transport for one day a week for schoolchildren.

This has already had dire consequences for the education of many of our young deaf children. Dozens are now being taken out of those specialist schools and put back into mainstream schools — which, try as they might, cannot do the job of a specialist deaf facility or annex. In some cases parents have said, 'This is just so important to us that I will give up my job so that I can drive my child to school, seeing that they cannot get there by taxi anymore. I cannot put my seven-year-old on three buses and a tram each day to go to and from school'. In some cases parents have had to reduce their working hours so they can take their children to school. I know that the government is looking at this and has established a committee to review the decision, but even if the government backs down before the election — I am sure it will, because it is another spot fire it wants to put out — this should not have been done in the first place. Dozens of children and their families have been adversely affected for at least 12 months. It is just not good enough, and you just wonder about the government's priorities.

I turn to what I describe as a process of threatening and intimidatory behaviour that I am seeing throughout Victoria. It came to my attention recently that a principal in north-west Victoria who dared speak out about conditions in her school was subsequently hauled down to Bendigo to see the regional manager, which she did. She was told that if she did not keep quiet her school would receive no more funding, and her future employment was threatened. This case, which I heard about last week, was not an isolated occurrence — I hear about this all the time. There is a lot of it going on around Bendigo at the moment.

There seems to be an element of fear out there. School communities will not talk and principals will not talk, because they are afraid to go to the media. They are also afraid to talk to me, because they are scared. They have been threatened. There is no tiptoeing around this: there are some pretty blunt threats being made out there. I refer, for example, to the process of provisioning, where clusters of schools are told, 'You sit down and work out a future model for the provision of schooling in your area, but do not say everything is okay and then ask for funding. As part of this process you have to close down a campus, and if you do not close down a campus you are not going to get any funding at all'. In other words, it is a case of saying, 'We will just starve you out of existence. Your school will fall down to the extent that you will give in and you will then close the campus, and that way you will get your capital funding'.

We have seen this occur with the Bendigo education plan which, as a concept, is good, but the way the Golden Square Secondary College parents and teachers have been treated is appalling. They have received threats and intimidation and have been treated personally in such a way that they have had to hold secret meetings. Those meetings have been found out, and the parents and teachers have had to park their cars in nearby streets so they can hold their meetings. That sort of thing should not be happening in this day and age.

As I said, I have lists of these sorts of complaints. This government is all about hiding the problems. It is not about being up front and saying, 'There are issues out there that we need to tackle', it is about sweeping those issues under the carpet and keeping them quiet until after the election.

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

Liberal Party and The Nationals: policies

Mr HUDSON (Bentleigh) — Today I grieve for the impact that cuts proposed by the Liberal Party and The Nationals would have on our core services in this state. I grieve because the cuts they would have to institute to implement their election promises would be much the same as the cuts that were instituted by the former Kennett government.

We all know what the legacy of the Kennett government was. It closed over 1000 hospital beds, it sacked 2000 nurses, it closed a dozen hospitals, it increased hospital waiting lists by over 20 per cent and it tried to privatise our great public hospitals like the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre in Heidelberg. The Kennett government pushed our hospitals to the brink of bankruptcy, and it destroyed public confidence in our hospital system.

Similar things happened in education. We saw the Kennett government close over 300 schools and sack 9000 teachers. What we are meant to believe now, of course, is that all that is forgotten, that the Liberals and The Nationals have seen the light, that they would not introduce such cuts in the future and that the only reason they introduced those cuts at the time was that they thought they were economically necessary. The opposition parties have said, 'The reason we made those cuts was that the state finances were in a mess, and if we had not made those cuts, the budget would have continued to be unsustainable'.

Let us go back and look at the record. It is true that in 1992–93 there was a budget deficit, which was largely due to the impact of the biggest recession Victoria had experienced in 60 years — declining economic growth, high interest rates and a major downturn in the manufacturing sector caused by the globalised economy. But one year later, in September 1994, then Treasurer Stockdale was reporting a surplus of \$392 million. In his media release of 7 September 1994 he said the crisis was over in Victoria. I will quote from Treasurer Stockdale's press release. It states:

The tough decisions, the sacrifice and in some cases the hardship of the last two years will not have to be repeated, but Victoria cannot delude itself that the need for reform is over.

Why did the Kennett government sustain those cuts for the next five years? Why did it continue to screw down our hospitals, our schools and our police force? Why did it cut the staff of the then Department of Natural Resources and Environment by an astonishing 46 per cent? Why did it continue these harsh policies even after the budget was back in surplus? The answer to those questions is economic rationalism — the Kennett

government had a distaste and a dislike for providing those services at the level expected by Victorians.

I well remember attending a meeting with Treasurer Stockdale at the time where we were talking about the cuts to schools, and the former Treasurer said, 'At the moment every child in Victoria is within 1 to 2 kilometres of a primary school. We think it is quite reasonable that they should be within 3 to 4 kilometres of a primary school, and therefore we are going to close primary schools in those areas where they are in close proximity in order to introduce this average distance right across Victoria'. The results of that policy are plain to see today. Kids no longer walk to school; they have to be driven to school by their parents. Children are getting less exercise and our roads are congested and polluted as a result of the fact that parents are now driving their children to school.

If we look at what happened in the five years following that time, we find that the Kennett government was starving the public sector of funds, not because it had to but because it wanted to. The Kennett government's budget strategy was driven purely by ideology. It said it acknowledged that education had a critical role to play in the state's economy, but it had closed 300 schools and retrenched another 6000 teachers. For the next five years the Kennett government produced budget surpluses, but still the cuts continued. Year after year it squirreled away money like Ebenezer Scrooge and tried to hide the surplus so it would not have to spend any more money. Every year it kept the screws on, even as our hospitals were on the brink of collapse as a result of a \$500 million real cut to their operating budgets over that time.

Who can forget the 1999 election campaign when the Kennett government, ostensibly in a change of heart, promised millions of dollars for hospitals and schools in its next term in government? Then, at the end of the campaign, Treasurer Stockdale came out and said, 'The net addition to the state budget will be less than \$100 million'. What the state had in store were even more cuts to pay for those election promises.

In opposition the Liberals have been at it again. Every year when the state budget has been delivered in this house they have come in here and said that we are on the brink of the abyss. The previous opposition leader, the member for Malvern, said that three budgets ago. In 2003 he said that Labor's spending on schools, hospitals, community safety and the environment were putting the state on the brink of the abyss.

The current opposition leader, the member for Hawthorn, was at it again in his response to this year's

state budget. He claimed that the Bracks Labor government is not spending enough on infrastructure, but at the same time he was opposed to Labor's borrowings to build more infrastructure. He claimed that a Liberal government would deliver more and better services, but at the same time he said that Labor is a high-taxing government and that he would reduce taxes. The Leader of the Opposition is saying, 'We have a magic pudding. We are going to cut taxes, we are going to reduce spending and we are going to have less debt, but we are going to deliver more services and we are going to deliver more infrastructure'. All this is claimed despite the fact that this Labor government is actually delivering on essential capital works spending on our hospitals and schools.

In the last six years of the Kennett government expenditure on infrastructure was only about \$6 billion, or \$1 billion a year. In its first six years the Bracks government spent \$13 billion on infrastructure. This year alone the Bracks government is spending \$4.9 billion on infrastructure to address that historical legacy of neglect in our hospitals, our schools, our police stations and our water infrastructure. That money is going towards dealing with that shocking legacy, and I want to talk about that legacy in terms of my own electorate of Bentleigh.

In the electorate of Bentleigh the Kennett government closed three schools — Murrumbeena High School, Moorleigh Secondary College and Eastmoor Primary School. It also tried to close McKinnon Primary School, but that was resisted by the local school community. What was the impact of those closures? The closure of Murrumbeena High School has meant that McKinnon Secondary College, our top-performing non-selective secondary school in the state, has been swamped with students. A school that is meant to have 1200 students as its maximum capacity now has 1400 students, despite the fact that tight neighbourhood zoning has been imposed on the school. There are kids who live in McKinnon now who cannot go to McKinnon Secondary School because of the closure of neighbouring Murrumbeena High School.

In 1996 the Kennett government tried to close McKinnon Primary School. That was resisted by the school community. In 1999 McKinnon Primary School had 190 students; today it has 575 students, even with a tight neighbourhood school zone. This demonstrates the short-sightedness of those policies of school cuts and closures, because families are moving back into those middle-ring suburbs. Schools that were deemed by the Kennett government to be redundant are now desperately needed by the community.

Today the shadow Treasurer was heard on ABC radio saying that the Liberal opposition will deliver cuts in stamp duty. This is a replay of what we saw in the lead-up to the last state election: a lot of chest beating about stamp duty. Week after week the Liberals were out there telling us in the 2002 state election campaign that they were going to cut stamp duty by a significant amount. When it came to the crunch, when it came to adding it all up, the Liberals promised to cut stamp duty by \$1000 on a medium-priced house. This was about half the cost of one month's mortgage payment for someone buying a medium-priced house over 20 years or 240 months.

What would amount to a significant cut in stamp duty this time? The interviewer on ABC radio today pressed the shadow Treasurer on this question. He said, in effect, 'What would be a significant cut? Would you cut it in half? Would you reduce it by a third? What is it?'. The shadow Treasurer would not say what the cut in stamp duty would be, and there is a very simple reason for that.

We know, and you can go and look at the State Revenue Office's scales, that for every \$10 000 you lift the scale it will cost \$42 million and save the average home buyer \$360. Even if you replicated the opposition's promise at the last state election of a cut of around \$1000, on a house worth \$360 000 the average home buyer would save just \$1000 and it would cost the state budget \$126 million. That is \$126 million in the context of all the verified commitments that have already been made by the opposition, even before we get to the election campaign, all costed by the Treasurer.

The Liberal Party has made recurrent spending commitments of \$2 billion over four years, or \$500 million a year. The Nationals have made recurrent spending commitments of \$3.6 billion over four years, or \$900 million a year.

Whatever has happened in this state in the past, what we have usually had from the conservatives is coalition government. Yet here we have \$5.6 billion worth of expenditure commitments without any sense of whether we are dealing with a coalition government or a Liberal government. What else are they doing? Some of the promises are similar, but a lot of them are very different. What we have not heard from the opposition is what a coalition government's commitments would look like.

Mr Wells — That is an absolutely stupid argument. What about the coalition of socialists, Greens and Labor?

Mr HUDSON — But we will not be in a coalition with the Greens.

Mr Wells — You are.

Mr HUDSON — No, we won't. When you go through the list and have a look at it, you see there are no significant commitments yet to education, health or community safety.

Mr Wells — School maintenance? You don't call that a significant item?

Mr HUDSON — Fifty million dollars out of your \$2 billion!

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Seitz) — Order!

Mr HUDSON — But when you go through the list you see a whole raft of other things the opposition has made commitments to, but not to education, health and community safety. The community is entitled to ask: how will these election commitments be funded? How will the significant tax cuts and the other commitments be funded? The only way they will be funded is by the same cuts that were introduced by the Kennett government in the number of nurses, teachers and police — the same cuts to core services in education, in health and in community safety. That is the only conclusion you can draw from the list of promises that have been made by the opposition. The opposition has not yet told us what it will do in those core areas, because it will have to make cuts again in order to deliver the unsustainable promises it has made.

Government: financial management

Mr CLARK (Box Hill) — I rise to grieve about the financial mismanagement of the state of Victoria under the Labor government — the waste, the blow-outs, the bungles, the increasing tax burden, the non-disclosure and lack of accountability.

We saw with the annual financial report released yesterday that in 2005–06 alone the Bracks government collected over \$1.3 billion in windfall revenue. It was only that windfall revenue that kept the budget out of deficit, because the government ran up unbudgeted spending blow-outs of \$888.4 million. The budget outcome was built on the back of an ever-increasing stamp duty burden on Victorian home buyers with an additional \$600 million more than budget being collected from Victorian home buyers and other property purchasers last year.

Over the past two days not only the 2005–06 financial report but also the Auditor-General's report on that

annual financial report and the report of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC) on private investment in public infrastructure have been released. All of those documents shed important light on the mismanagement of the Bracks government.

I refer first of all to the report of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee. I want to place on record that the report of this committee, of which I am a member, has been put together on a bipartisan basis. It was a unanimous report. The members worked together cooperatively and under considerable pressure to finalise a report to lay before the Parliament, because we all considered this was a topic of great interest and an area in which there was room and need for substantial improvement.

Different members of the committee approached the subject from different directions and put different nuances on the evidence, but the bottom line outcomes are clear. There is a need for substantial improvement to the way that public-private partnerships (PPPs) are managed in this state. There is a fundamental lack of the basic information that is needed to assess the value for money of the public-private partnerships that have been entered into under Partnerships Victoria, and that deficiency needs to be remedied.

I refer members to and recommend they read through this report, and I will refer to a number of the key aspects which are highlighted in it. The committee set out that many of the issues brought to its attention concerned the importance of governance, the limited accountability and transparency of PPP projects and reservations as to the value of the public sector comparator. That is at page 13 of the report. At page 14 the committee referred to the need for more attention to be directed to the long-term financial implications of PPP arrangements designated as financial leases in terms of government debt and future budget flexibility. At page 15 the committee highlighted a need for the government's PPP policy framework to be extended to encompass the identification and valuation of commercial rights available to private sector developers.

In relation to that the committee especially referred to the situation with the Southern Cross railway station, but similar issues apply with the Commonwealth Games village, the new convention centre development and with the showgrounds. In respect of all of these projects a key element of the economics of the project has been substantial development concessions to the consortium that undertakes the project. It is the development concessions that in my view have been driving the economics of a lot of PPP projects. They

raise serious issues about the extent to which the government sacrifices what should be its overall public interest role in determining the merits of granting these development concessions. It has a conflict of interest, because the value of the concessions which it grants to developers significantly offsets what would otherwise be budget costs.

In relation to Southern Cross station we have seen the project run significantly late. We have also seen reports that the government has had to pay \$32 million in settlement of legal disputes relating to the project, due largely to the complacent and pig-headed attitude of the Minister for Transport in refusing to recognise that the government needed to help get the project under way when there were significant difficulties with site access. The minister sat on his hands and refused to act for months, and taxpayers have paid the price.

In the annual financial report that was released yesterday we see at page 170 a curious item under the heading 'Payments from advances pursuant to section 35 of the Financial Management Act', described as 'Southern Cross station — ongoing management' of \$19.747 million, and we are entitled to ask: what on earth is that? This is supposed to have been a fixed-price contract; a public-private partnership in which the public agreed to make a set stream of payments in exchange for the delivery of a project. Now we find what appears to be an additional \$19 million cost to the budget in just one year in respect of what is described as 'ongoing management'. So the public is entitled to ask whether this means that it is going to cost \$19 million or more in each and every future year simply to manage this highly complex public-private partnership contract that the government entered into.

Another aspect of the PAEC report that I commend to members is the committee's conclusion on page 16 that:

Apart from the United Kingdom experience, there is an absence of publicly available information on PPP evaluations. Victoria needs a program of regular evaluations and the results must be made available for public consideration.

The use of commercial in confidence reasons by government to limit public and parliamentary access to key information on major PPP contracts has diminished the accountability of government to the Parliament for substantial state expenditure.

Public confidence in PPPs depends on a strong transparency and accountability framework. The committee considers that the Auditor-General has a major and ongoing role in informing Parliament and the community on the effectiveness of PPPs in Victoria.

I can certainly verify the government's refusal to make information public about the true costs of PPPs. The government has gone to the extraordinary length of taking a member of the opposition to the Court of Appeal seeking to prevent the operation of a decision by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal ordering that public sector comparator documents relating to the Scoresby tollway project be released. Certainly there is no sign that this case will come to trial prior to the election, and therefore it looks highly likely that this basic factual information about how much extra the Bracks government's decision to enter into its tollway deal on what is now called EastLink is costing Victorian motorists will be denied to the public.

At page 17 the committee also made the additional observation that:

Because the results of public interest assessments are not made public, the level of rigour and the depth of challenge applied to the assessments by government officials and/or external advisers cannot be judged by Parliament or the community. The level of reliance that can be placed on internal analyses of public interest is therefore limited.

Later on the committee strengthened its recommendation about the Auditor-General's role of providing a continual audit focus on the management effectiveness of PPP projects. The report later states:

Experience has proved that economic projections and financial business cases were often unreliable when compared with actual outcomes achieved. The government does not publish a comparison between actual and estimated value for money results from PPP projects.

At page 18 the report recommends that the government should reconsider a number of the views expressed by Mr Peter Fitzgerald in his 2004 review of public-private partnerships:

... and those expressed to the committee by the Auditor-General on ways to improve the use of the PSC, if use of a PSC is to be retained.

At page 19 the committee called on the government to rectify what it describes as 'the current vacuum in publicly available information on the state's performance in the management of risks in PPP projects'. In its conclusions the committee said:

In the absence of public documentation, the committee cannot conclusively state whether the PPP policy is delivering value for money over the life of the projects, compared with traditional procurement methods used by government.

At page 21 the report states:

The committee has reservations about the reliability of the public sector comparator because of its theoretical approach to estimating and comparing costs, particularly in relation to the valuation of risk.

It then goes on to say:

The committee considers that accountability needs to be improved within Victoria in a range of areas such as the prompt disclosure of contracts on the government's web site and providing Parliament with a schedule of repayments to consortia. The committee is also concerned about the excessive use of 'commercial in confidence' to prevent full disclosure of details such as the public service comparator, the risks to be transferred, the total amount of payments (often what is included in the lengthy complex contract is a formula rather than actual amounts), and contracts that are only released publicly months after the financial close has been agreed.

The committee is also concerned that the high cost of preparing bids results in only a small number of consortia bidding for major PPP projects. This raises issues about whether there is sufficient competition to ensure the government gets a good deal.

The committee went on to make a range of constructive recommendations as to how disclosure and the conduct of PPPs can be better managed in Victoria. I should say that on this side of the house we certainly concur with the direction that the committee is recommending, and indeed there is a substantial overlap between the committee's recommendations and the reforms that the Liberal Party has put forward to ensure publication of a greater range of information, ensure there is sensible cooperation between the government and public sector providers, make sure there is adequate expertise within the public sector to properly manage PPP contracts, develop standard documentation, reduce bid and compliance costs, improve project definitions, and then better manage PPPs on an ongoing basis.

Similarly a Liberal government would implement a number of the recommendations of the Fitzgerald review which the current government has rejected or ignored. These include publishing details of the forecast payment schedules under all PPP contracts, including on the Partnerships Victoria web site, and publishing a forward pipeline of major projects under consideration.

There is a pressing need for improvement in the way in which PPP contracts are managed in Victoria to ensure that they achieve value for money. PPPs should be used where they provide better quality, value for money, flexibility, risk transfer or other net benefits in the public interest, but the government of the day should have nothing to hide in terms of making the case public as to why the PPP projects that it enters into provide those benefits.

There is one other matter I want to touch on briefly, and it comes from recent reports, including the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report. I refer members to pages 47 to 49 of the report, which set out charts showing Victorian government capital formation

as a proportion of gross domestic product and Victorian general government net infrastructure investment, et cetera. What is striking is the contrast between the figures taken from the publications of the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the claims the government makes about the level of its capital investment.

What needs to be put on the record is that the government's claimed infrastructure investment levels include money it injects into other entities within government; but what is apparent from the Auditor-General's report and from yesterday's annual financial report is that when it suits it the government fiddles that figure. I refer to page 25 of yesterday's annual financial report, which makes it clear that the government has disregarded the \$600 million of capital that it took out of the Transport Accident Commission when it calculated what it referred to as \$2.692 billion worth of infrastructure investment. The Auditor-General's report that was published today shows that the general government sector made a net contribution to other sectors of government of just \$51 million.

In conclusion, there are numerous ways in which the financial management of this state needs to be improved. If the government can control its waste and its spending blow-outs we can deliver much better services and lower taxes.

Members: retirements

Mr ROBINSON (Mitcham) — With your indulgence, Acting Speaker, before commencing my grievance I would like to acknowledge the members in this chamber who will be departing the Parliament at the election. There are a number of them, and I do not want to name them individually, but I wish all of them well. In particular I would like to acknowledge the tremendous work done by those government members who will not be returning. I thank them for the support they have offered me in the time I have been here, and I wish them the very best of luck in their lives beyond this place.

Liberal Party: policies

Mr ROBINSON — Today I want to grieve about the shallowness of the Liberal Party's policies and the risks to Victoria if the Liberals get the opportunity to implement these policies. The gains made by the Bracks government in the last seven years would be very much threatened if that came to pass. For example, the government's tremendous achievement in expanding the Victorian police force by some 1500 officers — as opposed to the 800 who were removed

from the force by our predecessors — would very much be threatened. So would the work we have done in schools, where some 6200 new teachers and staff have come into the system in the time we have been in office, in contrast to the 9000 who were removed by our predecessors. All these achievements would be threatened, because the Liberal Party has not learnt the key lessons that parties in opposition need to learn — and in that way it is still not ready to govern.

The first and most important lesson to learn is one of financial discipline. I understand that the Victorian Liberal Party covets this characterisation much like a greedy relative awaits an inheritance. It is something that the Liberal Party considers a birthright that does not have to be learnt, but the truth is that it has to be. Certainly the Labor Party in opposition learnt that early on. The very first policy that the now Treasurer adopted for Labor in his term of leadership in opposition was one of financial management. That policy, which I think we adopted in 1994, committed us to ensuring that a Labor government in the future would deliver consistent surpluses, would cap borrowings only for capital purposes and would commit itself to greater transparency. These are commitments which have been put into effect in the last seven years, and the evidence is there for all to see.

It is the sort of discipline which allows this government to invest in building up and sustaining services. For example, we have put some 6500 new nurses into the system, as opposed to the 3500 who were removed from the system by our predecessors. We have been able to do things in the environment and conservation area, where we have created 19 national parks in the last seven years, which is almost four times the number created under our predecessor.

The Liberal Party has not embraced financial discipline because it is incapable of facing up to its past. It cannot deal with the reasons why it is in opposition today, although I want to acknowledge that the member for Nepean at least had a crack at it. He recently fessed up on school closures, and he did a very good impression of Fonzie, the character from *Happy Days*. I am sure some members will remember the episode where Fonzie tried to say that he was wrong but just could not get his mouth around the word. He went all the way towards it, but he just could not say that he was wrong. I am not sure if the member for Nepean is going to play Fonzie, and I am not sure who on the opposition benches is going to play Ralph Malph and Potsie, but we will leave that for another day. The thing about the member for Nepean's comment is that before the ink on the newspaper reporting his comments was even dry, he had been effectively renounced by his leader. That was

because his leader, the member for Hawthorn, will not permit any revisionism of the Kennett government's record. He will not do that because any revisionism of the Kennett government's record reflects on his own role as the state president of the Liberal Party throughout that period.

The failure of the Liberal Party to acknowledge its past and adopt the necessary financial disciplines for governing this state poses real risks to all Victorians. No party and no leader can be all things to all people. You cannot promise to increase spending while preserving the surplus, decreasing debt, maintaining services and maintaining public sector employment. It is a fundamental truth that you simply cannot do it, any more than you can promise to turn water into wine or, to put it in a contemporary sense, promise to make Carlton Football Club premiers in 2007. You just cannot do it, but the Liberal Party, through its leader, insists it can.

This problem besets not only the Liberal Party leadership but also some of its candidates. I will share with the house a fascinating local example that relates to the government's commitment to spend almost \$60 million on grade separation along Middleborough Road where it borders Box Hill and Blackburn. It is a tremendous project with which I am proud to be associated. It will deliver a whole package of benefits to local residents, including a new pedestrian underpass, the realignment of a blind corner in a neighbouring street, the refitting of the platforms at the railway station to bring them up to new standards and provision for a future third rail line. But that has not stopped the Liberal Party candidate from insisting that the project must include an island platform, even though he has been advised — and the advice is consistently available — that to do so would involve compulsory property acquisitions. These forced acquisitions would be of residential properties nearby, so people would lose their backyards or potentially even their homes. He is not worried about that; he says it must be part of the project.

The Liberal candidate for Mitcham also insists on the provision of a bus interchange. I have no problem with bus interchanges; I think they are tremendous devices that supplement bus services. However, I have some advice for him: if he wants a bus interchange to work well, it helps to have a bus service. Otherwise you run the risk of being like Sir Humphrey Appleby, saying to the respective minister, 'This will be a brilliantly efficient bus interchange. We will never have a bus run late there and we will never have a disgruntled passenger, because no buses service the station and none have in living memory'. The Mitcham candidate

is not in the same category as the Liberal candidate for Carrum — who I understand has single-handedly promised some \$400 million worth of road projects, which the local paper says he will be forced to pay for out of his electorate allowance because his own party has denounced them — but it is nevertheless a colourful start.

Ms Asher — Are you worrying about the Liberal candidate for Carrum now?

Mr ROBINSON — I am not, but I think others should be.

I will come back a step from slapstick to a very serious example of the Liberal Party's unpreparedness for government — that is, its fundamental departure from long-established bipartisan public policy — a move that has seen it trade responsibility for base vote chasing. I am talking about the road toll. The road toll is a continuing tragedy in this state. It touches us all. Since 1925 some 46 000 Victorians have been killed on our roads — that is a phenomenal figure. In modern political history the road toll has been tackled in a very bipartisan way. Starting in 1970 —

Ms Asher interjected.

Mr ROBINSON — We will come to that in a minute. In 1970 the road toll was 1061. It is worth noting that it was a courageous Liberal Party government of the time that decided to tackle the issue. It took on long-ingrained practices, only a couple of years after the 6 o'clock swill had ended, and said, 'We are going to have seatbelts'. Successive governments have followed on from that in a way that has caused the road toll to fall from 1061 in 1970 to 348 last year. It is true that the toll bounces around a bit — it goes up, it goes down — but the long-term trend is very favourable. It is a commendable effort, but much more needs to be done.

The government's policy in pursuing this further has been clearly articulated. The government is pursuing a 20 per cent reduction in road trauma between the 2001 figure and 2007. I think that is good, sound policy that would be overwhelmingly supported across this state, and up until recently I thought it was fairly bipartisan. However, Victorians who are looking to political parties for leadership on this issue would be very disappointed with the Liberal Party's efforts. The Liberal Party's commitments on road safety are contained in its policy document *A Fairer Deal for Motorists*. It could have been labelled any of number of ways. It could have been called *Safer Roads* or *Dealing*

with *Road Trauma*, but it is headed *A Fairer Deal for Motorists*.

When you look at the detail of the policy you see there is very little about speeding drivers. There is a little bit about sensible speed zones, as if to say zoning somehow creates speeding, but there is no reference to speeding drivers. When you look at the detail of the document you see this disturbing quote:

Despite the Bracks government's obsession with fixed and mobile speed cameras the reduction from 377 deaths under the previous Liberal government in 1994 to 348 in 2005 is small.

I will repeat that:

... the reduction from 377 deaths under the previous Liberal government in 1994 to 348 in 2005 is small.

The clear inference — it is unmistakable — from that statement is that we are only talking about 30 lives a year. The inference goes further to say that is too modest a gain to justify the rigorous speed camera regime in this state, which is only saving 30 lives a year after all. I condemn that philosophy — I think it is abhorrent.

Ms Asher interjected.

Mr ROBINSON — It is distorted, and I am coming right to that. The selective use of statistics by the Liberal Party to draw this gross inference is extremely disturbing. In order to create the inference that we are only saving 30 lives a year through this rigorous enforcement of speed laws, the Liberal Party has selectively chosen the 1994 road toll figure of 377. Using that figure as a contrast to last year's toll creates the difference of only 30. However, the Liberal Party could have chosen the 1993 road toll of 436 — a difference of almost 100 lives a year. It could have chosen the statistic from 1995, when there were 418 — a difference of 70. It could have chosen the 1996 figure, which would also have created a difference of 70, or even the 1998 figure of 390 deaths. It has deliberately chosen one year of the seven it was in office in order to allow it to craft a distorted comparison — I agree with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition: it is a distorted comparison — to get the inference that we are only saving 30 lives a year through the onerous use of speed cameras. That is the inference.

This policy is unique. It is the only policy that actually emits a noise and the noise sounds remarkably like a dog whistle — it is designed to appeal to that very small constituency that might actually consider that a higher road toll than otherwise would be the case is a price worth paying for a less-rigorous traffic camera

regime. My advice to the Liberal Party is that it is well and truly welcome to that constituency. The government I am part of will not be compromised in pursuing a lower road toll. It is a sad reflection that the Liberal Party, which was prepared to stand up to ingrained practices and driver prejudice in the early 1970s in order to tackle an unacceptably high road toll, lacks that courage today.

I want to note the Transport Accident Commission's report. It talks about the Hidden Toll campaign launched in October last year which explains:

... that on average, one person dies on the state's roads every day while a further 46 are injured. In addition to the personal and emotional impact of the hidden toll, the high level of serious injuries also represents a huge cost to the community (approximately \$4.5 million per day).

The real danger here is that if the Liberal Party is ever elected, it will be the first government in 35 years to turn its back on a bipartisan policy and look at doing a trade — a less onerous speed camera regime in this state because we are really only talking about a few lives. That is an abhorrent philosophy which deserves condemnation. More than anything else it demonstrates the unfitness of the Liberal Party for government in this state.

Question agreed to.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS

Education and Training Committee: effects of television and multimedia on education in Victoria

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — It was with great pleasure that I tabled today the Education and Training Committee's report on the effects of television and multimedia on education in Victoria.

Before talking about that report, I would like to pay tribute to my fellow committee members for their dedication and commitment throughout this inquiry and in fact throughout the term of the 55th Parliament. I would like to thank the following members of the Legislative Assembly: the Deputy Chair, the member for Bulleen, who is present in the house and who has developed an excellent working relationship with all members of the committee and has contributed mightily to some of the substantive recommendations we have made in education in this place. I would like to thank the members for Ferntree Gully, Mordialloc and Doncaster. I also thank Mrs Buckingham, a member for Koonung Province in the other place, and Mr Hall, a

member for Gippsland Province in the other place, for their valuable contributions to the committee's work.

I take this opportunity to especially thank Mrs Buckingham and the member for Doncaster, both of whom are retiring from Parliament. I wish them both the best of luck and fortune in their future pursuits. I commend both members for their dedication to the work of the committee, their love of education and their total contribution to progressing education in Victoria. I would like to thank all those who have contributed to this inquiry as witnesses or through submissions. The inquiry process is dependent on the effort and expertise that go into these valuable contributions. I would like to acknowledge and thank the schools that the committee had the opportunity to visit — the young people, teachers, students and parents who gave us some invaluable insights into the way multimedia is happening in our schools.

This inquiry was undertaken in the midst of the digital revolution. The multimedia landscape in Australia has changed markedly in the past decade. The increased variety and capabilities of multimedia devices are reshaping the behaviour, interests, attitudes, dominant learning styles and expectations of young people. Importantly, there are extremely high levels of dependence among young Australians on computers and the Internet in fulfilling their educational and social needs. Young Victorians in general are leading the way in terms of access to computers and the Internet and their levels of skill and confidence in using these resources.

The increasing popularity and sophistication of multimedia technology, as any parent in this chamber would know, is not without its drawbacks. The report includes a number of recommendations aimed at cyber safety issues. Although schools are already dealing well with cyber safety issues, schools, teachers and parents may need assistance in the face of the rapid evolution of multimedia technologies. It is important that schools stay ahead of the trends and are able to help parents deal with the constant changes in the multimedia landscape.

The advent of the digital revolution has placed new demands upon schools as students needs have evolved. Schools need to cater for the changes in learning styles and preferences of students. Students also need schools that prepare them for a changed world which demands high levels of media literacy among its citizens. In fact, our work force depends very much on high-tech, high-skill information and communication technology skills. There is a lot more to be said on the report, and I am sure many other members will say it. There are

12 recommendations and a lot of findings. It was a unanimous report by all members of the committee. In summary, I look forward to the government's response to this report in the new Parliament.

I trust that the education community will value the recommendations made in this report as much as the committee has valued the opportunity to complete the inquiry. Those recommendations come on top of other substantive recommendations made in other inquiries which are only now strongly impacting on education provision. To that point it is important to note the digital revolution has developed a divide between young people and adults, and between students and teachers. That was one of the most glaring things the committee found. There are incredibly high-skilled, high-tech young students. Teachers perhaps need greater information about new multimedia technologies.

It would be remiss of me not to note that in our report on teacher training in Victoria the committee made a range of recommendations about teacher training and what needed to happen in terms of multimedia. Those recommendations are in fact being implemented right now. I am very pleased the deans of education have seen the value of that report and are implementing change within their institutions.

Finally, it has been a great pleasure to chair the committee during this Parliament. I look forward to the recommendations in this report being enacted in the next Parliament.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: budget estimates 2006–07

Ms ASHER (Brighton) — I wish to make a few comments on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's report on the 2006–07 budget estimates in the first instance. Again I make the observation that this Labor-dominated committee has been incredibly brave in its criticisms of the government so far. I want to refer to the bravery of a former minister, the honourable member for Pascoe Vale, who at page 11 in her chair's introduction to this report expressed her disappointment with the way the government approached the committee. She wrote:

On several occasions the committee experienced long delays in obtaining information from some departments and, despite repeated requests, there were occasions where certain departments declined to provide specific information to the committee.

Again I make the point that the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee is a powerful and influential

committee in this Parliament, and the chair of that committee, a former minister in this government, has obviously been driven by desperation to make such a comment.

I want to touch briefly on the table on page 253, provided by the Minister for Major Projects. Had another report not been tabled by the PAEC I would have spent the rest of my 5 minutes pointing out the misleading information provided by the Minister for Major Projects to the committee. Not only was the information late, but in that instance it was completely misleading. Of course as everyone knows, every single major project is either late or over budget or both, and no amount of misleading of a parliamentary committee by the Minister for Major Projects will alter that perception.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: private investment in public infrastructure

Ms ASHER — However, today another Public Accounts and Estimates Committee report has been tabled, the report on private investment in public infrastructure. Again I have to commend the members of the Labor-dominated committee on their bravery. They have actually told this government that the way it is managing public-private partnerships (PPPs) is not working. Again let me make it perfectly clear: the Liberal Party is in favour of the use of the private sector in the provision of infrastructure, provided it meets the public interest test.

I refer to page 16 of the report, where the committee made the observation that there is such a limited number of bidders for the process that it can give:

... rise to potential conflicts of interest that may impede the integrity of decision making.

Again, members of this Labor-dominated committee made adverse comments about this government's use of commercial-in-confidence reasons to deprive the public of information relating to those particular contracts. The committee went on to say on page 17 that, notwithstanding the government's public interest requirements which are part of the PPP process:

Carrying out these steps does not automatically guarantee that the public interest has been fully served in all instances. Because the results of public interest assessments are not made public, the level of rigour and the depth of challenge applied to the assessments by government officials and/or external advisers cannot be judged by Parliament or the community.

So here is this government that was elected on a platform of being open, honest and accountable and

whose Treasurer constantly writes articles to the newspapers saying how fabulous the PPPs are under his administration, and here is a Labor-dominated parliamentary committee, headed by a former minister, indicating that there are some grave concerns with not only transparency but also the use of commercial-in-confidence reasons and a raft of other problems with the way the government is managing the private sector.

Probably most damning of all, on page 20 the committee stated:

In the absence of public documentation, the committee cannot conclusively state whether the PPP policy is delivering value for money over the life of the projects, compared with traditional procurement methods used by government.

I cannot think of anything more damning in terms of criticism of the way the government is running its PPP program. The committee also raised reservations about the public sector comparator. Again, the Labor Party has the Liberal Party at the Court of Appeal over one particular public sector comparator. I reckon the government is concerned about it as well.

The committee made the observation that lack of public information is having a negative impact on the campaign and stated that we need greater accountability from this government. I refer also to the fact that the committee expressed concern about high bid costs. This is something that Peter Fitzgerald raised in his review of PPPs and something that the opposition has raised about them. I refer the Attorney-General and other ministers of the government to this excellent report by the PAEC, damning the government's performance on PPPs.

Road Safety Committee: incidence and prevention of pedestrian accidents

Mr TREZISE (Geelong) — As the chair of the Road safety committee, I was also pleased today to table a report which is a review of a previous committee inquiry into pedestrian safety that was tabled in Parliament in 1999. Two of the key initiatives that came out of the 1999 report were the reduction of the default urban speed limit from 60 kilometres an hour to 50 kilometres an hour and the introduction of 40-kilometre-an-hour school speed zones. It is pleasing to note that since these new zones were introduced, pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries have decreased markedly. In this review, the committee considered the benefits of extending the 40-kilometre-an-hour speed zones to strip shopping centres and areas where there are high levels of elderly pedestrians.

Other traffic measures, together with appropriate local government and land use planning, also assist in reducing pedestrian trauma. However, the committee believes that pedestrians need to take greater responsibility for their own actions, by, for example, consuming alcohol responsibly, observing road and traffic rules and generally being aware of the traffic environment.

Despite the significant overall decline in pedestrian trauma since 1999, it is of concern to the committee that over 12 months there was a slight increase in pedestrian fatalities. The committee believes that this highlights the need for pedestrians, as I said, to take greater care and responsibility and for road authorities to continue with new measures and education campaigns. Many of the recommendations in the report are directed to the road authority, VicRoads, and in particular the need for VicRoads to complete ongoing reviews and trials, including the results of speed zone trials in shopping centres, and the reviews of motorised mobility devices and of safety standards at roundabouts.

I would like to thank the members of the Road Safety Committee for their time and deliberations throughout the review — namely, in this house the members for Ivanhoe, Frankston and Polwarth, and in the other house the Honourable John Eren, a member for Geelong Province, and particularly the Honourable Barry Bishop, a member for North Western Province and the Honourable Graeme Stoney, a member for Central Highlands Province, who are both retiring. I would like to wish them well and thank them for their dedication to road safety and to the committee.

Similarly I extend my appreciation as chair to the committee staff for their professional advice and hard work. They are namely the executive officers, Alex Douglas, who finished with us in January and whose position was taken over by Richard Willis from February, research staff, Marilyn Johnson and Graeme Both, and office managers, Heidi Milton-Young and Vanessa Hamilton.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the members of the Road Safety Committee in 1999, essentially under the chairmanship of John Richardson, who originally brought these important issues to the attention of the government. Key recommendations made by that committee have had a positive impact on pedestrian safety in Victoria.

Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee: retaining young people in rural towns and communities

Mr WALSH (Swan Hill) — I want to make some comments today on the Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee's inquiry into retaining young people in rural towns and communities. Not only did the committee look at the issue of retaining young people in country communities, but also as part of its terms of reference it looked at what may influence young people in making the decision to return to their country communities after they have been away and studied, travelled and seen the world. That is equally important as the part about retaining young people in country Victoria.

The only disappointment that I had, which I hope was shared by the rest of the committee, was that the terms of reference were given to us only six months before we needed to have a report for the finish of the life of this Parliament. There is bipartisan support on this big issue of how we keep the vitality and the youth in our country towns. It would have been good to have had some more time to do the issue justice and to do some more significant, in-depth study on some of the causes rather than just the symptoms, as we need to be dealing with more than the immediate issues.

I commend all the people who made the effort to put submissions in to the committee. We had something like 90 people who put in written submissions. I also commend the people who actually attended the hearings, and in particular the people from my electorate who made the effort to come and present at the hearing we had in Donald. I particularly thank the four people who agreed to be part of the case studies that were put into the report. They were Debbra-Jane Williams and Bronwen Alday from Sea Lake, and James McEwen and Lauren Adams from Donald.

It is always dangerous picking out people, but I also commend Pastor Margaret Russell, who came in and gave a very thoughtful presentation. Margaret has been a tower of strength to members of the Donald community in her church, leading the discussion and providing support for people affected by the drought up there. She recently kept her church open all night so that people who were related to and affected by the tragic car accident in that area could go along to the church to seek solace for the sad loss they experienced through that accident. I also commend the people from the Murray Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network — Glenn Stewart, John Webb and Tricia Currie — who came in and gave an excellent presentation about the work they are doing in trying to

get university courses delivered into the Swan Hill region.

In the time I have I will touch quickly on four of the recommendations. The first is recommendation 1, which is that the state government work collaboratively with the federal and local governments to develop comprehensive long-term policies to address the issue of population decline and how to create economic development and employment in our country towns. The issue we kept looking at is that it is almost a chicken-or-egg debate, and I think the egg is how we create employment opportunities in our towns. If we actually grow the economic activity in our towns and create employment, the other services will follow, because there will be the demand. We need to think outside the square, think of how we can do new things to make sure businesses will actually set up in country Victoria or existing businesses that are there can grow.

That flows on to recommendation 3, which is that the state government provide financial assistance and technical support to local government for the purpose of encouraging economic development and employment. Over the time I have been involved in public life I have seen some very good programs that have provided economic development officers for local government. There is the opportunity, and I would hope the government, in responding to this report, will see fit to put more money into local government for the employment of those economic development officers.

It is a matter of getting out there and selling the positives of our country areas, not only to enable the businesses there to grow but to encourage small and medium enterprises from the likes of Melbourne to potentially relocate to country Victoria. Those that do relocate to country Victoria realise that the staff they have in country towns have a great work ethic and are dedicated to those businesses, and they do not have the staffing problems they have in Melbourne.

The other issue I would like to touch on is recommendations 35 and 36. Recommendation 35 is effectively about having geographically tied, funded positions in universities. At the moment we have universities that have outreach into the country; we would like to see the places tied to the country areas so that university courses are actually delivered in the country and not dragged back to the city. The other area is making sure that technical and further education institutions could be part of delivering those courses into the future.

Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee: retaining young people in rural towns and communities

Mr HARDMAN (Seymour) — I rise to speak briefly on the Rural and Regional Services Development Committee's report on retaining young people in rural towns and communities. This report attracted a great deal of interest, as the member for Swan Hill said. Lots of people from around country Victoria and also some who now live in Melbourne made submissions to our committee.

The committee report was done in a short time frame, and I would particularly like to thank the hardworking secretariat, including the executive officer, Lilian Topic, our researchers, Peter Chen and Cathy Tischler, and the office manager, Maree Buchanan. The secretariat has this year written two major reports, organised public hearings around the state and participated in many robust committee meetings as members thrashed out the issues, recommendations and text in the report.

Creating sustainable communities is what this report was about, because young people are a missing demographic in many of our rural towns, with 20 to 35-year-olds having a bit of a dip in the population statistics. We found many young people wanted to stay in their communities if they were given a real choice, and that is what our report tried to deal with in its recommendations for addressing some of those issues. Obviously the key issues were transport, access — access to education, to training, to accommodation and to child care — and a number of other things across the whole range. Throughout the report there are a number of case studies of young people, and we thank them for allowing us to include these case studies, because they give the report a certain human touch that would perhaps have been missing if they were not there.

All committee members were very interested in this topic, and again I also thank the committee members — the deputy chair, the member for Gippsland East, who made an effort to attend and participate in all the hearings and meetings, and the members for Swan Hill, South-West Coast and South Barwon in this house and the members for Central Highlands and Ballarat provinces in the other place all put a great effort into this report.

The recommendations in the report have six months to be implemented, and I hope whichever government is in power in the future will look very seriously at all these recommendations. They build on the great work the state government has been doing across rural and

regional Victoria, including its work on disadvantaged transport areas. They are being addressed through the Transport Connections program and the Transport and Livability Statement, which was a great announcement that came out during the inquiry. Another great announcement this year was the increase in the living-away-from-home allowance. I commend the report to the house.

Education and Training Committee: effects of television and multimedia on education in Victoria

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — I thank the member for Seymour for agreeing to allow me to speak for the last 2 minutes. I will comment on the Education and Training Committee's inquiry into the effects of television and multimedia on education in Victoria. I pay tribute to the staff, all of whom worked extremely well to ensure that this report was completed before the last sitting day of Parliament. I also thank the members of the committee, the chair and all the other members from the Labor Party and The Nationals. We have worked well together as a group for the last four years to come up with some good reports, and I hope the government takes on board the recommendations we have put forward as part of this report.

It was unfortunate that this inquiry was done during the year of an election, because there are many parts of the report which needed deeper investigation, especially in relation to e-bullying. The government is not doing enough about e-bullying, and the recommendation I put forward to the committee was unfortunately defeated by the Labor members of the committee. I believe we should have a 24-hour e-bullying hotline that students can call to seek advice on what action they need to take to ensure that any e-bullying stops. While I appreciate that most of this occurs outside the school grounds and you cannot stop that, it still comes back into the school, so it is very important that the government is proactive rather than reactive. It is a huge problem here. As the report states:

The committee heard that the incidence of cyber bullying has increased.

The fact that it has increased means that we need to do something now, before it is too late and before someone gets hurt, rather than trying to react to the problem. Unfortunately, as I said, because of the coming election the committee decided not to look at e-bullying in detail, and regrettably the recommendations in this report do not cover e-bullying and the impact it has on students. While I say well done to the committee, I think more work needs to be done.

Sitting suspended 1.01 p.m. until 2.02 p.m.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Photographing of proceedings

The SPEAKER — Order! I wish to advise members that I have given both the *Herald Sun* and the *Age* permission to take still photographs during question time today, but they are not allowed to use flash cameras.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! That is because there are no flash members!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Gaming: regional caps

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the hundreds of reports he has today dumped on the Parliament, and I ask: why has the Premier withheld the government's report on regional caps on poker machines?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. The regional caps on gaming machines will be released by our government when they are ready to be released, so that will be soon.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BRACKS — That is a policy announcement which our government will be making. But on the broader — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! Members will behave in a manner that is appropriate for question time. I ask them, when they have finished asking their questions, to be quiet and allow the ministers to answer them.

Mr BRACKS — On the broader question which was raised with me by the opposition leader, the reason there are so many reports which have been tabled in this Parliament on these days is that I wrote to all department heads and requested that they be in before the end of this Parliament. That is not required under our constitution. The previous government would not allow that to happen. They have been tabled because we took steps, over and above the legal requirement, to

ensure they were tabled in this Parliament so they were reported publicly and were available to the people of Victoria.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Sandringham is using unparliamentary language. If he does it again, I will remove him from the chamber.

Housing: Wendouree West neighbourhood renewal

Ms OVERINGTON (Ballarat West) — My question is to the Premier. I refer the Premier to the government's commitment to making Victoria a great place to work, live and raise a family, and I ask him to detail for the house how Wendouree West exemplifies this commitment.

Mr Perton interjected.

Ms OVERINGTON — And I'll be back!

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — Speaker, it is one of those days! I thank the member for Ballarat West for her question, and I would like to place on the record in this house the absolute commitment the member for Ballarat West has had to the residents of Wendouree West.

Wendouree West is a ministry of housing estate and one of the largest housing commission estates outside metropolitan Melbourne. It was placed in a location where there were no services effectively supporting that community. Shopping precincts were a long way away, and as Ballarat grew and developed, some of those shopping precincts have moved much closer.

It is an area which has had a high crime rate and a high youth unemployment rate, and it has a high number of residents who have very low incomes. I know it has been a cause for the member for Ballarat West, both before and during her term as a member of Parliament. She has stood up for that community and ensured that we have programs to support and assist the people of Wendouree West.

In 2002 I was very proud to commit to a new program called the neighbourhood renewal program, which was based not just on subsets of programs which were adjusted to assist with training, work placement, health or education but on looking at place and at making sure that funding and support followed requests from and the needs of those communities from the ground up. That was the principle of the neighbourhood renewal

funding, and that was the principle that I announced with the member for Ballarat West at that time in 2001.

We have invested some \$27 million in the Wendouree West community and the Wendouree West housing commission estate. We have created 252 new training places for young people and adults on site. We have developed the Wendouree West community hub with the Uniting Church's UnitingCare organisation in Ballarat. We have reinvigorated the Violet Grove strip shopping centre, and now that renewed centre is servicing that community.

We have refurbished 480 homes as part of that development, which includes security lighting for 450 houses. We have established Neighbourhood Watch and neighbourhood police programs on site. We have built the new Weeramar Park, which I opened with the member for Ballarat West in February 2005 and which is the only park in that area. It was previously a wasteland; now it is a great public park which 80 of the residents came out at a working bee to support and assist.

As a result of all that we have seen, since 2001, the crime rate in Wendouree West go down by some 8 per cent in just that one area. We have seen unemployment levels go down, particularly for young people. More importantly, what we have seen in that area is pride and opportunity. People feel pride for the first time in many, many years in their community, in their own residential area and in their place in the community in Ballarat. As distinct from its being a cul de sac, or an area which was outside the whole of the activity of Ballarat, we now see it being integrated into the whole of the community more broadly — and the pride in the houses, in the suburb and in the opportunities for young people is second to none.

I will quote, in finally commenting on this program, the convenor of the Wendouree West Residents Group, Lauren Scully, because I think this is indicative of this program and the 18 other programs which we have set up for neighbourhood renewal around the state. Lauren Scully said:

Neighbourhood renewal merely provides the resources to harness the spirit, strength and skills that already exist in your community.

Grab the opportunity with both hands. Dare to dream. Nothing is too big that it's unachievable. Believe in the people that come into your community.

Individually you may achieve small things; collectively residents can shape their own destiny and provide opportunities for future generations that they may never have thought possible.

I echo those comments in regard to the 18 other locations for neighbourhood renewal around the state. You can achieve a lot working in partnership with communities and families around the state. This is what good Labor government is about, and this is what we are about.

Rural and regional Victoria: government initiatives

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — My question is to the Premier. I refer to the unprecedented climatic conditions which are imposing enormous stress upon the economic and social fabric of so many of our country communities, and I ask: apart from the measures already announced, will the government commit part of its \$825 million surplus to reinstating the farm business assistance package, incorporating payments of up to \$20 000, to thereby provide desperately needed cash flow to struggling farmers and small businesses in country Victoria?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — I thank the Leader of The Nationals for his question. I know he understands the very difficult period that we are in currently. Regrettably that period is going to get even worse, with the predictions for low rainfall and hotter temperatures and with the existing water reserves, which are very low, all leading to one of the most difficult drought periods we will ever face in this state. I echo and agree with the comments made by the Leader of The Nationals in relation to these matters.

That is one of the reasons why we have marshalled across government all the resources we can to support and assist in this period of drought across the state by instituting the policy we announced following the last drought, when we brought in a rate subsidy for exceptional circumstances (EC) declared areas, where those areas were declared for receiving assistance for drought from both the federal and state governments. In addition to that, in Victoria — the only state to undertake this — we also allocated a 50 per cent reduction in the municipal rates for those farmers and those primary industry land-holders to ensure that their costs were reduced at a time when their income was obviously reducing as well.

We have also announced ahead of time — for example, in the Goulburn Valley, and the Leader of The Nationals is probably aware of this — that, rather than waiting for the prima facie case for the EC to be concluded and the full EC to be in place, we would offer assistance and support in interest rates subsidies. We announced that we would immediately undertake that through the Rural Finance Corporation as a matter

of course once the prima facie case was established — at the first occasion. I think that is a good policy. It is really about recognising that interest and municipal rates are fixed costs which are inputs to a person's business at a time when their revenue is down, either because their crops have been affected or because they are de-stocking — and certainly with regard to crops, we are going to have a reduced yield. That is a way of reducing the cost burden.

In relation to other measures, we will continue to marshal all the resources we can around the state to support our primary producers through this period of drought. We are meeting regularly to undertake that work. We have already announced several — in fact numerous — policies in relation to that. The matter that has been raised about farm business assistance is a matter that I will consider. In relation to the \$20 000 grants, we have provided an alternative, which is the rate reduction and also the interest subsidies. There are also other infrastructure projects. We are bringing those forward and looking at community-building projects and other projects which councils are bringing forward to stimulate economic activity. These are all things that we are undertaking already and considering for the future as well.

I finish by saying that it is going to be a difficult period. We are certainly aware of that, but we will stand behind what is one of the most efficient farm sectors in the world here in Victoria. We want to stand behind that, because the long-term future is a very strong one. This is a time in which we need to stand by our primary producers in order to get through that and continue to be one of the most productive areas in the country.

Schools: funding

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — My question is to the Minister for Education and Training. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to making Victoria a great place to raise a family. I ask the minister to detail for the house how the government's investment in education is delivering on that commitment.

Ms KOSKY (Minister for Education and Training) — I thank the member for Eltham for his question — indeed, I know of his great interest in education. We have invested enormously in education in this state since we have come to office.

Honourable members interjecting.

Ms KOSKY — I think everyone in this house is aware of this, including the member for Bass. We have provided an additional 6000 teachers and staff to assist

in the transformation of our education and training system — that is more teachers spending more time with our students.

I want to give a sense of what the extra teachers and staff we have provided in our schools are actually doing in our classes right across Victoria. We provided an additional \$180 million for teachers to fulfil our commitment of average class sizes from prep to year 2 being brought down to 21. That was an additional investment for those teachers of \$180 million. There was \$84.3 million for the Schools for Innovation and Excellence initiative, which has meant that we have seen 250 clusters of schools around the state — all of our schools are involved in this process — sharing a lot more information about curriculum development and great ideas for schools. Now we are also seeing exchanges of teachers between primary and secondary schools within those clusters so that those teachers can better teach our students.

An amount of \$150 million was provided for the Leading Schools Fund, through which 150 secondary schools have implemented some fantastic programs focused around information technology, science, learning via the Internet — there has been a lot of online learning — and a lot of exchanges, again, for professional development. That investment in extra teachers occurred through the Leading Schools Fund.

More than 12 000 students are now enrolled in the Victorian certificate of applied learning (VCAL). We provided \$47 million for additional teachers in order to put the VCAL in place. It has been an extraordinary success, with over 12 000 students now enrolled who previously were missing out or for whom the Victorian certificate of education was not necessarily the best option.

This government has provided over \$25 million per year in equity resourcing that is targeted at students who are most in need of extra assistance so they can get the best from their education. As a result of all this investment in extra teachers we are seeing quite remarkable results in our education outcomes. Our primary class sizes are down. Average prep-to-grade 2 class sizes are down from 24.3 in 1999 to 20.8 this year — a fantastic record.

Mr Perton interjected.

Ms KOSKY — Our average primary class sizes are the lowest on record, and the son of the member for Doncaster will gain the benefit of that.

Average secondary school English class sizes are at their lowest level since 1993, and the secondary

student-teacher ratio is the lowest of any Australian state. These ratios are delivering much improved outcomes for our students, who are doing much better. For instance, the proportion of government school students reading at expected levels in prep, year 1 and year 2 has improved significantly since 1998. We have seen an increase of 17.3 percentage points in reading for our prep students, an increase of 15.3 percentage points for year 1 students and an increase of 9.3 percentage points for year 2 students.

Mr Ryan — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister has been speaking for more than 4 minutes, and I ask you to have her conclude her answer.

The SPEAKER — Order! I uphold the point of order and ask the minister to conclude her answer.

Ms KOSKY — There is so much good news in education that it is very difficult to condense it. We are getting results from the investment we have made in extra teachers. There are some in this house who believe you can reduce the number of teachers and not get the consequences.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have asked the minister to conclude her answer, and I ask her to do so now.

Ms KOSKY — We know that when we invest in teachers we get improvements in completion rates, we get improvements in our prep-to-grade 2 class sizes and we get benefits for all our students. You would think a leader who was working against those outcomes would apologise.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the minister to resume her seat.

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister has been speaking for over 5 minutes, and she is now starting to debate the issue.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have already asked the minister to resume her seat.

Gaming: public lotteries licence

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Minister for Gaming. I refer to the minister's claim yesterday that he had not been advised of any preferred applicants for the lotteries tender, and I ask: will the minister confirm that the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation delivered its recommendation on a preferred tenderer in early June and that the report was delivered in person to his office?

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Gaming) — You have to question the accuracy of the comments of the Leader of the Opposition. He said that yesterday I did not know who the lottery bidders were. If you read *Daily Hansard*, I think it says I was not actually asked that question. However, I do note that yesterday — and it relates to this issue — the Leader of the Opposition in asking a question quoted from the report of the chairman of the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation, who is an independent statutory office-holder. He tried to link one part of the chairman's report about the lotteries licence review to a totally separate paragraph about investigations and people who — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! If the minister wants to correct the record, he is welcome to do so in a personal explanation. In this case I ask him to return to answering the question.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — I am highlighting inaccuracies in — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister will return to addressing his comments to Victorian government business.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — That is exactly what this is about. The fact of the matter is that again the Leader of the Opposition is wrong, in the same way that in quoting from the report he deleted six words and added two words to what was purported to be the chairman's quote.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have already explained quite clearly to the minister that, if he wishes to make a personal explanation about matters that occurred in the house yesterday, he is welcome to go through the normal process. In this case he is required to direct his answer to the question he has been asked today.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — There is no need for a personal explanation from me, Speaker, but there may be from the Leader of the Opposition. I can let the Leader of the Opposition know that the process has not been completed on the lotteries licence review. As I reiterated in the house yesterday, I rely on advice from the independent lotteries licensing review team. The gaming commission has not made any recommendation. The recommendation will come from the lotteries licensing review team.

Mr Baillieu interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition!

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — The role of the gaming commission, as I said to the house yesterday, is to conduct suitable investigations in relation to probity and suitable investigations in relation to the corporate and financial structures of proposed bidders.

Mr Smith interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Bass!

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — And the technology solutions being offered by the bidders. That is what its role is. I have been advised by the independent licence review team that the work of the gaming commission is not yet finished.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for Bass has totally ignored me, so I warn him. I also ask the member for Polwarth to be quiet.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — I have said that the independent licensing review committee has not made recommendations to me or to the government about the lottery licences. The Leader of the Opposition is wrong, in the same way that he was wrong yesterday in linking the chairman's comments with the lotteries licence review. The chairman and the gaming commission have informed me that the comments he was quoting from the chairman's report had nothing to do with the lotteries licence review and that the Leader of the Opposition was making it all up.

Schools: funding

Ms BARKER (Oakleigh) — My question is to the Minister for Education Services. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to helping make Victoria a great place to raise a family by investing in school buildings, and I ask the minister to detail to the house how the government is delivering on that commitment.

Ms ALLAN (Minister for Education Services) — I thank the member for Oakleigh for her question. The member for Oakleigh and I were at Oakleigh Primary School just this morning seeing some of the great things that are going on in Victorian government schools right across the state, as we have heard from the Minister for Education and Training.

The Bracks government has certainly worked very hard over the last seven years in investing in government

schools and in rebuilding government schools through its massive investment in school buildings. The figures back up our commitment. We have invested a mammoth \$1.6 billion in capital works. This has gone into building 57 new and replacement schools. It has gone into delivering 900 capital projects at 680 schools right across the state. We have pumped more than \$420 million into school maintenance needs at the same time.

This record investment is getting results. When you look back to 1997–98, under the former Kennett government, you find that the maintenance audit identified school maintenance needs of \$345 million. Compare that to 2005, when maintenance needs identified by the maintenance audit were down to \$268 million.

In less than one year since that audit was completed, we have already allocated \$141 million to allow schools to get on with the job of addressing their maintenance needs. Importantly this includes a 20 per cent boost in the annual base level of maintenance funding. It is also important to note that this brings the total investment that the Bracks government has put into school buildings and maintenance to \$2 billion. That is \$2 billion we have invested in capital works and in addressing maintenance needs as well. You can certainly compare that to what happened when the Leader of the Opposition was running the party that ran the state. It took the easy option of closing schools rather than maintaining and rebuilding them.

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, question time does not give the minister the opportunity to attack the opposition or to attack past governments. She should be concentrating her answer on government administration, and I ask you to bring her back to order.

The SPEAKER — Order! The minister appears to be debating the issue. I ask her to return to Victorian government business.

Ms ALLAN — We have done the hard work, and it is just a shame that those opposite will not apologise for what they did in Victorian government schools in the 1990s. We have certainly done the hard work. We have been building schools, we have been employing more teachers and bringing down class sizes.

Just last week I was alarmed to hear of an alternative policy on maintenance funding that reminds me — —

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, the minister is now about to commence debating the issue. She is also straying into the area of hypothetical

matters. I ask you to bring her back to the question and to government administration.

The SPEAKER — Order! It is a bit hard for me to call points of order on things that have not already been said in the house. In relation to comments, ministers are entitled to discuss alternative policies that the government has considered.

Ms ALLAN — Maybe the member for Mornington is considering a career post-Parliament as a clairvoyant.

I was alarmed last week to hear of an alternative policy when it comes to maintenance funding. This reminds me, and I am sure it reminds many of us in the house, of what the education system was like in the 1990s. When asked how this alternative would be funded, the cat was let out of the bag. The opposition spokesperson confessed that funding would only come through savings — —

Mr Thompson interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the member for Sandringham to cease interjecting in that manner. I ask the minister to continue her response, relating it to Victorian government business.

Ms ALLAN — The contrast is there: the \$2 billion in funding for capital works and maintenance versus slashing and burning to achieve savings, closing schools and sacking teachers. The Bracks government flatly rejects this approach and will continue to invest very strongly in schools and capital works. We have worked very hard to build and upgrade schools and to maintain facilities. But we also know that there is more to do in this area and we will continue to invest — —

Mr Cooper — On a point of order, Speaker, even with the points of order that have been taken previously, the minister has now been speaking for well over 5 minutes. I ask you to get her to round up her answer.

The SPEAKER — Order! I understand the minister was concluding, but her response has been interrupted a number of times.

Ms ALLAN — In conclusion, we will continue this hard work. We know there is more to do, we know that we will have to continue to invest in school capital works and school maintenance and not take the lazy option of closing schools and sacking teachers to make ends meet in Baillieu land.

Gaming: public lotteries licence

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Minister for Gaming. I refer to the June receipt of the Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation's recommendations on the lotteries tender and the subsequent approach the minister's office made to the chairman of the VCGR to investigate information the minister's office had received in regard to potential probity issues involving the bidders, Tattersall's and Intralot. Will the minister advise the house who provided that new information and when?

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS (Minister for Gaming) — We are in the process of a lotteries licensing review. One thing that gambling stakeholders want to know and have confidence in is that a government is prepared to have an open market and competition. I am pretty sure that if the other side had continued in government there would not be an open process — a competitive bidding process — for gambling licences in Victoria, which will get the best outcomes for Victoria. We are working through a process.

Under the Gambling Regulation Act the gaming commission needs to recommend to the independent review panel, via me, in relation to the obligations under the Gambling Regulation Act that I continually referred to in my previous comments and yesterday's comments. An interim report has been made available by the gaming commission to the licence review team. It is up to the licensing review team to be satisfied with the details of that report. It advises that further work needs to be provided by the gaming commission — —

Mr Baillieu interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Leader of the Opposition!

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — Further work needs to be provided by the gaming commission. The review team has not made me privy to the reasons for that. The Leader of the Opposition keeps on talking about probity. Probity is one of the areas of responsibility of the gaming commission. The other areas are about proposed corporate financial structures and technology.

Mr Baillieu interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have asked the Leader of the Opposition to cease interjecting in that manner across the table, and I ask him again.

Mr PANDAZOPOULOS — Speaker, this is la-la land, Baillieu land stuff. The Leader of the Opposition

is making it up as he goes along. At the end of the day it is the gaming commission that has to meet its obligations under the Gambling Regulation Act and the licence review team needs to then meet its obligations in relation to being satisfied that the gaming commission has met all the requirements under the Gambling Regulation Act.

There is no recommendation to me on a preferred lottery bidder. There is more than one bid in the process, and we need to let the processes go through to get the best outcomes for Victoria.

Hospitals: government record

Mr LUPTON (Pahran) — My question is to the Minister for Health. I refer the minister to the government's commitment to reversing the damage done to Victoria's health system in the 1990s and ask the minister to detail for the house the most recent examples of the government delivering on that commitment.

Ms PIKE (Minister for Health) — I thank the member for Prahran for his question and I commend him for his role in chairing the community advisory committee for the redevelopment of the Alfred surgery centre. The member, like many other members on our side, has worked very hard to support hospitals and health services within his local community, particularly as they have gone through one of the myriad redevelopments that have characterised the last seven years of this government.

Victoria's public hospital system is in the black for the second year in a row. I am pleased to be able to report to the house today that the combined surplus is \$42.5 million across both metropolitan and rural hospitals. The number of people on the elective surgery waiting list is the lowest since 1998. The number of people on the elective surgery waiting list is almost 4000 below the number who were waiting when Labor came to office. In addition to all of that, and to treat the many thousands of extra patients who are coming either to emergency or being admitted into our hospitals, we have recruited more than 7000 extra nurses since 1999. That is 34 per cent more nurses.

Just those figures alone — and of course there are many others that I could present to the house — are clear evidence that the Bracks government is turning around the state's hospital system. It is not just this government that is making that comment. It has been nationally acknowledged in many reports that the Bracks government's investment in our health system really is

innovative, is providing for greater access, and, of course, is yielding quality health services as well.

I want to use the example of nurses because we recognise the valuable role nurses play in our public hospitals and in our primary health services. We have worked very hard to make nursing an attractive career. We needed to do that after 3500 of them were sacked — 3500 left the profession, 3500 no longer had a job and 3500 were terribly disillusioned with the public health system. We provided, for example, funding for 2300 nurses — who used to be in the system before they were sacked — to attend refresher or re-entry programs. We funded more than 1200 scholarships for people wishing to undertake postgraduate studies, particularly in those areas of high demand such as critical care and mental health. We have invested significantly in training opportunities for nurses while they are on the job. Each year more than \$30 million is spent by our public hospitals on ongoing training and professional development.

We have invested in back injury programs, and of course we established a task force which has now reported with recommendations dealing with the ways in which we can reduce violence in the nursing workplace. The member for Mount Waverley, who is chair of that task force, provided 29 recommendations to the government, and we are now implementing all of those recommendations.

The Bracks government has made a significant financial investment in our public hospitals — some \$2.9 billion over the last seven years — and that is 83 per cent additional funding. That additional resourcing is now bearing fruit as the waiting lists come down, and all in the context of an additional 500 000 people receiving services in our public hospitals this year compared to 1999 — so that is people in emergency and people who are admitted into our hospitals. That is 500 000 extra patients.

We know we have a big challenge. We know that as the population ages people use health services more. We know that as the population grows we need to provide more services. We know that the community's expectations continue to rise, but we are very keen to meet this demand. Over the last seven years we have demonstrated that we have the capacity to do it. We know how important it is that health services are there for Victorians to make this community a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Gaming: public lotteries licence

Mr BAILLIEU (Leader of the Opposition) — My question is to the Premier. Has the Premier ever advised representatives of Tattersall's or Tabcorp that the gaming machine duopoly would be continued and that in any tender for the renewal of licences Tattersall's and Tabcorp would be given priority?

Mr BRACKS (Premier) — The answer is no. I can say that because I have no vested interest at all as Premier of this state.

Government: financial management

Ms LINDELL (Carrum) — My question is to the Treasurer. I refer the Treasurer to the government's commitment to delivering services through governing in an economically responsible manner, and I ask him to detail to the house how the Auditor-General's report, tabled in Parliament today, demonstrates that the government is delivering on that commitment.

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — I thank the member for Carrum for her question. At the outset I make the point that, unlike the former Liberal government, the Bracks government has enshrined the independent powers of the Auditor-General in the state's constitution. Our changes to the Financial Management Act have ensured that the Auditor-General has full access to all financial information relating to the state, and that is what the Auditor-General said in his report which he released to the Parliament today.

Today's report is really a vote of confidence in the state's finances and in the state's economy. Essentially the Auditor-General's report shows that under the Bracks government Victoria is financially responsible; it shows we have clear policies; it shows we have a plan for Victoria; it shows we are fiscally responsible; and it shows we have a tight team that governs responsibly with the interests of Victorian families in mind.

I think back to 1999 and the promises which we made then, being a party to the election. The total value of those recurrent promises net new spending was \$238 million over four years. In 2002 we committed net new spending of just on \$1 billion, again over the four-year period. We did not go around making reckless promises. If you want to deliver strong budget outcomes and a strong economy, you cannot make reckless promises. Governing responsibly means that we have been able to —

Mr Cooper interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask members on my left to be quiet, and I remind the member for Mornington that he is on a warning from this morning.

Mr BRUMBY — Governing responsibly means we have been able to turn Victoria around. As we have heard today, we have been able to employ more than 7000 extra nurses. We have been able to reduce elective waiting lists in hospitals to their lowest level in eight years, which is an extraordinary achievement. We have been able to increase police numbers by 1600. We have been able to achieve in our schools the highest retention rates of any state in Australia. We have been able to pay out more than 80 000 first home bonus grants. We have achieved record population growth and record building approvals, and we have completed more apprenticeships than any other state. That is a good record. It is built on making responsible promises.

My attention has been drawn to an article which appeared recently in the *Chelsea, Mordialloc, Mentone Independent*, which is from the electorate of the member for Carrum. It relates to financial responsibility and reckless promises. It concerns a gentleman called Mr Jeff Shelley, who has promised to build the Dingley bypass and extend the Mornington Peninsula Freeway. The cost of that commitment is \$380 million. This appears in an article headed ‘Lib pledge is a “disaster”’. When asked about this issue, Mr Shelley — —

Mr Thompson — On a point of order, Speaker, the Treasurer would be misleading the house if he did not also refer to the comments by the Honourable Pat Power, Labor’s transport spokesman in 1999 — —

The SPEAKER — Order!

Mr Thompson — The Premier, Steve Bracks, and the Treasurer, John Brumby himself, in relation to the Dingley bypass in 1996 and 1999 — —

The SPEAKER — Order!

Honourable members interjecting.

Questions interrupted.

SUSPENSION OF MEMBER

The SPEAKER — Order! I warned the member for Sandringham earlier about his behaviour in the house, yet he has chosen to quite clearly abuse the rules of this place by putting up a frivolous point of order and continuing to talk for a long period of time while the Speaker was on her feet. I therefore suspend the

member for Sandringham from the house for 30 minutes.

Honourable member for Sandringham withdrew from chamber.

Questions resumed.

Mr BRUMBY (Treasurer) — That is the article. I was asked about financial responsibility and about making reckless promises. When the gentleman in question was asked by the paper about the undertaking to build the Dingley bypass and the Mornington Peninsula Freeway, he replied, ‘It was a personal commitment’.

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! I ask the Treasurer to return to addressing his comments to Victorian government business.

Mr BRUMBY — If you make reckless promises and silly commitments, people will say silly things about you. This goes on — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The SPEAKER — Order! The Treasurer will address his comments to Victorian government business or I will sit him down.

Mr BRUMBY — In the Auditor-General’s annual financial report released today he indicates that his analysis confirms that over the five-year period to 30 June 2006 the rate of growth in state expenditure has been below the rate of growth of the Victorian economy. This indicates that the current level of government activity remains affordable and sustainable.

Mr Cooper — I raise a point of order, Speaker, in respect of two matters. Firstly, the Treasurer has been speaking for well over 5 minutes — in fact, he is now up to 6 minutes. Secondly, I draw your attention to a ruling by Speaker Andrianopoulos on 1 June 2000, when he said that a minister in replying to a question should not respond with extracts or information contained in a report tabled that day. I ask you to bring the minister back to order and to ask him to conclude his answer.

The SPEAKER — Order! As I understand it, the ruling by Speaker Andrianopoulos related to the fact that members should not provide information to the house that is readily available in a report. Ministers can respond by referring to that report but certainly not by quoting from it.

Mr BRUMBY — At this time of the year members should also be cautious about the way in which they use their electorate allowances. In relation to this matter another person was asked to comment on this particular remark, and the quote was:

What, so he's going to pay for it out of his own pocket? Is the \$380 million coming out of his electoral allowance?

The SPEAKER — Order! The Treasurer will resume his seat. Question time is now completed.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 12

Ms D'AMBROSIO (Mill Park) presented *Alert Digest No. 12 of 2006 on Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring (Amendment) Bill, together with appendices.*

Tabled.

Ordered to be printed.

DOCUMENTS

Tabled by Clerk:

Fed Square Pty Ltd — Report for the year 2005–06

Financial Management Act 1994 — Reports from the Minister for Environment that he had received the 2005–06 annual reports of:

Calder Regional Waste Management Group

Desert Fringe Regional Waste Management Group

Housing Guarantee Fund Limited — Report for the year 2005–06

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 — Notice under s 32(4)(a)(iii) in relation to Waste Management Policy (Used Packaging Materials) (*Gazette G37*, 14 September 2006)

Project Development and Construction Management Act 1994:

Amendment order under s 9

Nomination order under s 6, application order under s 8 and a statement under s 9 of reasons for making a nomination order (three documents)

Royal Botanic Gardens Board — Report for the year 2005–06

Statutory Rules under the following Acts:

Racing Act 1958 — SR No 128

Sentencing Act 1991 — SR No 125

Sex Offenders Registration Act 2004 — SR No 127

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — SR Nos 126, 129

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Minister's exemption certificates in relation to Statutory Rule Nos 119, 125

Western Regional Waste Management Group — Report for the year 2005–06.

SERIOUS SEX OFFENDERS MONITORING (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 3 October; motion of Mr HOLDING (Minister for Corrections).

Mr WELLS (Scoresby) — I rise to put the Liberal Party's position on the Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring (Amendment) Bill. This amendment results from a challenge to the act by Robin Fletcher in the Supreme Court, and the issue was clearly about him living in the community.

Robin Fletcher was at the time living within the walls of Ararat prison, and the Supreme Court ruled that living inside the walls of the prison at Ararat was not living in the community — and I refer to the ruling by Justice Gillard on the 27 September. On 4 March 1998 Robin Fletcher was sentenced to a total of 10 years imprisonment on three counts of wilfully committing an indecent act with a child under the age of 16 years, one count of child prostitution and one count of attempting to pervert the course of justice. Fletcher pleaded guilty to the charges, and the sentencing judge ordered that he serve a minimum of eight years before being eligible for parole.

Fletcher was an eligible offender within the meaning of the act in relation to applying for an extended supervision order (ESO), in that he had been the subject of a custodial sentence in respect of a relevant offence — namely, the indecent assault of a child. The ESO was going to be enforced from 12 June 2006 for a period of five years. An enormous amount of material was put before the court, and the court was satisfied that there was a high degree of probability that the offender would be likely to commit a relevant offence if released into the community.

When Fletcher was applying to the Supreme Court saying that the extended supervision order he was under was unfair, he was residing in a temporary accommodation unit in Ararat prison. He also complained about the fact that he was denied freedom of movement and could only leave the premises in the company of an approved escort. That was the basis for

the institution of the proceeding. On 9 August 2006 he was moved from the serious sexual offenders unit to a completely separate unit within the grounds but still inside the perimeter of the Ararat prison.

The new residence was located on a portion of land which was degazetted as a result of the order in council made on 27 July 2006. This land no longer formed part of the Ararat prison, but the fact is that it was still within the walls of Ararat prison. The degazetted land was fenced off on three sides using cyclone fencing and shade cloth screening in order to provide privacy for any occupants and visitors. The house is described as a relocatable unit.

Point 62 in the information submitted to the court states:

It was submitted on Mr Fletcher's behalf that it was the intention of Parliament that he should reside in the community. Reference was made to a number of provisions in the act which supported the submission.

The submission quoted the Minister for Corrections, who said in the second-reading speech on 22 February 2005:

Extended supervision orders will only be in force when the subject is resident in the community. An extended supervision order is suspended automatically if the subject of the order is detained in custody and will recommence upon discharge from custody.

I guess the intention of the second-reading speech was that Robin Fletcher would be dealt with harshly and would be punished so that when we had ESOs he would not be a menace to the general community and would not be allowed to roam around the streets of Ararat.

Justice Gillard looked at the legislation, which makes it very clear that the act was to be enforced once he was living within the community. He therefore ruled that living in the degazetted part of Ararat prison was not living in the community, and as a result Robin Fletcher was able to be released. It would follow that Mr Baldy would be able to be released into the general community as well. I guess the situation would be that there would be housing outside the walls of Ararat prison that they would be able to move into. We have seen some regrettable circumstances over the last couple of weeks. For example, when Mr Baldy was on one of his walks he had on an electronic device that simply did not work. He was able to walk around the perimeter unsupervised for about 35 minutes. A corrections officer then had to go out and find him.

We were under the impression that electronic devices had some sort of tracking system in them. We now find

out that that is simply not the case. We support the government's view that people such as Robin Fletcher and Mr Baldy need to be dealt with harshly by the adult parole board. They need to be inside the walls of Ararat prison where they can be dealt with so they are not going to be a risk to communities such as Ararat and surrounding areas. On that note I say the Liberal Party will be supporting the amendment put forward, and we wish it a speedy passage.

Dr SYKES (Benalla) — I rise to speak on the Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring (Amendment) Bill. I wish to indicate that The Nationals also support the bill. The background to the bill and the intended powers it contains have been outlined by the member for Scoresby. I would like to spend a short amount of time putting this bill and its powers in the broader perspective of protecting our community and particularly our children against serious sex offenders.

The key thing about this legislation is that it is a targeted approach. It is putting its energies into the known high-risk people, and in this case providing secure housing. The need for this is highlighted by an example when such a system was not in place for a particular person. It relates to the prime suspect in the horrific murder of the Irwin sisters. That person was not subjected to these sorts of measures and was able to live in the community quite legally with no controls, even though he had a history of 20 years of violence and sexual assault. Most recently he had spent two or three years in jail for rape. That is an example of where the system failed, and we can see the importance of putting in place legislation such as this. In response to that particular situation, as would be expected, there was community outrage, resulting in over 12 500 people signing a petition demanding tighter controls and greater protection of people in the community.

The solution The Nationals propose is to introduce a system of minimum sentencing for serious crime modelled on the New South Wales system. I call upon the government to adopt this approach as part of a strategy for protecting people against serious sex offenders. Other measures to look at in context include having a greater police presence in the community and on the beat, instead of the apparent situation we have of a reduction of around 750 police on the beat. That has resulted in decreases in staffing availability and actual closure of small stations such as Murchison and concerns in larger stations such as Mooroopna. That has caused considerable concern within the community and the Police Association.

Another issue is looking again at the need to protect our children against serious sexual assault in the context of

encouraging earlier reporting and detection of problems before they get too far down the track. The police in schools program was an example of that. By placing police in schools we had contact between schoolchildren and police and a development of respect and rapport. One of the benefits reported in the government's review of that program was the earlier reporting of sexual assaults in the schools. That is an example of a program that was working to identify problems early and address them. Unfortunately that program has been terminated and replaced by an alternative system that is yet to be proved.

In relation to sexual assaults in schools, in the past 12 months I have had experience with a number of investigations and the handling of the issues has been very disappointing. For example, the rights of the victim seem to be far less than the rights of the alleged perpetrator. We had a situation where the Department of Human Services was contesting a restraint order on an alleged perpetrator and enabling that person to continue in a school where the alleged victim was still present. Equally, the policy excludes the parents of victims being notified, even if a victim is intellectually disabled. Some serious attention needs to be given to sexual assaults in schools so that such problems do not multiply and we do not have a large number of sex offenders in our community.

On the broad-brush issues, legislation has been passed through this Parliament that requires police checks for people working with children. I think the intention is good, but I suggest that the actual implementation of the legislation needs substantial refinement. An amendment was made to the original child employment bill under which grandparents were required to undertake a police check. After substantial community reaction the requirement for a police check was removed, but under certain circumstances grandparents still require a permit to have children working with them. I understand that even uncles and aunts are still required to undergo a police check. We need to go back to the drawing board on that sort of thing so that our energies and resources are put into focusing on the high-risk situations and getting the best return in our efforts to protect our children.

A similar situation arises with the police checking of volunteers. I will not spend much time on that, other than to say that hundreds of thousands of volunteers will be subject to undergoing a police check to identify something like 3000 who have known criminal records when the proportion of sex offenders who actually have criminal records is a minority, with most people who commit those offences not having a record and being close to the actual victims.

In the context of the bill, and looking to protect our community against serious sex offenders, we need to continue to encourage the community spirit that is particularly evident in country Victoria. The adage that it takes a village to raise a child needs to be pursued and encouraged. Therefore we need to continue to encourage people in the community to be keeping an eye out for the wellbeing of children in the community and to protect them against the inevitable sex offenders who will be out there. If many eyes and ears are operating, the likelihood of that occurring will be reduced. As I said, in terms of getting value for money we need to be targeted and focused on our requirements, rather than taking a broad-brush approach which can result in inconveniencing many people and discouraging people from becoming volunteers, at great expense to the community.

In conclusion, The Nationals support the bill. We believe that the amendments will enable secure housing of serious sex offenders when they have completed their prison terms. At the same time we need to ensure that the powers in the bill are part of an overall package with some of the measures that I have mentioned, including minimum sentencing for serious offenders, more police on the beat and in the schools, and encouraging community members as a whole to keep an eye out for the wellbeing of each other, and particularly children. I wish the bill a speedy passage.

Mr LUPTON (Pahran) — I am pleased to be able to make a contribution in support of the Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring (Amendment) Bill, which amends the Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring Act, which was passed by this Parliament last year. Essentially the 2005 legislation established a strict regime under which people who had been convicted of child-sex offences would be subject to strict monitoring of their location and behaviour once they reached the end of their prison sentence.

The Secretary of the Department of Justice is, in appropriate circumstances, able to make application to the court. Where the secretary forms the opinion that the offender is likely to re-offend if released unsupervised back into the community at the end of their sentence, the secretary can apply for an extended supervision order which comes under the direction of the Adult Parole Board of Victoria. An extended supervision order is made by the court and can extend up to 15 years. As I said, an offender subject to an extended supervision order would then remain under the close supervision of the Secretary of the Department of Justice and the adult parole board.

The powers of the adult parole board's supervisory functions include giving a variety of directions to the offender for the purposes of achieving the extended supervision order. Those purposes are designed to protect the community from the potential of subsequent offences and also to promote the offender's rehabilitation and treatment. One of the powers of the adult parole board is to make a direction about where the offender must reside. In a number of cases it had become the practice for an extended supervision order to require that the offender reside within the grounds of a prison.

A particular offender subject to an extended supervision order, Mr Robin Fletcher, applied to the Supreme Court, claiming that the provision requiring him to reside in those circumstances was outside the scope of the legislation and invalid. Recently, on 27 September, the Supreme Court upheld that application. In *Robin Angus Fletcher v. The Secretary of the Department of Justice and Anor* the court found that the direction that Mr Fletcher reside in accommodation that is behind prison walls could not properly be described as 'living in the community', as was required under the legislation. As the Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring Act contemplates that an offender subject to an extended supervision order is living in the community, Mr Fletcher's accommodation arrangements were found to be unlawful. The effect of the decision would be to preclude offenders subject to extended supervision orders from being accommodated on prison grounds within the prison wall but outside the actual prison.

The amendments that the government is making are welcome because the original intent of the legislation passed by the Parliament last year will be reinstated. The Supreme Court found that although the Parliament essentially intended a particular outcome — that a person could be subject to a direction to live in certain circumstances and in a particular location and that some offenders were able to be located appropriately only within the grounds of a prison — that was not effectively accommodated by the terms of the original legislation. In light of the decision in Fletcher's case the bill amends the Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring Act to clarify that the adult parole board's powers to direct an offender include a direction to live on prison grounds.

The bill makes it clear that the adult parole board can direct an offender subject to an extended supervision order to reside at a place that is within the perimeter of a prison, either inside or outside the prison walls, but which does not form part of the gazetted area of the prison. That will enable those offenders to be

accommodated at facilities that are located within the grounds of a prison but which do not form part of that formal gazetted area.

The bill also clarifies that where the adult parole board gives an offender such a direction, the offender must be taken to be residing within the community for the purposes of the act. That is a sensible overriding provision which makes clear the intention of the Parliament that these circumstances mean that people such as Mr Fletcher can be accommodated in the way that he had been until his Supreme Court application was heard recently.

I commend the government for introducing this legislation. It is clearly necessary to give proper effect to the original legislation that was passed by Parliament last year. It again indicates that the Bracks Labor government is committed to making sure that Victoria continues to be a safe state.

Our commitment to community safety is well recognised. It includes the greatly increased resources that have been given to police and the net increase in police numbers in Victoria of more than 1600. Our commitment is also to look after victims of crime and to make sure there are as few victims of crime as possible. However, where offences do occur we must ensure those offenders are subject to appropriate sentences. Where serious sexual offences occur, even after the offender's sentence expires, it is appropriate that their circumstances, location and behaviour are closely monitored. This legislation will give effect to that spirit and intent. I support the bill.

Mr McINTOSH (Kew) — I state from the outset that my remarks in relation to this bill are not in any way an adverse reflection on the adult parole board. As a member of Parliament I have observed it does a good job in very difficult circumstances and is little understood by members of the community. Most importantly, the adult parole board is obviously bound by the laws made in this place. In light of that it sometimes has a difficult task to justify the position it adopts in relation to many of those matters. This is a matter I have discussed with the Attorney-General and the Minister for Corrections, and at the end of the day we have to get the laws right to enable the adult parole board and other correctional authorities to get it right.

We are all very concerned about those offenders who commit serious offences — particularly paedophile offences — who are likely to reoffend when they are released into the community. Our support for this amendment is based on the premise that while we accept the bill does go some way toward addressing

those concerns, it should go further in relation to all serious offences.

I understand that there is a high rate of recidivism amongst paedophiles. Paedophilia is probably one of the more revolting offences that one can think of and is the reason we are moved to pass this sort of draconian legislation. But it should apply to all serious offences and particularly to the most serious of all sexual offences, the offence of rape, which is not included in this legislation, and in relation to murder.

One of the difficulties we are dealing with today, and the reason this legislation has been introduced, is the imminent release of Mr Baldy, which received front page newspaper coverage. There was no law in the land that could protect the community once a person had served their maximum term. Understandably a lot of community outrage was directed at the parole board — I think unjustly — and at the government, rightly, to fix the problem. With some degree of speed the government brought this legislation into the house early last year, supported by the opposition. The opposition tried to amend it to make it tougher by including other offences like rape and murder. In fact, we were not able to amend it to include murder because it was related to sex offences, but we certainly tried to amend it to include the offence of rape as being related to serious sexual offences.

However, there is no doubt that in its haste to introduce the original legislation the government did not contemplate the problems we have faced here. There is no doubt that everybody was contemplating, in dealing with the original legislation, that a person such as Mr Baldy would be somehow cocooned, in the minister's words, by the toughest possible conditions available here in Victoria to protect the community against an offender who had been assessed by the Supreme Court as being a person with a high probability of reoffending by committing a relevant offence — not rape or murder but in relation to paedophile offences — if released in the community. So there was the expectation of that occurring if the person were released in the community. Indeed they are the words of the act itself under section 11 — that it is about recommitting a relevant offence 'in the community' — and they were the words of the minister in his second-reading speech, emphasising that it was upon 'release in the community'.

As a result of the Mr Baldy case we saw the serious consequences and the fear that people like Mr Baldy can engender in the community and the sort of vigilantism the community could resort to in pursuit of Mr Baldy. The only practical solution was for Mr Baldy

to be moved within the perimeters of a jail — maybe not the inside wall but certainly within the perimeter of the Ararat jail, with the tough conditions that the minister spoke about.

Regrettably, the solution moved faster than our ability to keep up with the legislative regime. I supported that position and identified even at that time that if the only practical solution to protect the community was to keep an offender in the precincts of a jail, then so be it, that should be the position.

The recent decision of Justice Gillard in Robin Fletcher's case identifies that whatever else 'release into the community' means, it does not mean release into a house inside the precincts of a prison, even though the area of land on which that accommodation had been established was degazetted. It is clear that the government foresaw this problem, but the court found in that case that the word 'community' certainly does not mean within the inner walls of Ararat prison, and accordingly this amendment is certainly supported by the opposition. As I said at the time, even in the case of Mr Baldy, if the only practical way the community can be protected is to confine these offenders inside the precincts of the prison, then so be it. And that is what this legislation does.

I have been a great supporter of extended supervision orders from the outset. Extended supervision orders are a very flexible method of resolving this particular problem rather than the sort of mandated indefinite sentence that they have in Queensland, where a judge determines that, if a person is going to remain a continuing danger, they can be subject to indefinite detention inside a prison. It should be flexible enough to allow that, but it should also be flexible enough to have lesser conditions and to allow those conditions to be relaxed over a period of time, subject to the discretion of the adult parole board.

I also identify for the purposes of this discussion a matter that causes me some concern. This matter was raised in a very recent decision of the Court of Appeal in *TSL v. Secretary of the Department of Justice*, where Acting President Callaway, agreed with by Justices Buchanan and Coldrey, found that there is concern that medical specialists, psychologists and psychiatrists giving evidence in these cases may in giving their clinical opinions necessarily go a little bit further than may be warranted, and the court has to be vigilant about that.

However, having said that, another matter that gives me great cause for concern in this legislation is its retrospectivity. Have no doubt what we are doing here.

If a person has been to court, no matter if it happens to be someone as reprehensible as Mr Fletcher, that person has been to court and has had his rights declared, just as it is the right of any citizen to go to court to have those rights vindicated or declared by the court.

Notwithstanding that right being declared, we are introducing a piece of legislation that will deliberately quash those rights that have been declared by a court. It is a significant step and should not go without some sort of comment today. It is a significant step that, yes, the opposition supports, but it must give us pause in the way we go about things. It is something that has arisen in the past, certainly in relation to the Garry David legislation. That certainly gave everybody reason to pause.

Having said that, it is a necessary amendment to effect that which the community expected was going to be the case, and accordingly the opposition supports the legislation.

Ms MARSHALL (Forest Hill) — It gives me a great deal of pleasure to join in making a contribution to the debate on the Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring (Amendment) Bill 2006. This amendment to the 2005 Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring Act gives the adult parole board the power to require high-risk child-sex offenders to reside either within the perimeter of the walls of a prison or in a prison property. This will enable offenders subject to extended supervision orders to be accommodated within a prison on degazetted land.

A decision in the Supreme Court in the matter of *Fletcher v. Secretary of the Department of Justice and Anor* found that the direction that Mr Fletcher reside in accommodation that is behind prison walls could not be described as living in the community and that the arrangements pertaining to his detention were therefore unlawful. The effect of that decision is to preclude offenders subject to extended supervision orders from being accommodated in prison grounds within prison walls.

In light of that decision, the bill will amend the Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring Act to clarify the adult parole board's power to direct an offender to live on prison grounds. That will give effect to the government's decision to provide temporary accommodation for offenders and to ensure that appropriate, safe accommodation is available for extended supervision order offenders where it has not been possible to find suitable housing for these persons in other locations in the community.

This bill is supported by the opposition and The Nationals, and I wish it a speedy passage.

Mr PERERA (Cranbourne) — I join members of both sides of the house in supporting this bill. The purpose and effect of the bill are entirely protective and rehabilitative. According to the evidence available, some paedophiles are likely to offend again and again throughout their lives. It is appropriate and necessary to provide for their ongoing supervision and, more importantly, to have the power to prohibit them from having contact with children. The laws, including this amendment, are tough, but they are in place to both protect the community and promote the offender's rehabilitation, care and treatment.

In the past we have seen some communities go berserk when a rumour about sex offenders moving into their neighbourhood spreads. We had recent experience with the Mr Baldy case. When my constituents heard that he had moved to the electorate, my phones were going hot. In this case the requirement to reside at such premises does not constitute an additional penalty on the offender. It is an arrangement to rehabilitate, care for and treat and eventually assist serious child-sex offenders who are posing a serious danger to the community. Every child has the right without discrimination to such protection as is in his or her best interests and is needed by him or her by reason of being a child. The Bracks government simply will not take lightly a potential risk to children. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HOLDING (Minister for Police and Emergency Services) — There are a couple of issues I would like to take up. I start by thanking members for their contributions to the debate. It is a very difficult piece of legislation insofar as it challenges a lot of fundamental legal precepts. It is important, and I do appreciate the thoughtful contributions all members made.

There are a couple of issues I want to canvass briefly. The member for Scoresby made the point that it was his view that Brian Jones, otherwise known as Mr Baldy, and Robin Fletcher ought to continue to reside within the perimeter of the Ararat prison as a consequence of the passage of this legislation. I want to make it clear that it is the government's view that ultimately these decisions are to be made by the adult parole board. We do not want to get into a situation where politicians, members of Parliament, myself as minister, shadow ministers and others provide a running commentary on what the conditions of an extended supervision order should be. The conditions ought to be set by the adult parole board. That is an independent process. It is the process that is explicitly contemplated by the

legislation, and it is a very important part of what makes this regime defensible. It is not politicians or bureaucrats making the decisions; it is a sentencing court making a decision about a person's likelihood of reoffending and the adult parole board making a judgment about what the appropriate conditions ought to be.

If I can take up the comments made by the member for Kew, it is the government's view that the strength of this is that it gives the adult parole board a flexible mechanism to manage offenders over a sustained period of time, with the ability to set the initial conditions and then potentially to alter those conditions as it is able to judge and assess the rehabilitative and treatment impact the conditions have had on relevant offenders over the course of their being subject to an extended supervision order regime. We think this is a strong piece of legislation, and its flexibility is improved by the amendments we introduced in the Parliament today.

The member for Kew raised the issue of retrospectivity. This is unusual, and I want to make a brief comment on it to explain the policy basis for it. Honourable members would recall that several months ago, when the adult parole board originally set the conditions of Robin Fletcher's extended supervision order, I made some comments in this chamber in response to a question without notice which outlined the conditions that the adult parole board had imposed on Robin Fletcher. At the time I described the legal basis for the making of those conditions and the importance the government had placed on the adult parole board's decision to impose a condition that Robin Fletcher reside within the perimeter of the Ararat prison. In other words, it was always the government's view that the condition imposed by the adult parole board was legally valid. Therefore whilst we understood the reasoning of the Supreme Court, we were surprised by that decision; hence the reason for introducing this amendment.

In a sense the legislation does not so much deprive someone of a previously existing right, although it deprives them of a right as declared by the Supreme Court, as assert the legal situation that the government thought existed anyway — that is, the right of the adult parole board to validly enact that as a condition of an extended supervision order. That is the reason why we have made this retrospective.

Mr McIntosh interjected.

Mr HOLDING — That is the danger, as the member for Kew interjects.

I thank all members for their contributions on this important amendment. We believe it makes the Parliament's intent absolutely clear. It is the intent of the government and of this Parliament that a valid condition of an extended supervision order includes an order that an offender reside within the degazetted part of an existing prison. That is the reason for this amendment, and we would hope and expect that the judiciary is mindful of that when it assesses applications brought by people who are subject to extended supervision orders in the future. I wish the amendment a speedy passage through the Parliament.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

WATER (GOVERNANCE) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from 3 October; motion of Mr THWAITES (Minister for Water).

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — The contents of the bill have been well covered by my friend the member for South-West Coast, who despite being very ill last night gave an excellent dissertation on the failure of the Bracks government to apply itself to the real problems in the water industry and to the shortcomings and anomalies within the bill. It has also been well covered by the member for Swan Hill, who has a good knowledge of the irrigation industry and whose views I respect.

One thing I would like to comment on is the inappropriateness of tacking on to this bill the changes to the Werribee South Land Act. Although we support the development, it should be in a planning bill. There is no way known it should be tacked on to a water bill. The vegetable growers in the area should be quite clear as to how the development will affect their future agricultural pursuits. This is clearly an attempt to hide the Bracks government's willingness to make adjustments to the use of land which was specifically set aside as green wedge land. I want to emphasise that in cases like this you do not often hear the Bracks government accept that it is changing what is specifically green wedge land, and as I said, this is a case in point. It chooses to do so only with its mates.

However, it is the enabling provisions of this legislation that worry me the most. As always, the devil is in the detail. The Treasurer will now have greatly increased powers in relation to the water portfolio. He will now have complete control over the establishment of water corporations and the restructure of water corporations, and he will even have the power to abolish water corporations. All I can say is, 'Good night to the First Mildura Irrigation Trust'. If a water authority is to be restructured, this legislation will deny it the opportunity of retaining elected board members. This is the strength of the First Mildura Irrigation Trust (FMIT). In future it must have a board appointed by the minister.

All through this legislation it is clear that the government intends to do away with the FMIT and remove the last vestige of free enterprise involved in running the water industry. This is Big Brother at its worst — but there is more to come. An elected board member will now be able to be sacked by the minister. Previously that was never possible. Should the minister wish to abolish the FMIT and amalgamate it with another water authority, he will only be required to table his reasons for doing so in both houses of Parliament. In future he will merely have to write to both authorities and then table his reasons to avoid all public debate. Clearly a body as important and as singularly different to the rest as the FMIT should not be facing this sort of legislation, which is designed specifically to remove it.

The removal of an authority's ability to determine the remuneration of its employees is another indication of this government's intent to centralise its authority over and control of the water industry. However, the Treasurer will really get his hands on the water industry under the requirement-for-dividends provision in the act. The new provision, which will allow the Treasurer to strip capital from all water corporations right across Victoria, including the cash cow of Melbourne Water, is really sinister.

In fact, it is worse than sinister. It will give the Treasurer complete control over what was the financial independence of our water authorities. It is bad enough to have a state government that has not invested in major water infrastructure over the past seven years, but now the Treasurer will have the right to commandeer funds that have been set aside by the water authorities to fund infrastructure works to either store more water, which is essential — I am sure the member for Murray Valley will comment on that — or reduce the enormous water losses that occur right across the state. We are burdened by an ageing, inefficient and outdated channel system, leaking pipelines and infrastructure that is, in many cases, over 100 years old.

There is an improvement in the bill, whereby Melbourne Water will no longer have to provide water free of charge for the cleansing and watering of streets. But why does Melbourne Water have to retain responsibility for supplying water free of charge for the washing of sewers and drains? That uses up an inordinate amount of water every year, and no-one pays for its use. There are systems elsewhere in this world where the outmoded habit of flushing drains and sewers has been replaced by the use of metaphoric 'pigs'. That has led to extraordinary and substantial savings in the water used for flushing.

What is of real concern to me, though, is the repeal of provisions in section 92 of the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Act 1958. The section states that:

The Board —

now the board of Melbourne Water —

shall at all times keep charged with water all its pipes to which fire plugs are fixed unless prevented by unusual drought or other unavoidable cause or accident or during necessary repairs ...

I would like to read the change proposed in new section 171D(5) of the Water Act. New subsection (4) states:

- (4) Melbourne Water Corporation must —
- (a) keep all fire plugs that are fixed to its works in working order; ...
 - (b) provide conspicuous markers for fire plugs ...
 - (c) make sure that at all times water is available without charge —

from fire plugs —

... for cleaning sewers and drains —

which I said is inappropriate. Then new subsection (5) states:

Sub-section (4)(a) does not require Melbourne Water Corporation to make sure that water pressure is adequate for fire fighting.

This is quite extraordinary. One of the main reasons for having fire plugs and for having water supplied on a perpetual basis is that every plug has the pressure to be used to fight fires. I find it extraordinary that this is the case.

Another concern I have is that Melbourne Water is not required to produce a permanent water-saving plan. All other urban water authorities have to publish plans, so

you have to ask why the same level of scrutiny is not applied to Melbourne Water. According to some estimates, Melbourne Water loses at least 20 per cent of its water through leakages, undetected and inappropriate use, and inefficient storage management. It is quite extraordinary that the government may well be hiding the real figure of water losses in much the same way as it exaggerates the amount of water that is recycled — that is, wastewater. It has recently been stated that Melbourne reuses only 2.6 per cent of its wastewater. The figure the Bracks government boasts about is 14.6 per cent. I looked up the report that has just been made available today. The actual amount of wastewater being reused is 7986 megalitres, which is only 2.6 per cent of the total. The government claims that the other 21 000 megalitres — used on the Werribee sewerage farm — is reused water. That is a complete farce. It is worse than a farce; it is actually untrue.

As the member for South-West Coast pointed out, there are two errors in the legislation that we picked up. It is extraordinary that my office could pick up two errors in this legislation that the Bracks government could not. It is very disappointing that that is the case.

I turn to the other areas of real concern. When this legislation is enacted there will be extraordinary confusion amongst the whole community. The new water systems, once declared, will be based largely on ownership shares. There will be concerns about the valuation of land, the mortgage of land with water and the increase from 2 per cent to 4 per cent of water that can be transferred from a district. Delivery of water may well be rationed and may even go to a quota system. There are all sorts of concerns here. All I can say is that it is a real concern that even the amendments have a mistake in them.

Mr JASPER (Murray Valley) — In joining the debate on the Water (Governance) Bill I support the comments that have been made by earlier speakers on behalf of The Nationals, and in particular by the Deputy Leader of The Nationals, because of his intimate knowledge of the water industry. Because of the importance of water to us, it has always been a huge issue for us in north-eastern Victoria, but now it is a huge issue for all Victorians and for all Australians.

I will digress for just a minute or two to indicate that a crisis situation is facing us in Australia — and water is one of the issues that is part of that crisis. I had discussions with the Premier only yesterday, and I indicated to him concerns relating to north-eastern Victoria and my electorate of Murray Valley and the additional problems that have been created just

recently. I went on to say that my belief is that the people involved with the Reserve Bank really have no idea of the difficulties facing us in country Australia. We hear reports in the media saying that there will be consideration of a further increase in interest rates before the end of this year. I believe that would compound the disaster situation facing us in country areas.

As the situation is developing, there is a lack of knowledge and information concerning primary producers and the great difficulties they are facing. Businesses and industries in country cities and towns are now feeling the effects of the lack of water in north-eastern Victoria and beyond. Of course this has been complicated further by the drought situation and other recent events in north-eastern Victoria and the Goulburn Valley, such as the frosts and the added complication of the announcement of changes in funding being provided to the tobacco industry in north-eastern Victoria.

My message initially is that we need to talk to people. The government needs to talk to the relevant people in the Reserve Bank and to the economists on this issue and to indicate clearly to them that any further interest rate rise would have a devastating effect, particularly on people living in country Australia, but more importantly on all people right across Australia. The effects are now starting to be felt. I hope the government puts the strongest possible pressure on the Reserve Bank in relation to the issue of interest rates increases and the devastating effect they are having, as well as the compounding effect on other issues of concern to us.

It is disappointing to have a look at the water industry and see the money that has been dragged out of the water authorities by the Victorian government since it was elected to power in 1999. It is estimated that approximately \$1.6 billion has been extracted from water authorities across Victoria and has gone into the coffers of the government. That is a disastrous situation and certainly is not conducive to the authorities being able to upgrade and improve the facilities for water users across the state of Victoria.

Now we have an environmental charge, which is another charge on the water authorities. It is estimated that \$60 million has been collected via this environmental tax which has been imposed on the water authorities as a so-called dividend that goes back to the government. These authorities can hardly afford to be presenting this money to the government when funding really needs to be provided to upgrade water facilities right across the state.

I was interested to read the front page of the *Herald Sun* today. I want to just quote two paragraphs from the lead article:

Stamp duty, fines, motor vehicle tax and increased GST payments from the federal government helped drive the bonanza.

Property buyers parted with a record \$2.6 billion in stamp duty, while people buying, selling and registering cars and motorbikes were taxed \$1.242 billion.

The point I am making is that the state government is rolling in money; it has been able to generate a huge surplus. We need more money to be provided to country Victoria — to these areas of concern and to the water industry.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr JASPER — I am appreciative if funding has been provided in my electorate of Murray Valley — that certainly is an issue I do not argue with at all — but I am concerned to see the surplus that has been generated by the state government when the water industry is having huge difficulties in maintaining and extending water infrastructure and services for those living in country Victoria.

I want to highlight not only that Victoria has difficulties with reduced water availability across the state, with the extended drought situation we are now facing and with the crisis that is developing throughout the farming industry and extending into the cities and towns, but that we have had the compounding factor in recent weeks of frosts in the Goulburn Valley. They extended right into north-eastern Victoria and across my electorate of Murray Valley, affecting the fruit growing industry as well as the wine and grape industries right up into the King Valley. The latest issue relates to the tobacco industry, with British American Tobacco indicating that it wants to close down production in north-eastern Victoria.

People in the tobacco industry have told me quite clearly that they will have great difficulty in getting the same returns from alternative crops, and there are others who are saying we need to look at the situation closely because of the difficulties that have developed in the chop-chop industry. It has been estimated that the federal government is losing up to \$100 million a year in excise revenue because of that illegal tobacco activity.

I turn to the issue the member for Benambra mentioned in his contribution. I have been an ardent supporter of extending and increasing water storages in north-eastern Victoria and beyond. The government

argues that Victoria does not need extended water storages. At this stage we certainly do not need them, but the fact is that without dams in north-eastern Victoria we would not have the water that is available for irrigation across the Murray Valley region. Last year a 100 per cent water right was available to water users, and this year there was a 93 per cent water right. That availability has underpinned the development and maintenance of the food bowl of the Murray Valley, which is dependent on irrigation water. Without Dartmouth Dam, which still has over 50 per cent capacity, we would not have had the supply of water that is coming down through the Murray and Snowy systems.

I have been a great supporter of extending water storages and building the Big Buffalo Dam. I was interested last week to receive correspondence from Mr Fred Neal of Myrtleford, who provided me with some newspaper cuttings. The Wangaratta *Chronicle Despatch* of 27 November 1962 reports under the headline “‘Big dam’ is the choice’ that a ‘£21 million dam on Buffalo River is recommended’. As I said, that was in 1962. We now have a situation where we need to be building the Big Buffalo Dam, extending Lake William Hovell and considering other water storages across Victoria. Unfortunately the government’s policy is not to build any water storages or extend any of the storages we already have.

My argument is clear: if we have a big wet season, we will fill those dams and be able to use the water in the future. As sure as night follows day it will rain, and when it does we want to be able to fill those storages and make sure we can underpin the increasing demand for water right across Victoria and across Australia.

I am not opposed to what the government is doing in looking at water conservation measures and seeking to get people to be more economical in their water usage. I have seen changes in this area, and I support actions by the government in seeking to reduce the amount of water that is required. But to suggest that water should be shifted from north-eastern Victoria to Ballarat and Bendigo is ludicrous, and I am totally opposed to it. The government needs to look at other alternatives, including water storages closer to those areas and schemes that reduce the water storage requirement.

I am disappointed when I hear the Minister for Water say that we need to share our water. I am not opposed to people wanting to have an appropriate supply of water, but it should not be at the expense of irrigators in the northern part of this state. To my way of thinking the water rights they have are sacrosanct. I see one member of the opposition shaking her head, but as far

as I am concerned those water rights are sacrosanct and need to be protected at all costs. If we do not have that water supply, we are certainly not going to get the production we need in the food bowl of Australia to ensure we have appropriate food supplies for the rest of the country.

This legislation has been amply expanded on by previous speakers from The Nationals, who looked at the amendments the bill makes to the Water Act and the Catchment and Land Protection Act. I support those amendments, but I oppose the principle in the bill before the house.

Ms DUNCAN (Macedon) — It is always a pleasure to follow the member for Murray Valley when he makes a contribution to debate on water management. I must confess that I continue to be confused by the policies of The Nationals when it comes to the management of water. However, I am pleased to speak in support of the Water (Governance) Bill, which will amend the Water Act 1989 and related legislation. I will briefly go through the main points of the bill.

The bill requires water authorities to have regard to principles of sustainable management, provides a stronger governance framework for water authorities, brings Melbourne Water under the Water Act 1989, establishes the role of storage management and sets out the functions of this role, and provides consultative processes for the decommissioning of any future dams. The bill also introduces on-the-spot fines for breaches of permanent water-saving plans, drought-response plans and water restrictions by-laws and provides for the protection of public land by making it clear that water authorities are exempt from adverse possession claims.

The bill amends the principal legislation to allow Victoria's top 200 industrial water users to be identified for the first time. Under these changes large industrial water users will be able to highlight their water-saving efforts to the wider community. I think that is really important. As we all know, the main feature of the government's policy on water management is first and foremost the conservation of water, and it is important for everybody to understand what other sectors of the community are doing and how they are contributing to the water-saving effort. That amendment will go towards achieving that goal.

In terms of the principles of sustainable water management, the government believes that water authorities have a leading role to play in responsibly and sustainably managing Victoria's water resources. Under the current legislation water authorities do not

always have a clear mandate to take what we would now consider to be a whole-water-cycle approach to the management of water services. This is an aspect of water management that the member for Murray Valley might consider a little more broadly. It is important to look at a whole water cycle when considering an entire catchment area. It is proposed that water authorities must have regard to these principles in the exercise of their powers and the performance of their functions. These principles incorporate internationally recognised environmental concepts.

In regard to water storage management, the current legislation does not clearly provide for the roles and functions of storage operators. We know that water storages — dams — provide a range of community benefits, including the provision of potable water, but they also provide recreational benefits, health benefits and environmental and aesthetic benefits. The bill clarifies the existing legislation by giving water storage managers explicit functions in this area.

With regard to the decommissioning of major dams, there is currently no requirement in the legislation for water authorities to seek any input from the community on a proposal to decommission any dam. While some form of consultation usually takes place, it is important that a consistent approach be adopted right across the state. This bill establishes a mandatory consultative process for the decommissioning of major dams that is transparent and equitable, takes account of public submissions and requires water authorities to advertise any proposed decommissioning.

The bill also introduces on-the-spot fines. As I said, one of the key elements of the government's approach to water management is conservation. With the permanent water-saving restrictions that are now in place — they are really commonsense rules — it is important to ensure that, once people fully understand the restrictions, any breaches are dealt with appropriately and in a timely manner. Currently any breaches of water restrictions can be prosecuted in court. This bill introduces penalty notices, or on-the-spot fines, which are an extra enforcement tool that water authorities will be able to use to encourage people to comply with water-saving rules.

Water authorities are encouraged to use discretion in this. Often when people breach water restrictions it is done out of ignorance, and water authorities need to take that into account. We need to be encouraging and working with people to make a fundamental change to the way we use water. That is what all of this is about. It is not about trying to hit people with sticks; it is about getting people to change their behaviours.

Obviously, the penalties are higher for breaches of restrictions, prohibitions and additional restrictions under drought-response plans and are lower for breaches of the permanent water-saving measures. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — After some 18 years I rise to make my last contribution to debate on a piece of legislation. Looking back at the extent of the legislation I have spoken on, I realise that I have not been an expert on most of it but have got better informed as I have gone along.

I could not help but notice that buried at the back of this 226-page Water (Governance) Bill — and I know you, Acting Speaker, are a very fine person for detail — in clause 173 is a long-term marina development lease. Clause 174 refers to the effect of schedule 2. I know the Minister for the Arts would be fascinated by this, because it is another take on green wedge land. The former Minister for Planning, now the Minister for the Arts, who is the minister at the table, promised this Parliament four years ago that green wedges would be enshrined forever, that green wedges would never be tampered with. But here we have in schedule 2 yet another incursion into green wedge land for a developer. I do not know how this situation could arise with a government that is supposed to be supporting green wedges.

It is probably appropriate that I quote from the second-reading speech made by the former Minister for Planning on the green wedge legislation on 10 October 2002:

One of the initiatives of Melbourne 2030 is to reinforce the principle of maintaining green wedges between areas of urban development.

I further quote the minister's press release of 20 May 2004:

Green wedges contain some of the state's most valuable land for the environment, agriculture and tourism. During extensive consultation on Melbourne 2030, including our green wedge zone proposals, the community clearly told us it believed green wedges should be no-go zones for inappropriate uses like urban sprawl ...

What do we have here? It is a subdivision in the green wedge. This minister made a promise to this Parliament — she had all her friends from the green wedge support group lined up in the public gallery, and they were all supporting the fact that this government was going to lock away this land forever — and now we have, apart from a Chinese nursing home imposed upon my electorate by this minister, a total blight on the landscape. It is not an allowed use in the green wedge

zone, but we have this incredible concrete brick edifice in a scarred landscape that used to be bushland. That was allowed to occur after the green wedge legislation went through the Parliament, and now we have a marina subdivision in the Werribee green wedge.

On 23 August the current planning minister said in answer to a question without notice:

Giving the red light to green wedges, as we know, gives the green light to unbridled development in green wedge areas. What does this mean? This in turn would mean that we would be taking a wrecking ball to the beauty of areas like Mount Macedon, the Mornington Peninsula —

and who could deny the beauty of the Werribee area? You could substitute Werribee for one of those areas, I am sure.

Here we have a situation in which land that was meant to be protected for all time is being given over to a developer for a residential subdivision and associated marina development. What a mockery that makes of this Parliament's so-called commitment to green wedges. What a mockery it makes of the minister's promises to all those volunteer groups who had been campaigning for so many years to lock up this green wedge!

Ms Delahunty interjected.

Mr HONEYWOOD — Across the table the minister can try to justify it as much as she would like. I was elected on a mandate from my volunteer groups in 1988 at a time when the then Premier, John Cain, unfortunately had a policy of dual occupancy as of right across the entire metropolitan area. A good, hardworking Labor member, Lou Hill, lost his seat over that issue, and I was a beneficiary of that. The bottom line is that the green wedges have been part and parcel of my 18 years of parliamentary experience because I have been able to achieve absolutely no change to the green wedge in my electorate.

I know the current member for Werribee is a passionate supporter of her electorate, even though she will no longer be the member for that electorate, but at the end of the day this government should not, after having promised the people of Victoria that green wedges would be sacrosanct, make incursion after incursion into so-called protected land. I am sure that Rosemary Graham and many others who sat in this chamber and listened to the minister's commitments will be fascinated to see this latest example of a unilateral change to land that was meant to be protected for all time.

Mr HUDSON (Bentleigh) — It is a great pleasure to speak in support of the Water (Governance) Bill. The bill gives further legislative effect to the government's white paper, *Our Water Our Future*. It is a landmark document because it implements sustainable water management in Victoria.

The great thing about the bill is that it requires water authorities to take into account the principles of sustainable water management. Water authorities will not only be looking at the supply of water, they will also have to look at how much water is available in their catchments and the best way to use it.

Under this government water authorities have played a key role in promoting water savings. They have not only informed people as to what constitutes efficient water use within any given household for the size of that household but also promoted water-efficient devices such as showerheads. They have supported government initiatives like rebates on water-efficient washing machines. They will assist customers to develop water-efficient gardening practices, which is where a lot of household water is used.

Under this bill they could also consider whether, for example, new housing estates such as the Aurora estate could benefit from the installation of a third pipe for recycling grey water, given the availability within the storage of that particular water authority. This legislation clearly puts the importance of sustainable water management front and centre for our water authorities.

Another aspect of the bill and the amendments introduced into the house is on-the-spot fines. We know Melburnians have done a great job in saving water over the last decade. In fact since the 1990s there has been a 22 per cent saving in water use in Melbourne. Since 1992 we have saved the equivalent of 180 billion litres of water. If we had not saved that water our water storages, which are currently at about 46 per cent full overall, would be down at about 36 per cent. If we had not saved that water through water conservation measures, we would be very close to stage 3 restrictions and not stage 1 restrictions.

It is fairly clear that most Victorians are abiding by the water restrictions, but as we move on to stage 1 restrictions here in Melbourne, the next level of severity in water restrictions, it is also important that we put in place measures to ensure that we have effective deterrents against those people who are recalcitrant misusers of water and who do not comply with the water restrictions. To date the only way we have had of enforcing water restrictions has been to issue warnings

or to take people to court. Under this legislation we will be able to introduce on-the-spot fines which will ensure that people comply with the restrictions. If you look at the levels of those fines, you see they range from \$107 for a breach of stage 1 restrictions through to \$537.15 for a breach of stage 4 water restrictions.

These on-the-spot fines will be a significant deterrent. They will be in place this summer and, of course, it is important for them to be accompanied by an effective community education program so that people are not in breach of these restrictions out of ignorance. But we do want to catch the wilful offenders and those who are not willing to comply with the law. I commend the bill to the house.

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — I am very pleased to make a contribution to the Water (Governance) Bill. The purpose of the bill is to amend the Water Act 1989 and to require water authorities to have regard to the principles of sustainable management — and I think that is very important. It will provide a stronger governance framework for water authorities and bring Melbourne Water under the Water Act 1989. It does a whole range of other things including introducing on-the-spot fines for breaches of water restrictions. It amends the Catchment and Land Protection Act, repeals the Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works Act 1958, and brings some Melbourne water authorities under the Water Act.

As previous members have pointed out, it is a rather lengthy and complex piece of legislation. It runs to 226 pages and is complex and difficult to follow. To compound matters the government still has not got it right, because only today it has brought in another 13 amendments to the act, and that is part of the reason we will be opposing the legislation. The government has still not got it right.

Referring to the principal act, the Water Act 1989, it is rather ironic, I guess, that on my last day in the Parliament today I reflect that one of the very first issues we dealt with when I came into this place was the 1989 Water Act. I pay tribute to the minister at that time, the Honourable Bunna Walsh, the shadow minister for the Liberal Party, Geoff Coleman, and Barry Steggall on behalf of the National Party, who did an enormous job at that time consolidating six separate acts — 1000 pages of legislation — into the 1989 Water Act, and, if you will pardon the pun, that was a watershed in water legislation.

We need to move on. Things have changed, and certainly there is a need for — —

Mr Smith interjected.

Mr MAUGHAN — I agree, in many instance it has not been for the better. As the member for Bass points out, some of the legislation we are dealing with today is going backwards rather than forwards. But this legislation gives much more power to the minister.

It changes the structure of the catchment management authorities (CMAs) and provides the minister with more power over them, which reverses the initiative brought in under the Kennett government and prior to that, as a result of the McDonald report, to devolve power out to the CMAs on the one hand and to water authorities on the other. This bill reverses that. It turns water management back to the pre-McDonald report days, which at that time gave more authority to the customers — the irrigators. Likewise with the CMAs, because the whole concept there was to include the whole community and to say that every one of us is part of a catchment and should have some responsibility for what goes on in that catchment. Now the government has reversed that, and it is far more in the hands of the government.

Water is a very important issue at the moment, and not only because of the extreme circumstances we are in, although they are certainly driving it. It is also an issue of national significance. It is being driven from the Prime Minister down. The Prime Minister has been making a lot of comments on it recently. The national water initiative has been initiated by the commonwealth government, which has put \$2 billion into the project. Essentially it was driven by the Deputy Prime Minister at the time, the Honourable John Anderson who was the Leader of The Nationals, and the Honourable Warren Truss. Now, to his credit, the Prime Minister is giving it a lot more oomph. He has established the Office of Water Resources so that we have a national approach to this very important issue of water. Important and influential businessmen like Richard Pratt have spoken out on this issue, and the Business Council of Australia has made some very worthwhile comments.

As I have already indicated, the debate is driven to some degree by the dire circumstances we are in at the moment in Victoria. Dam levels are appallingly low. Eildon is at 21 per cent of capacity at the moment, with about half the water that was in it this time last year. Eppalock is a disaster at 3 per cent of capacity with severe restrictions for those who are dependent on it. Campaspe irrigators are still on zero allocation. Hume has 18 per cent capacity, about 20 per cent of what it had in it this time last year. Dartmouth is the bright spot; it still has 55 per cent capacity with 2.1 million

megalitres of water in the dam. The Murray system is still not yet up to full water entitlements.

Dr Sykes — What about Lake Mokoan!

Mr MAUGHAN — As the member for Benalla points out there is not much in Lake Mokoan, nor in Waranga, and you can go through all those other dams. The River Murray system is in its sixth successive year of drought. Inflows into the Murray system over the five years from July 2001 to June 2006 are the lowest on record. As I have indicated, Goulburn irrigators are on 21 per cent of their allocation with a 1 in 10 chance of getting their full allocation by the middle of February. Campaspe irrigators are on zero, again with a 10 per cent chance of getting their full allocations by the middle of February.

The Bracks government talks a lot and takes a lot of credit for what it has done in the water industry. It publishes a lot of glossy brochures and puts out a lot of spin, but no specific water industry projects have been initiated by this government in the seven years it has been in office. That is nowhere better illustrated than in the recent debacle over taking water from the Goulburn Valley for Ballarat and Bendigo. No thought has been put into a strategy for supplying urban areas. The government is doing these sorts of things on the run. There is no plan, and there is no study. There has been no community consultation, just an announcement by the government that it is going to take water from distressed farmers in the Goulburn Valley and pipe it to Bendigo — and again, to get it past the election, it has suddenly found \$220 million, which it says it is going to spend on taking water to Ballarat.

Where is the study? Where is the honesty and the openness? Where is the accountability to show that it has looked at other sources such as underground water. There are large aquifers in Ballarat that could be used in situations such as this, and likewise around Bendigo. What has the government been doing to recycle water? What has it been doing to catch storm water? These are very important issues, but there has been no study of the alternatives, no action on recycling and no action on reducing losses.

Victoria's water infrastructure is in a poor condition and loses about 7 per cent of all the water that goes through it, which amounts to well over 700 gegalitres per annum. Our losses through infrastructure are greater than those of practically any other state in Australia. What are we doing about it? Absolutely nothing. A total of 350 billion litres of partially treated sewage is dumped into Bass Strait each year. What are we doing about recycling that water? Virtually nothing. I could

go on to talk about the 13.5 million litres of treated sewage from the Lilydale treatment plant that goes into the Olinda Creek and ultimately into the Yarra. What are we doing about that? Again, absolutely nothing.

What can we do? We can build things like the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline, the first stage of which was on time and within budget — and that was essentially done by the commonwealth. This government played politics over the remaining stages for about two years. The project is now under way, this government has put in \$172 million, and it will be a great project for reducing water losses. A lot more projects such as that can be undertaken. There is Southern Cross station, which has the largest roof in the CBD, the rainwater from which — 18 million litres a year — goes straight into the Yarra. It is an absolute disgrace. The situation is the same with the Austin and the Mercy hospital projects. This government has done nothing about water initiatives.

This government stands condemned for its lack of action over the last seven years. All it has done is to put out glossy brochures. It is time it got on with things and did something, particularly to assist the distressed irrigators in the Goulburn Valley.

Ms MUNT (Mordialloc) — I am very pleased to be able to contribute to the debate on the Water (Governance) Bill, but I am going to speak from a metropolitan perspective. This is a very big bill that contains a lot of clauses and has a lot of different information, and water is an important subject at the moment, given the protracted drought we are experiencing in Victoria.

As I travel around my metropolitan electorate I know that the people of Mordialloc have a genuine desire to participate and help in the conservation of water. They try and do this by many means, including grey water recycling and cutting down the times of their showers. There are government rebates on water tanks, and I know a lot of people are very anxious to install tanks on their properties. They are interested in using grey water systems and trigger nozzles, and I am very pleased that 180 000 water-saving shower heads are about to be sent out too. People are also conscious of the amount of water they use in their gardens. All these measures have helped to reduce water consumption in the domestic area by 22 per cent. That figure does not really give a proper picture of the water saving it represents. It amounts to 180 billion litres, or three dams worth, of water saving.

People have a genuine desire to save water in their own residences, and they are working well at doing that.

They are also telling me that they would like industry to participate in water saving as well, so the part of this bill I would like to quickly talk about is the annual reporting of significant water users, whereby industry and business will be encouraged to contribute to overall water savings. We just have to do it, because water is so scarce. This an opportunity for the top 200 industrial water users that are undertaking significant water conservation measures to be recognised for their initiative. That is a part of this bill that I am sure will be welcomed by the people of my electorate. They will see that industry and government are focusing on matching their wonderful efforts to save water.

The other initiative I want to mention is the eastern water recycling project. This could lift our recycling rate to over 40 per cent and reduce the outfall at Gunnamatta by up to 80 per cent. They are all very important prongs in the plan that has been put in place to save water. I support this bill. It is good legislation that is another part of the water-saving jigsaw puzzle.

Mr RYAN (Leader of The Nationals) — Not only can this Labor government not manage money, it cannot manage water — indeed, it spends money like water. Unfortunately the position that prevails in Victoria is a commentary on the ability of the present government to manage one of our most important natural assets.

It is ironic that we are debating this legislation in the last moments of the 55th Parliament prior to its being dissolved and our proceeding to the election on 25 November. It is ironic, because it effectively marks the end of seven years of governance by the Labor Party in the state of Victoria. The examination of Labor's performance in the water sector over that period of time leads to the inevitable conclusion that it stands absolutely condemned for its inability to do anything of merit with regard to managing this critical aspect of our natural resources.

I heard the commentary of the previous speaker about shower heads. It is interesting to put these things in context. Over seven years the Victorian government has received \$1.6 billion in dividends that it has taken from water authorities. In addition to that it is taking \$60 million a year by way of an environmental tax. I always think of that payment with a bit of a winsome smile, because you do not need to think too far back to remember the kicking and squealing about the catchment management levies which were initiated by the previous government. The payments were to be about \$35 per household, and there was hell to pay from the then Labor opposition. But now Labor is taking \$60 million a year by way of an environmental

tax. What do we have to show by way of a real initiative which the government has recently announced as the benefit of all this money? A \$6 million, or thereabouts, program in relation to shower heads — the government will be down to beads and axes next. With the enormous amount of money available to it — the huge amount of funds it has effectively taken out of the pockets of Victorians — the government has nothing to show for it.

While this legislation does things we would normally support, and we favour elements of it, it reiterates the general notion of a structure which is not appropriate to the needs of the industry and for the future needs of Victoria and Victorians. In the context of the overall discussion about water, what I find most disappointing about the government's approach is its unashamed endeavour to pitch communities against communities. It stumbles from one proposition to another without any practical long-term planning to provide a credible basis for it. That is reflected in the propositions to pipe water hither, thither and yon that have been advanced over the last couple of months.

About five months ago, in April, the government released a 165-page report about governing Victoria's water future. The idea of piping Victoria's water around the place was not mentioned. This was an extensive report that was purportedly the subject of much consideration over a period of months, if not years, and yet these propositions were not in it at all. Over the succeeding period of about 150 days all of a sudden the government has come up with \$220 million to pipe water out of the Goulburn Valley across the Great Dividing Range and into Ballarat — and that incorporates, to a degree at least, the piping of water to Bendigo.

Let me make it very clear on behalf of The Nationals that we unreservedly accept that the great regional cities of Victoria — Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong — are entitled to their water security. It is an imperative for the future of those cities and for the good of the state at large. We recognise that, but equally we recognise and respect the rights of Victorian irrigators to continue to enjoy their legal entitlements in relation to the water that is vested in them.

We also recognise that if you transfer water, you transfer wealth. If you send water from place A to place B, you send wealth with it. You therefore have to be very careful in the way in which you approach these issues. That is what moved me to say recently in an ABC interview at Ballarat, I think it was, that the government would be much wiser to hasten slowly in how it plans to ensure we get a proper balance in all of

this in order to do justice to all the respective communities as best as we can. We cannot have winners and losers; rather, we have to approach this in a balanced way that does justice to all concerned.

The Minister for Agriculture picked up some commentary he must have heard from my Ballarat interview, as is his wont, and tried to twist it into some notion that The Nationals are opposed to Bendigo and Ballarat securing their water future. That is not the case at all. Rather, what we are advocating is that when you are planning these things on the massive scale that is involved, you have to do it on a proper, researched and credible basis.

Other aspects of the government's treatment of the industry are very relevant, particularly regarding Gippsland. There has been discussion about the development of the Gippsland water factory. Again The Nationals strongly support the notion of Gippsland at last having the chance to be rid of the appalling odour that comes out of the Dutson drain, as it is known, which crosses part of my electorate — of course we support it. Of course we support the principle of recycling water and getting better use out of it. What we will not and will never support is taking more of Gippsland's water and sending it to Melbourne. It was only at the end of his rant this morning that the member for Narracan dropped in the notion that Gippsland will get some use out of the potable water that is saved, but other places will also be beneficiaries of that. We all know what he means — Melbourne Labor will raid Gippsland for even more water.

Mr Jenkins interjected.

Mr RYAN — I hear the member for Morwell firing up, and so he should. He stands condemned too. He will not stand up on behalf of Gippslanders and protect their interests. No wonder he is embarrassed about it. If I were pathetic enough to take his position, I would be equally embarrassed. And the same goes for his colleague the member for Narracan and the commentary he made this morning. The people will put their point of view on 25 November. These two weaklings will not even stand up on behalf of Gippsland communities to protect them and ensure that Gippsland's potable water — what we have left, at least — is protected and used for the good of Gippslanders, as opposed to it being sent back to Melbourne, which is what Melbourne Labor wants to do.

There are other aspects of the legislation that deal with matters pertinent to the future of the industry. There is the unresolved question of the exit fees charged in

irrigation areas. The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has cast a pall over the prospect of that happening. We have unresolved issues concerning the unbundling of water from land. From the perspective of local government this is a hugely important issue, because local councils in the irrigation areas in particular are uncertain as to how this will impact upon their rate bases in times to come.

I conclude by saying that the government must be prepared to commit to the prospect of at least building more water storages in Victoria. It does not have to be dams; it could be off-stream storages, if necessary. There are variations on the theme. You can do it in different ways. Premier Beattie in Queensland has done it successfully. Of all people Professor Peter Cullen, chief adviser to the Prime Minister, said the other day that it is something that ought to be positively considered. The Business Council of Australia has said it as well. The government needs to open its eyes to the practical fact that with today's technology you can do it. It is just another element of how Labor cannot manage money or water. In both instances, shame upon it!

Mr INGRAM (Gippsland East) — In the brief time that I have to speak on the Water (Governance) Bill I say from the outset that I will be supporting it. I understand there is a raft of provisions in the bill, many of which are very complex.

Some issues have come up during the debate which are very important. The Leader of The Nationals probably does not understand the Gippsland water factory concept. As I understand it, the proposal to treat the water in the Latrobe Valley and use some of that water at Australian Paper will not decommission the outfall to Dutson Downs. It would not be until the eastern water treatment plant came online that the outfall would be decommissioned. That is a real concern for most people in my community.

A lot of other issues have come up in this bill, and one of those is how important water is for all our urban and rural communities in an agricultural sense. That is why the white paper reforms, which I commented on at the time — and most people in this place supported the broad concept — put a greater focus on water recycling and reuse.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr Plowman) — Order! The time set down for consideration of items of the government business program has arrived. and I am required to put the following question. The question is:

That this bill be now read a second time.

House divided on question:

Ayes, 60

Allan, Ms	Kosky, Ms
Andrews, Mr	Langdon, Mr
Barker, Ms	Languiller, Mr
Batchelor, Mr	Leighton, Mr
Beard, Ms	Lim, Mr
Beattie, Ms	Lindell, Ms
Bracks, Mr	Lobato, Ms
Brumby, Mr	Lockwood, Mr
Buchanan, Ms	Loney, Mr
Cameron, Mr	Lupton, Mr
Campbell, Ms	McTaggart, Ms
Carli, Mr	Marshall, Ms
Crutchfield, Mr	Maxfield, Mr
D'Ambrosio, Ms	Merlino, Mr
Delahunty, Ms	Mildenhall, Mr
Donnellan, Mr	Morand, Ms
Duncan, Ms	Munt, Ms
Eckstein, Ms	Nardella, Mr
Garbutt, Ms	Neville, Ms
Gillett, Ms	Overington, Ms
Green, Ms	Pandazopoulos, Mr
Hardman, Mr	Perera, Mr
Harkness, Dr	Pike, Ms
Helper, Mr	Robinson, Mr
Herbert, Mr	Seitz, Mr
Howard, Mr	Stensholt, Mr
Hudson, Mr	Thwaites, Mr
Hulls, Mr	Trezise, Mr
Ingram, Mr	Wilson, Mr
Jenkins, Mr	Wynne, Mr

Noes, 25

Asher, Ms	Napthine, Dr
Baillieu, Mr	Perton, Mr
Clark, Mr	Plowman, Mr
Cooper, Mr	Powell, Mrs
Delahunty, Mr	Ryan, Mr
Dixon, Mr	Savage, Mr
Doyle, Mr	Shardey, Mrs
Honeywood, Mr	Smith, Mr
Jasper, Mr	Sykes, Dr
Kotsiras, Mr	Thompson, Mr
McIntosh, Mr	Walsh, Mr
Maughan, Mr	Wells, Mr
Mulder, Mr	

Question agreed to.

Read second time.

Circulated amendments

Circulated government amendments as follows agreed to:

1. Clause 54, page 81, line 27, after this line insert —

“Division 4 — Annual Report

- 122ZJ. Information to be included in annual report**

- (1) A water corporation, in its annual report for a financial year under Part 7 of the **Financial Management Act 1994**, must include the following information —
 - (a) in relation to each person, who is not a natural person, who uses water supplied by the water corporation for purposes that are not farming, irrigation or domestic purposes, at a volume that is within a specified range —
 - (i) the name of the person; and
 - (ii) the information (if any) as to the person’s participation in any water conservation program; and
 - (b) in relation to each specified range, the number of persons to whom paragraph (a) applies who are within the range.
- (2) For the purposes of this section the Minister may specify one or more range or ranges of volumes.
- (3) In this section “**specified range**” means a range of volumes specified by the Minister under sub-section (2).”.
- 2. Clause 54, page 82, line 2, omit “122ZJ” and insert “122ZK”.
- 3. Clause 54, page 82, line 27, omit “122ZK” and insert “122ZL”.
- 4. Clause 54, page 83, line 26, omit “122ZL” and insert “122ZM”.
- 5. Clause 54, page 84, line 16, omit “122ZM” and insert “122ZN”.
- 6. Clause 71, page 98, after line 5 insert —

“171G. Immediate action for water supply protection

Melbourne Water Corporation may, immediately and without notice, remove from —

 - (a) any land that is adjacent to any waterway or works forming part of Melbourne Water Corporation’s water supply system; or
 - (b) any water in or adjacent to any such waterway or works —

any substance or thing that is, in Melbourne Water Corporation’s opinion, likely to affect the purity of Melbourne Water Corporation’s water supply system.”.
- 7. Clause 71, page 98, line 6, omit “171G” and insert “171H”.
- 8. Clause 71, page 100, line 1, omit “171H” and insert “171I”.

- 9. Clause 123, page 142, line 12, omit “122ZJ” and insert “122ZK”.
- 10. Clause 161, line 10, omit “7C” and insert “7AB”.
- 11. Clause 161, line 12, omit “7B” and insert “7A”.
- 12. Clause 161, line 14, omit “7C” and insert “7AB”.

NEW CLAUSE

- 13. Insert the following new clause to follow clause 166 —

‘AA. Insertion of new section 77A in the Water Industry Act 1994

After section 77 of the **Water Industry Act 1994** insert —

“77A. Annual report of certain information to be given to Minister and tabled

- (1) A licensee must give to the Minister, for each financial year the following information —
 - (a) in relation to each person, who is not a natural person, who uses water supplied by the licensee for purposes that are not farming, irrigation or domestic purposes, at a volume that is within a specified range —
 - (i) the name of the person; and
 - (ii) the information (if any) as to the person’s participation in any water conservation program; and
 - (b) in relation to each specified range, the number of persons to whom paragraph (a) applies who are within the range.
- (2) The information to be given under sub-section (1) must be given to the Minister on or before the date specified by the Minister.
- (3) The Minister must cause any information given to him or her under this section to be laid before each House of Parliament within 7 sitting days of the House after the day on which the Minister is given the information.
- (4) For the purposes of this section the Minister may specify one or more range or ranges of volumes.
- (5) In this section “**specified range**” means a range of volumes specified by the Minister under sub-section (4).”.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

VALEDICTORY STATEMENTS

Ms GARBUTT (Minister for Community Services) — I have mixed feelings today. There is some relief as I remember some tough question times, long hours, tedious debates and late nights — and even some all-nighters occasionally. But I also remember some important issues that were debated, some great friendships, some very funny moments and some great achievements. The most important task is to thank all those who have been part of the journey with me, from my time on the government backbench from 1989 and my time as an opposition shadow minister from 1992 until 1999 to my time as a government minister from then until now — and then perhaps there will be time for a few reflections.

It has been a great privilege to represent the people of Greensborough, first, and then Bundoora, and I have always found it a great responsibility to adequately represent their interests. I must say I have been proud to be their member of Parliament. They are wonderful, active, community-minded people, and I want to give the house some examples. Jan Macdonald was a passionate teacher for years and is now retired, but she is very active in the community as a member of the Diamond Valley art awards committee, the Banyule arts and culture committee and the Plenty River support group, which she founded, and the organiser of the International Women's Day dinner.

Ron Weir is an active member of the Bundoora Bowling Club, of which he has been president — and he has probably held many other positions as well. He is now a Royal Victorian Bowls Association councillor, and two weeks ago I found out that he has been a foster carer for more than 20 years. Then there are Ellen and Brian Smiddy. Ellen has been involved in the Greensborough Citizens Advice Bureau, the board of the Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE, Norparrin, and the local asylum seekers support group — and I think Brian is involved in everything.

People in my electorate want improved services and infrastructure. They have worked very hard over the years to get them, and it has been a great pleasure to work with them to achieve that. My first successful project was to establish the Pauline Toner Reserve to protect the endangered Eltham copper butterfly — and it is still flying, so we saved it. In Bundoora we campaigned to stop the sale of the Austin hospital and then to develop the fabulous, new, world-class Austin and Mercy public hospitals. The Macleod Netball Club came to me with a dream for an indoor netball centre, which is now operating at Macleod Secondary College. We fought for and achieved the Greensborough

ring-road. There are numerous school building projects right around the electorate, and there are now more teachers, more nurses and more police. They are wonderful people, and I thank them for their support over the years.

I thank my electorate office staff. They have been loyal, they have great knowledge of the local issues and they are committed to local people. I thank all the Australian Labor Party branch members who have supported me now through five preselections. I thank them all very much.

My interest in and passion for politics have always been about overcoming disadvantage and giving people a fair go, about improving women's rights and opportunities and about protecting our environment. I am very privileged to have had the opportunity to contribute in those areas and to be part of a government which has delivered achievements such as appointing Victoria's first Minister for Children, with a major focus on the early years; establishing the world's first system of marine national parks, a great moment; water reforms such as farm dams management, the Wimmera-Mallee pipeline and recycling projects; reducing logging in our native forests to a sustainable level through Our Forests Our Future, which is still being implemented; the better protection of women through a women's safety strategy and reform of the domestic violence and sexual assault laws and services; the reform of the child protection system to protect our most vulnerable; and the redevelopment of Kew Cottages to improve the lives of disabled people.

My powers were not sufficient on a couple of occasions, though. I could not help the young man at the Malmsbury Juvenile Justice Centre who wanted a pardon because the judge had framed him. And I could not control the nasty little pony that was pulling the cart I was in with his owner when we were taking a ride down a shared footpath that I had just opened. He was fine when we were trotting towards his home and a good feed, but when we turned back he refused to go and had to be cajoled and prodded and yelled at by his owner. We very slowly wandered back to the assembled throng, which included the local media. When we arrived he proceeded to back into the ditch alongside the road and turned us over. I set a personal best for the high jump that day. My portfolios have always involved competing with kids and animals, which at times has been a bit unfortunate!

I thank my ministerial staff, who have always been there, doing the hard work, developing good relationships with our stakeholders and coming up with

ideas — and speeches. Any and all achievements have been theirs as well.

I thank my parliamentary colleagues for their friendship, support, passion, commitment and vision as well. I thank the Premier for his leadership and for his support. I also thank the parliamentary staff, who have always given great service and made this Parliament a better place to work in. Achievements are never about individual efforts. There is always a team involved, and relationships are probably the most important factor in any success.

I entered Parliament after my close friend and mentor Pauline Toner died suddenly in office. We shared an interest in many issues, including the environment, but none more so than advancing the interests of women. When I think of her I can actually measure the advances that we have made. When she entered this house in 1977 there was only one other woman in the Parliament — on the other side of the house. In 1982, after being the shadow spokesperson for women's affairs, she became the first woman minister in Victoria's history as Minister for Community Welfare Services — and there is a certain familiarity about that. Now we have 41 women members of Parliament: 7 are ministers, the President and Speaker are both women, and a woman has been Premier. However, I am surprised to find that I am the longest serving woman member of Parliament in Victoria's history.

That is great progress, and I see great progress in many other areas, too. Women now make up 41 per cent of those who hold positions on government boards, and a woman heads our Supreme Court. There is still a long way to go: the glass ceiling has not been shattered yet, and many women's wages are still below those of men for the same work. The new industrial relations laws put women under greater pressure. Affordable, high-quality child care is still hard to find.

In other areas there are also challenges for politicians across the country. The critical issues that face us in the environment are water and the need to tackle global warming and climate change. Both clearly need national cooperation. Achieving that remains a great challenge. Providing services for an ageing population will challenge every government. There are new challenges for the future in ensuring that diversity is valued and disadvantage and discrimination are overcome. We must continue to speak out to protect the diverse, tolerant, multicultural society that we are so proud of in Victoria.

Finally, I thank my blended family, who have supported me completely. They have kept my feet on

the ground and endured the late nights, the disrupted family time and stressed-out, grumpy moods — that is me! — and they have shared some great times too. They have been my bedrock and I could not have done it without them.

Politics is an exciting life. The highs are exhilarating, and the lows are unspeakable. It has been a great ride. I thank you all.

Mr HONEYWOOD (Warrandyte) — I well recall when the Minister for Community Services came into this place as a fresh new member. I have to wonder whether anybody has seen the Eltham copper butterfly ever since, but it was a great example of a single-issue campaign, and she certainly made the most of it. Well done!

How do you reflect on 18 years of a fascinating personal journey in just 10 minutes? I would like to lead off by saying that when I came into this place I was only five years out of university. I did not know much. I sat up here in the bleachers, so I started where I have finished. In fact the member for Doncaster actually started in the seat he is in now — but he makes up for it from on high.

I well recall my first day. New members were not allowed to interject until they had made what was then called their maiden speech. I recall the then hugely popular Premier, John Cain, rising to his feet to answer the first Dorothy Dix, which was about how much the 1988 election campaign had cost the Liberal Party. Suddenly his wonderful index finger — only he and Jim Kennan could actually use their index fingers in this place to any great effect — was wagging up at me on the back benches, and he said, 'Over there we have the new member for Warrandyte, the Liberal Party's Six Million Dollar Man'.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr HONEYWOOD — It cost them \$6 million and all they got was me, but anyway —

Mr Baillieu — Money well spent!

Mr HONEYWOOD — Having said that, if I am fiddling with my hand at the moment it is because my wife, Jennifer, who is in the gallery today — I know it is not appropriate to refer to the gallery — and I have been joking for some months about who in this game bothers to give you a gold watch. This morning when I woke up, there on the bedside table was the gold watch.

The fact that you have to reflect on who is going to give you a gold watch in this game brought me back to a

statement made by Andrew Peacock. Back in the days when I was a very young member of Parliament it was amazing how often, when Andrew was ensconced in his tower of power in the federal offices across the way at 4 Treasury Place, he would just come over here at lunchtime and have a meal. Sometimes I would find myself sitting opposite Andrew — who was a hero of mine when I was a Young Liberal — and he would, as only Andrew could, give advice on the world and the state of the union. Andrew actually said to me, ‘Phil, just remember to hang on to the friends you had before you came into this place, because you will not get many along the way’ — and so to my two amigos, the members for Nepean and Bulleen.

The member for Bulleen will never forgive me because he carried my bags when I was a minister. Sometimes ministers travel overseas and take their staff with them, and the member for Bulleen always refers to the time when he carried my bags. As I recall, that occurred on one mission to Saudi Arabia, when it was deemed to be a bit of a silly look for the Australian minister to be walking off dragging bags and that the ministerial adviser should carry the bags for a change. He will never live it down — but we have moved on from there. The member for Bulleen has the fantastic achievement of being our first Greek-background member of Parliament.

I would also like to particularly thank the members for Malvern and Doncaster for their friendship and intellectual stimulus, because we have had some wonderful discussions over the years. It was a genuine personal achievement for me to be the deputy to the member for Malvern, who I believe did an outstanding job for us in very difficult times.

Looming behind all this was one of my good mates, the member for Bass. It would be no secret that the member for Bass thinks the member for Warrandyte is a leftie pinko-commo, but we are a broad church and there is room for plenty of us. I say to my good mate, thank you for your honesty and thank you for always telling me the way things were and the way things could be improved.

There are many other colleagues on both sides of the house whom I would like to thank for giving me personal encouragement along the way. There are some great figures that have come and gone, such as Steve Crabb and even good old Peter Spyker, who would give you advice on a bipartisan basis when he felt like giving it to you. There were many wonderful figures on our side of politics, like Tom Austin and Vin Heffernan, who was a great example to me. Our party talks a lot about the fact that you have the right to make a stand on

a conscience issue and you have the right to be an individual. Unfortunately, in reality this sometimes gets lost along the way. Vin, a bit like the member for Bass, had very strong views of the world that were a bit to the right of mine, but he was a passionate environmentalist and stood up strongly for the environment. He was a great example to many of us of how you can be a member of this party and maintain your individual perspective and your individual views on key policy issues.

Looming behind all this, of course, was Jeff Kennett. Jeff was very much there as part of my career. I am sure the member for Bundoora will agree that you are always grateful to a leader who gives you your big kick-up in life. Sitting around that cabinet table with colleagues such as the members for South-West Coast, Brighton and Mornington was a rare privilege indeed. I often think to myself, and I am sure they agree with me, that seven years with the Kennett government was probably worth 20 years of any other government, no matter what party was in office, because there was never a dull moment.

One of my favourite Jeff Kennett stories would have to be about a public meeting during the 1996 election campaign. In the morning while I was tying my shoelaces I broke a shoelace in half. I made a mental note to fix that situation during the day but had no time to do so. When I arrived at the public meeting of 400 people — the usual rent-a-crowd, Liberal Party branch members and so on — I had not fixed my shoelace. Jeff Kennett was seated three people down from me on the stage. Somebody introduced him, and Jeff got up to walk to the podium to make his speech. Before he got to the podium he made a U-turn, squatted in front of me, pulled a \$2 coin out of his pocket and said, ‘Get yourself a bloody pair of shoelaces’. He got back up and made a brilliant speech — no notes, as always. At the end of the public meeting everybody came up to me and asked what was going on between Jeff Kennett and me with the \$2 coin. Of course, being a politician what do you say? You say, ‘I had a bet with him and I won’.

On a serious note, my electorate has educated me enormously. I was no environmentalist before I became the member for Warrandyte, but I was very fortunate. Unfortunately for John Cain and for Lou Hill, who was the hardworking member at the time, there was a dual-occupancy-as-of-right policy across metropolitan Melbourne. I won the election on the back of the fact that my electorate wanted no dual occupancy, and we have retained that ever since. They wanted their precious green wedge kept as well, so there is no subdivision under 20 acres. I am proud to say my

greatest achievement in my electorate is to have changed nothing. If that is the mark of a true conservative, then I am a conservative.

Along the way, as Minister for Tertiary Education and Training, I had a tremendous time. To the guys opposite — and the Minister for Education and Training will agree — the video was all about promoting Victoria as the education state of Australia!

In the environment area, I really enjoyed working alongside the Minister for Environment, so much so that I made sure my hair colour matched his!

In the 30 seconds that I have left I would like to give enormous thanks to my wife. When I came into this place I was very young indeed. I lost one marriage along the way, but my wife Jennifer has been the most fantastic supporter for these last seven or eight years. It has not been easy for my children, Nick and Kate — multicultural affairs took a lot of time out our life — but I am going to make up for that in the future.

Mr LONEY (Lara) — In thinking about the remarks I might make today, I found that the most overwhelming thoughts I had about this place were of people. The first are the people of the electorates of Geelong North and Lara, whom I have been privileged to represent. They are wonderful people who have been tremendously supportive of and loyal to me in my 14 years in this place. It has been an honour to represent them, and the greatest satisfaction I have had has come from playing some part in improving the communities in which they live.

Next, of course, are my colleagues in this Parliament, and I include many in this category. I have served under five leaders during my time here. I might add that there were three in, I think, my first six months, but two of them have led my party for more than 13 of my 14 years here. The current Treasurer, John Brumby, who was opposition leader for over six years, gave me the opportunity to serve as a shadow minister in various portfolios. John was a tremendously hardworking leader in the Parliament's toughest role, and he devised many of the strategies that ultimately helped lead the party into government.

The Premier, whose support I have appreciated, gave me the opportunity to do things such as chair the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, through which I developed an interest that I am now able to pursue outside this place. More broadly, of course, my colleagues have included members not only from my own party but from the other side of the chamber. I have had the opportunity to work with many of them

over the years, particularly on parliamentary committees, and in spite of being subjected to scurrilous interjections, frivolous points of order and unfair imputations during my learned contributions — and I might add that that was just in the party room — I have great regard for them and for this institution.

In this the 55th Parliament I have worked closely with the Speaker and I have enjoyed our relationship on both a professional and a personal level. We have had some great conversations, but I have to say they will retain their 'what is said in the Speaker's chamber stays in the Speaker's chamber' status. I thank the Speaker for the relationship we have enjoyed.

The next group of people with whom it has been wonderful to be associated include all those who work for the Parliament — the attendants, the clerks, the serjeants-at-arms, the chamber officers, Hansard, the dining room staff, the library staff, the maintenance staff, the security officers and all those officers in the parliamentary departments. They have always provided me with cheerful advice and assistance, and I wish them well.

You do not last in here without people who support and encourage you. I have had great support from my Left colleagues throughout my time here, and I particularly acknowledge the advice and friendship of Tony Sheehan, Alex Andrianopoulos, Eddie Micallef and Kim Carr. Locally there are so many who have supported me to the hilt. I could not have survived my very first election campaign without people like Maurie and Merrill Hill, the late Ray Atkinson and his wife Mary, who sadly died a week ago, and the small band of dedicated campaign workers I had then.

So many others have turned out over the years to help whenever asked, and they include Harry Bartz and the Bartz family, the Endersbys, the Henrys, Harry and Ruth Morrow, and Jack Moor. Then there are the many people who serve our community in various ways whom you meet and become aware of as a member of Parliament. I am often staggered by the contributions so many people make to making Victoria a better place.

I must thank all those who have worked for me over the years and on whom I have relied heavily. I refer to my various electorate officers, starting with Deidre Morrow and including Arlette Allen, Jason Brandrup, Keith Hohner, Luis Barrigos, Eileen Woods, Mike Atkinson, Barnaby Kerdel, Catherine Day and Sonia Kociski, who has been with me for most of my time in Parliament and who has been a wonderfully loyal and competent staff member and a good friend. I thank them all.

I must also thank my party for giving me the privilege of serving in this place. I am under no illusions that without 'ALP' after my name on the ballot paper I would not have been here. People ask you, 'What will you miss about the place?'. Looking back, the first thing I will not miss about the place is the ALP levy! But of course when you look back at the highlights the first thing — and I think it is the same for everyone — is the thrill you feel the first time you set foot in this chamber and take on the privileges of a member, which I did 14 years ago.

I think back to the changes that have occurred. I was given my first office in the chookhouse, sharing with a good mate, the then member for Dandenong. The chookhouse was a bit different to what it is today. It was not the most sought after location in this Parliament, I can tell you, but it did undergo a few transformations. Some of us would remember the Demetri Dollis facade that went up on that place. We often have debates about family friendly hours in this place, and some of us recall the all-night sittings. I recall one in particular where we started on a Friday morning and concluded at 4 o'clock on the Saturday afternoon. Fortunately those times are behind us in this place.

Some things, of course, get recycled. In my first campaign I was out there protesting and working to save the orange-bellied parrot against a federal environment minister who wanted to do away with it. How things change! The biggest change you can experience in this place is the 10-metre walk from one side of the chamber to the other. It may only be a short way, and the chairs seem to be about the same height, but by gee the view is a lot better on this side!

I remember a number of stunts, many of which are now forgotten. The Treasurer may well remember the MPs quartet which launched his singing career. There may still be the odd CD of that around somewhere. I recall as the then shadow Minister for Small Business getting involved in a stunt that revolved around a recording studio that was going to be lost as a result of the building of the casino. In order to highlight its plight we managed to get 40 rock band drummers on the front steps of Parliament one day. The noise certainly got the attention we wanted, and we managed to get a quick fix for that.

Finally, I cannot conclude without giving thanks to my wife, Judy, who has been my most loyal, energetic and enthusiastic supporter. As I have often said, she was the only person who could have beaten me for preselection at the time. But that support has at times unfortunately come at great personal cost, which we alone

understand. I thank her for the wonderful support she has given me over that time.

I conclude by saying that it has been a wonderful experience and a privilege to be a member of Parliament. I thank everybody involved with this place for the contribution they have made to that, and I wish them all well in the future.

Mr MAUGHAN (Rodney) — On an occasion like this, after nearly 18 years, there are so many memories that come flooding back and so many things that one would like to say.

I simply start by saying that we live in a wonderful country. We are very privileged to live in a country that has the freedoms we enjoy and a democratically elected Parliament where we can have an occasion such as this when, in spite of our different political backgrounds and different beliefs, we can all share together. I really treasure that. I treasure the rule of law, due process — all those things, the freedoms that we hold very dearly. I know all of us in this place, irrespective of where we sit in the house, subscribe to those views. I want to start by paying tribute to that.

It goes without saying that for the whole of my life I have always believed the highest accolade one can achieve is to be elected by one's peers to represent them in either a state Parliament or the Commonwealth Parliament, never thinking before 1988 that I would be one of those who achieved that. I am very honoured and privileged to have been able to spend some time in this place. I hope I have been worthy of the support I have received from the 35 000 people in the Rodney electorate.

I have now been to five successive elections over the last 18 years. I believe Rodney is a fantastic electorate. I could go on about that, but I do not intend doing that today. We have all done that at various stages. We are all elected to Parliament with the view that we can make a difference. Certainly I came in with the idea of making a difference for the people I represent: the so-called ordinary people out there, the people who have problems with disabled children or with housing or who right now are dealing with all the stresses and strains of one of the worst droughts in our history. It has been about dealing with those people and using the authority this position gives to try to assist them in whatever way I could.

People have enormous personal problems, and I think all of us are able to at least listen and show some understanding and some sympathy. I have felt enormous personal satisfaction in situations where

someone has come in and poured out all their woes and, after thinking, 'What the heck am I going to be able to do?', I have offered something — 'I might be able to do this or do that' — and they have gone out just thanking me for listening. It is a privilege to have had that opportunity.

We have all worked to try to change things for the better. We all have different views as to what that might be, but I think we have all tried to make a difference. I have been pleased to assist a whole range of groups within my electorate with their various projects and proposals. Given that there are 15 towns, 35 schools, 6 hospitals, 20 preschools and so on, there are a whole range of groups to be associated with. One of the most enjoyable things for my wife, Dorothy, and me is to mix with that enormous number of people both in the electorate and in the Parliament and take part in all the opportunities parliamentary life offers to assist with a whole range of projects. The Kyabram research station is one that I am particularly proud of, and that was achieved in my very first term here.

There are also the hospitals that I have been associated with. The minister is coming up later this month to open the new operating theatres at the Echuca hospital redevelopment, a \$30 million project, and to turn the first sod for the new hospital in Rochester. I could go on and refer to Kyabram and Nathalia and so on. There are lots of those things.

Then there are the schools. I have been very privileged to have been able to share in the experiences of so many school communities, both primary and secondary, throughout the electorate and to assist in various ways. I feel passionately about preschools, because I feel that if we are to make a difference in society we need to do far more about devoting resources to the first six years of a child's life so that they may be able to overcome some of the social problems that emerge later in life. I have been passionate about that, and I think that as a community we are moving in that direction. I have been pleased to be associated with that.

I refer to the all-party parliamentary committee work. I have found this very satisfying and have been privileged to be part of four all-party committees, two which were essentially about community development. We produced some excellent reports to do with in-vitro fertilisation, surrogacy, adoption and those sorts of issues. I found them very interesting. I served two terms on the Law Reform Committee. One of its reports dealt with technology and the law, and one that was recently brought down, which has been a fascinating inquiry, was on the Coroners Court. I have really enjoyed

working with my colleagues across party lines. I have developed some very good friendships across party lines through the all-party committees, and I am very grateful to have had that opportunity and to have made those friendships.

As I have said, many memories come flooding back, and many friendships have been made across party lines. Neil Trezise, about whom we spoke in a recent condolence motion, was one of those who, when I came into this place, went out of their way to be very friendly and to welcome me. John Cain was another, as was Steve Crabb, who was here only yesterday. I have renewed friendships with them. In the whole of the time I have been here — and I have served two terms as an acting chair — I have tried to behave myself and to uphold the principles of this place.

There was an occasion — and I shared this with the former Speaker only the night before last when I was pleased to catch up with him in the dining room — when Speaker Andrianopoulos was trying to maintain order. The house was rather rowdy and there was a bit of noise from wherever I was sitting at the time. It was not me who was interjecting, but the Speaker swung around and named the member for Rodney, so I got up and walked out. My leader looked around and said, 'Good God, they've shot Mother Theresa!'

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr MAUGHAN — There have been some really good times that we have all enjoyed.

I want to conclude by saying that I have been very privileged to have been a member. I have enjoyed the process, I have enjoyed the opportunity to advocate and contribute, and I have enjoyed very much the friendships that I have made — and I am sure they will continue over the years. It will not be an easy process to get away from this sort of life. I will certainly be watching with a great deal of interest what goes on over the years.

I want to express my thanks to other MPs of all political parties for their friendship and support over the years; to the ministers for their courtesy and their assistance; to the attendants in Parliament, who have always been unfailingly courteous and helpful; to the dining room staff — I have spent a lot of time and a lot of money in the dining room — who have been very good, and we appreciate that; to the library staff; and to Hansard. I want to particularly thank my colleagues in The Nationals. I am very fortunate in that we are a small group — a family group — and I really enjoy the times we have together, particularly in the dining room in the

evenings and on other occasions when are together. In spite of our sometimes having little spats, we are all good mates, and I have appreciated the friendship over the years.

I also express thanks to the clerks of the Parliament and to all of those who have helped us, particularly my leader, Peter Ryan, who has done a fantastic job and has welded us into a real group. I thank my electorate officers who have served over the years. Only this week one of them, who was here for a while as the Youth Governor and who served for five years with the Youth Parliament, was endorsed as the no. 2 candidate on our upper house ticket. I am hoping like heck she can be the first of the Youth Parliamentarians to be elected to this Parliament, so I pay tribute to Rachel McAsey. I particularly pay tribute to and thank my senior electorate officer, Wendy Nolan, who has been with me for 13 years and without whom I could not have done the job I have been doing; and Leonie Canham, who has been with me now for nearly three years, has done a fantastic job. I have not worked any differently, but my image — —

An honourable member — You've forgotten Dorothy!

Mr MAUGHAN — No, I have not forgotten Dorothy. I leave the best until last! I give thanks to my wife, Dorothy, and my family — and Dorothy is in the gallery, as is my daughter, Penny. I thank them for their support and encouragement over the years. I conclude by thanking you all for your friendship and for the support you have given me. I am going to miss this place like mad, but it has been a great ride!

Ms GILLET (Tarneit) — It is a pleasure to follow one of the men I regard as a true gentleman of this Parliament. It is a real privilege for me to be able to say thank you today to the very many people who have made my 10½ years as a member of the Victorian Parliament such a pleasure. I would firstly like to thank the member for Ivanhoe, the best whip in the known universe, for negotiating this opportunity. I would like to think that I have been a good and faithful member of caucus, causing the whip no additional difficulties in his almost impossible job.

However, there was one time when we were in minority government and we were sitting into the early hours. It was 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, and I decided that I needed to put my head down for a little nap. I fell into a very sound sleep, as is my wont, which was only disturbed by a rather annoying dream featuring loud bells and an even louder ringing phone. I woke to a loud bang, which resulted from my door

being flung open to reveal a rather frantic-looking whip, yelling something at me. We raced up to the chamber — I had my shoes in one hand and the tail of the whip's suit coat in the other. We made it just in time. I would like to publicly apologise for causing the whip such stress and hope that the strength of our friendship over the years will enable him to forgive me!

Thankfully, Speaker, the days of all-night sittings are all but gone, and I feel that in no small measure this is due to the wonderful leadership of the first two women to preside over this Parliament, who I am pleased to call my friends — your good self, Speaker, and the Honourable Monica Gould, President of the upper house. The leadership you have both shown has broken down another barrier for women in politics, and I would like to thank you both.

Before I was elected in 1996, I had worked for 10 years for the National Union of Workers, originally the Storemen and Packers Union. During those 10 years I was very fortunate to have some wonderful workmates and teachers. My brothers in the union — and they were all brothers at the beginning — taught me one of the most important life lessons about leadership, power and authority. I learnt that power is never personally owned. The power of the union organiser does not belong to them; it belongs to the union through its membership. That power just flows through a good organiser. I feel it is the same for members of this place. The power of the Parliament flows from the Victorian people through to us to encourage us to work hard to improve the lives of all Victorians. This is a huge responsibility, and I have done my best to fulfil it over the last decade.

The Parliament is a unique workplace, but like all workplaces it is only the sum total of the talents, skills and humour of the people who work here. MPs come and go but the staff and officers of the Parliament abide — and thank goodness for that, because they have made me feel welcome and at home in this Parliament from the first day I walked in the door. I would like to publicly declare my gratitude to Ray Purdey for his wisdom and patience, to Gavin Bourke for his friendship and odd jokes about *The Matrix* and to Warren Smith and his sensational attendants — especially Ray, because Ray is one of my favourite constituents — who do their jobs so well and are a great set of public faces for this Parliament, patiently explaining the history and operations of this place to the thousands of visitors who come here every year. I say thank you to all of them for the support they have given me and my family.

To Luke Jordan — happy birthday for Monday, Luke — and all of his staff, thanks for doing the impossible on a very regular basis. To my special friends Shirley and Jackie, what can I say? You have been like sisters to me. Thank you for making the parliamentary dining room feel like home.

I fear no contradiction when I say that my electorate office has three of the finest women it has ever been my privilege to work with. To Deb Hannan, Marie Brittan and Simone Perry I say: you are simply the best. My respect and affection for the three of you is bottomless. Our community is the richer for all your hard work, compassion and humour. A very special thanks to Marie Rogers, another part of the team, who has now retired and will be my special adviser on all things retirement! Marie was wonderful. It did cause some confusion in the office when there was Mary, Marie and Marie — Marie and Marie spelling their names exactly the same way. I have to say it confused the punters just slightly.

I would sincerely like to thank all members of the Werribee and the Hoppers Crossing branches of the ALP for their support. In particular, special thanks to Ray Cody who has been unfailingly loyal for the whole of my 10¹/₂ years. Ray has been a member of the party for as long as I have been alive. Ray, you are a legend, and I would like to say thank you.

I leave this Parliament with no regrets. I have done my best. That is not to say that the job is done. As we always like to say on this side of the house, there is still much more to do. But soon it will be someone else's job to do. I have to say that it is my fervent hope that Tim Pallas will replace me as the member for Tarneit. It is so much easier to leave knowing that there is a great candidate who will work hard to earn the right to represent Tarneit. Tim will never be bored representing a growth corridor, but he will have to get used to the Treasurer wanting to avoid him like the plague!

I do not consider leaving the Bracks government to be leaving the Labor Party. I have always loved the Labor Party. I regard her, with all her faults and failings, to be one of the best political parties in the world. My commitment to and faith in her remain as strong as ever.

As much as I love the party, I love my family more. While we all drive one another nuts from time to time, we are as thick as thieves. Thank you to Taylor, Emma and Christopher for sticking by me. And to my beloved husband, Wayne: the time has come to make our dreams real.

To my caucus comrades who are about to leave this place to fight the good fight, I say: all strength to your arm. My thoughts will be with you daily. Unless you have been a candidate, it is hard to understand how lonely a campaign can be. My thoughts will be with you all.

To my parliamentary colleagues on the other side of the house — the Leader of The Nationals, the member for Rodney, the member for Murray Valley, the member for Sandringham, the member for Benambra, the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Malvern, the member for Scoresby, the member for Mildura and the member for Gippsland East — I say thank you for your random acts of kindness over the years.

Finally, to the leadership of the government, with whom I first served in opposition, I say thank you for taking us to government. There were times in opposition when our difficulties seemed insurmountable, but the leadership group persisted. The only good things about being in opposition are that it makes you hungry for government and you can get your adjournment matters up.

Being in government is a privilege. I remember having a coffee in 1996 or 1997 with the then member for Niddrie, now the Attorney-General, the Minister for Industrial Relations and the Minister for Planning, when we lamented the prospect of spending our whole political careers in opposition and maybe holding the fort for another generation of Labor MPs to take Labor to government. We must have been having a particularly gloomy day. We got to minority government in 1999 with the support of very fine Independent MPs. Jeff Kennett should have been a lot nicer to you, Russell!

I am proud to have served in two Bracks Labor governments. I will not serve in a historic third Bracks Labor government, but it is my passionate hope that many of my caucus colleagues will.

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) — This is my last speech to the Victorian Parliament as the member for Doncaster, and I begin by saying thank you to the voters who sent me to this Parliament, to the community of Doncaster which gave me such great support, and to my friends and family, who sustained me in parliamentary service for 18 years.

I also say thank you to my parliamentary colleagues — Liberal, Labor, National and Independent. Although we argue as if each of our parties has a monopoly on wisdom, the reality is that governments — Liberal,

Labor and National — have made this the best place on earth in which to live. My appetite for politics and good public policy remains undiminished, but I am leaving the Parliament as I find the seven-day-a-week demands of modern parliamentary life difficult to balance with the needs of my young family — my wife, Jane, and my son, Ted, who has already been interjecting from the gallery.

An honourable member — Like father, like son.

Mr PERTON — Like father, like son. My timing appears to be right, as I am pleased to say that Ted will be joined by a brother or sister next year.

I look forward to working in the private sector and making my volunteer contribution in the fields that members know I love — human rights, democracy, development and good governance.

This speech is a final annual report, and I have 10 minutes to summarise 18 years of service. There have been many successes in the parliamentary arena and in my local electorate. Whilst each of us is proud to talk about what happens with public infrastructure in our electorate — the Eastern Freeway extension in my electorate is the obvious achievement of our time in government — the needs of individual citizens have always been to the fore for each and every one of us.

There have been dramatic cases where we have worked for the victims of abuse and crime. We worked for a woman who was abused as a child in a Victorian orphanage: we brought her legal recompense and, through freedom of information, reunification with her mother after 50 years of separation. Our support for a young woman raped in a Victorian classroom again proved to me that the justice system can be inadequate and that we as MPs are the front line of human rights. People's individual rights and dignity require champions who can speak fearlessly. My predecessor, the late Morrie Williams, was one of those. He was always a strong champion of the individual, and he used parliamentary privilege judiciously to make that point. I know my successor, Mary Wooldridge, will follow in that tradition.

In my maiden speech in October 1988 I committed myself to the pursuit of human freedom. I said then:

My belief in liberalism is deep rooted. It is founded in my family's history —

which has —

... demonstrated to me that the values of freedom must have democracy as their first principle.

I spoke of communism and dictatorship, my refugee family's experiences of the horrors of the Soviet Union and my own studies in communist China. I think we are all proud of the fact that in the intervening years the sustained pursuit of freedom and democracy by Australia and the West led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. My parents homelands of Latvia and Lithuania are now democracies and part of the European Union.

One year into my parliamentary career I was inspired by an essay of James Fukuyama, *The End of History*, which many of you will remember, acclaiming the victory of liberal democracy. But now, in the clash of civilisations in the long war against terror, the struggle for freedom and human dignity continues. While the Victorian Parliament is not at the apex of that struggle, it is responsible for safeguarding our 150-year heritage and practice of freedom and democracy.

In these complex and risk-averse times we have seen the rise of the regulatory state, both in annoying increments and in major legislative change. Australians, and Victorians in particular, are ever more tightly wrapped in red tape and forced to bear an increasing compliance burden. In my first term I served on the Legal and Constitutional Committee. I later chaired the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee and the Legal and Constitutional Committee.

Liberal, Labor and National parliamentarians — the Deputy Premier, the Minister for the Arts, the member for Rodney, the member for Sandringham and Bruce Skeggs, who is sick in a home for the aged — all worked very hard to remove redundant laws, to provide a more stringent scrutiny for new laws and to develop new models for regulatory efficiency. But the recent state and federal budget initiatives on red tape, whilst laudable, are an admission that we have failed. The challenge to each of the continuing MPs is to remain vigilant so that this Parliament's laws and the consequent subordinate legislation do not unnecessarily diminish people's rights.

Although you will no longer hear my booming voice in this Parliament, I will continue to be vigilant and to urge you on from the sidelines to continue this important work. I thank the information technology unit for making sure that the spam filter in Parliament is not strong enough to prevent my missives to you.

Being a member of Parliament has allowed me to work on public policy issues, not just at the state level but federally and internationally. One of my highlights was representing the state parliaments of Australia at the second United Nations Conference on Human Rights. Another highlight was working with the newly freed

South African Parliament on regulatory reform. We are a robust and mature democracy, and together with the member for Geelong North and others I have had the opportunity to pass on best practice to developing countries in Asia, the Pacific and Africa.

I thank my party for giving me the great honour of leading policy development as shadow minister for education, jousting with the two ministers on that front; as shadow Attorney-General, jousting with the current Attorney-General; and as shadow minister in technology and innovation, conservation and environment, Aboriginal affairs and consumer affairs. I thank the environmental movement for working with me as shadow minister for conservation and environment in a strong joust with the member for Bundoora to incorporate in the legislation the Cape Howe Marine National Park and the Ricketts Point Marine Sanctuary and to provide compensation for fishing families who suffered loss.

I thank the staff at Vicnet and Multimedia Victoria for helping me to become a pioneer in the political and policy use of email and the Internet. The Victorian community achieved a number of firsts in the 1990s which were documented in the Bill Gates book *Business@the Speed of Thought*. Some of you thought that I was a bit odd when I said that Internet and email would be the future of our communication, but the number of pockets and handbags that now have Blackberrys in them are proof of that change. I enjoyed chairing the Data Protection Advisory Council and the electronic commerce framework group and being a member of the federal government's e-commerce expert group. The people I worked with were bright, intelligent and futuristic, and the work done by those groups remains fresh and relevant to the challenges of the online world.

Transparency, accountability and good governance remain a rightful expectation of the community. In hundreds of freedom of information applications I have appreciated the jousts with government to extract information it would prefer to keep secret. It is no secret that I had arguments with my own side on that front, and as a private citizen, regardless of which party wins in November, I will continue to work for the citizen in lifting the veil of government secrecy.

I thank the members of the Doncaster branches of the Liberal Party for their hard work in supporting me and for their advice and their friendship over 25 years. I extend special thanks to my electorate chairs, Warwick Leeson, Brenton Rodrigues and Neil Taylor. All three are warriors for liberalism and freedom.

I value the contribution to my political thinking made by many thousands of Liberals and Young Liberals over my 30 years in the party. The common joke about politicians, which was used by my friend the member for Warrandyte, is that we leave no friends behind when we leave Parliament. I do not think that is true. Many of you are friends and confidantes, and I look forward to staying in touch with you over the years.

Many of the parliamentary attendants are the great characters of the house, and I would like to make mention of the housekeeper, Warren; the poet of the Parliament, Richard; Greg at the back door; Shirley in the dining room; and Bill in the car park, who started out in the bar.

Thanks to the parliamentary IT unit, the papers office and the Clerk's office. Thanks to the hardworking library staff; thanks to the journalists and media outlets who deliver our messages to the public and force us to be clear in our expression; and thanks to Hansard for clearing up our expression.

I thank my family, friends and staff for their support. My special thanks go to my electorate officers Linda, Christabelle and Madeline. I would also like to mention my previous electorate officers Drew, Marg, Eleanor, Sue, Rosie, Gil, Jennifer, Ilene, Clare and the late Kirsteen Lee.

I would like to give special thanks to my mother, who came here as a refugee, was widowed young and worked hard to support her family. Thank you for your support and example. Thank you to my darling wife, Jane, my adorable son, Ted, and my dear sister, Regina, who are my great supports.

In conclusion, it has been an honour and a privilege to serve the people of Doncaster and Victoria as a member of Parliament. It has been an honour and a privilege to serve with all of the members of this place and to joust, joke and travel with them. It is a great life being a member of Parliament. I have appreciated it immensely. To each and every one I say thank you.

Mr WILSON (Narre Warren South) — I wish to take this opportunity in thanking the Speaker and members of the Assembly for allowing me to make a final contribution to the house.

There have been many good stories to tell for the residents of the electorate of Narre Warren South over the last four years. The economic times, thankfully, have been strong. We have experienced an all-time high level of employment, and the terrible hardship caused by unemployment has eased. In the south-east manufacturing has maintained its jobs, and this has

been the mainstay of employment in the region for many years.

When one looks forward, one sees that the rate of land taken up by housing on the urban fringe is likely to decrease, thus relieving the pressure on our environment — especially with the defined urban boundary introduced by the Bracks government — and allowing the provision of services to catch up with population growth.

I am pleased to be a member of a government that has made education its no. 1 priority. I strongly hope the education department will be able to continue to effectively plan for schools, rather than what we had some years ago where in my electorate at Narre Warren South P-12 some 800 students turned up on the first day of the school. I commend the excellent staff at Narre Warren South P-12 for their hard work to make the education at that school a great one. They have worked harder than necessary, as the school should have been built some years earlier, but that was refused by the then government, even though the number of people living in the vicinity of the school in the middle of the growth corridor was growing very quickly.

Since the opening of this school we have seen the construction of many other new schools and their development into places of learning excellence. I refer to schools such as Hillsmeade Primary School, Berwick Fields Primary School, Strathaird Primary School, Kambrya College — and the list goes on. I congratulate the principals, staff and parents of our schools who have contributed to the development of these greenfield sites, to the great benefit of our young students.

However, the Minister for Education and Training would be the first to acknowledge that much more needs to be done. Some of the schools built years ago require further upgrades and maintenance, and our population growth will continue to require the education department to plan further schools in the area. I look forward to the plans being announced for the Casey Central Secondary College, because the current primary school populations will require its announcement in the future.

In the city of Casey more diverse post-secondary education is required. I am pleased that the Premier and the Minister for Education and Training recently announced the additions to Chisholm TAFE at Berwick to allow a technical education facility. While I was educated in a highly academic stream it was my pleasure for seven years to be on the Noble Park Technical School council. That school, like many of the old technical schools, provided hundreds of young

people with a lesser academic education and taught many of the people who have become our tradesmen and tradeswomen of today. With interest I note that many of them earn higher incomes than my former students at Noble Park High. The strengthening of technical education in Victoria will be considered a significant achievement of the Bracks government.

I do not know how many times I lobbied for a new public hospital when I was working for the former member for Noble Park and then Dandenong. The proposal for a private hospital — a proposal put forward by others — would not have fulfilled the needs of our community. The creation of a new 229-bed public hospital in the suburb of Berwick has been a major success, with a responsive emergency department and thousands of patients treated since it opened. As the Premier noted at its opening, the current building has been designed to allow for future expansion. With the growth in the region, this is likely to be needed in the future.

I congratulate the Minister for Health and her department for in particular managing the hospital and health systems to reduce the number of people awaiting operations. This is one of the issues I have fielded constant queries about in my 24 years working in the parliamentary system.

The Minister for Transport and his staff have been very responsive to the hundreds of requests for information and the delegations seeking priority for both roadworks and public transport in the growth corridor, particularly in the Narre Warren South electorate. I am sure the Minister for Gaming will remember well the difficulty we had with Clyde Road in the early days. Clyde Road has been funded so that it is duplicated from the Hallam bypass to Thompsons Road. This road, I believe, will become the bypass for Cranbourne in the future, with many heavy vehicles travelling along it.

As well, residents of Narre Warren and Narre Warren South are particularly grateful for the duplication of Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road and its railway underpass, as well as the Hallam bypass. With the seemingly ever-increasing number of vehicle movements in the region, further road improvements will be necessary. VicRoads has lists of works that need to be done, but I would especially like to note that future works will be required on Thompsons Road, Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road and Hallam Road.

Buses and trains can carry many more people much more effectively than cars, and the massive growth in spending on our mass transport systems is vital to the livability of greater Melbourne. The announcement of

the massive increase in local bus services and the additional track between Springvale and Caulfield will add to the ability of many more people to utilise our public transport system. Over the past four years the Bracks government has overseen upgrades to local railway stations as well as additional services on the Pakenham line.

Another challenge which has been faced by this Parliament and will be faced by future Parliaments is the building of cohesive, inclusive communities. I listen to many commentators who note the lack of good social interaction in newer dormitory suburbs such as Narre Warren South and the newer communities around Berwick. These communities are a reflection of much of the Victorian community being multiracial and multi-religious.

We need to ensure that all residents are made welcome in these communities. We need to avoid the negative stereotyping of particular groups. We need to welcome and embrace diversity. Discussions about Australian values have been filling our airwaves and print media, and I wholeheartedly support the need to ensure that all are made welcome, irrespective of race, colour, creed or religion.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people of the Narre Warren South electorate for giving me the opportunity to represent them over the past four years. It has been a challenging, often frustrating but also extremely rewarding experience that I will always treasure.

I would like to thank my fantastic staff members, who have worked tirelessly and diligently over the past four years to make my job easier. I wish them well in their future endeavours. I am indebted to the many staff at the Parliament for their welcoming attitude towards me and I am sure towards many other members of Parliament. To my many supporters both within the Australian Labor Party and in the broader community I say a big thank you: I could not have done it without you.

I am indebted to my strongest supporter, my partner, Jean, for her great help, especially over the past few months. And finally to my parliamentary colleagues, especially the Labor caucus led by the very able Premier: I am forever indebted to you for making the last four years very memorable.

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — The decision to retire from this place is not an easy one. But when an 82-year-old grandmother whose grandson happens to be employed by me said to him one morning, ‘I did not

realise what an old man Mr Plowman is’, I recognised that I had made the right decision.

This profession is more important for the people you have around you and the people who support you than any other. You are only as good as the people who surround you and help you. I have to say an enormous thank you to all the people who have been of support to me in the period I have been a member, because it is only through their efforts that you could do well. When I look around this place, every one of the people I see has enormous talent, and I know that talent is also supported by their staff, their friends and their families.

I have been particularly fortunate to have a wife who is a fantastic critic. Nobody I know can pull a man down at 50 paces like my wife! But equally, as is always the case, she is also my most ardent supporter. It is all about the sort of support you get from your wife, from your family, from your children and even from your grandchildren — and I now have quite a few! It is just wonderful to know that you have that level of support to take you through what can often be a difficult experience in this place. I say thank you to all my friends, who have stuck by me through thick and thin and who during my time here have always given more to me than I have been able to give back to them. You cannot help being enormously grateful for their contribution to your political life.

I cannot thank my electorate officers enough. I have four of them here today — Joan, Yvonne, Kate and Royce — and there were two or three others prior to them. It is the work that our electorate officers do for all of us in our electorates that make our electors think we are bloody good. How often have you heard people say, ‘Politicians are a mob of’ — I will not say it — ‘but our bloke is a good fellow or a good woman’, and that is because of the way your electorate office portrays you. To all of my electorate staff I say: thank you indeed for what you have done for me and for what you have done for the people in the electorate, who need help more than anyone else. It includes the personalised attention, the respect that is paid to people and the dignity that is afforded to those who most need help, which I think all our electorate officers give to our communities right across the state. To my electorate officers I also say: thank you indeed for doing it better than I could ever have done it myself.

It is undoubtedly a privilege to be a member of Parliament, and I think it is even more of a privilege to be a member representing a country electorate, because in a country electorate you get very close to your community. Being a country member of Parliament gives you a bit of an edge, because you get to know

your electorate well, and it certainly gets to know you well — and the electors will certainly tell you what they think at an election! It is an extraordinary opportunity to represent a country electorate, and it is one that I have been very fortunate to have.

Benambra is a bit of a misnomer for the electorate. Benambra is the name of a town in the electorate of East Gippsland, but in fact the electorate of Benambra has the fastest growing city in country Victoria. It is an incredible area which has developed over the 14 years I have been there, not to my credit but to the credit of all those people in that electorate that make it so special.

I would like to make three points before I conclude my speech. Intrinsicly I believe in the Westminster system. I believe that sometimes we abuse that system here, and I think that is an awful shame. Recently I travelled to the United Kingdom to study the practice of intervention in parliamentary debate. An intervention means that you get true debate in the Parliament. It is not a Parliament where people come in and make speeches, it is a Parliament where people debate, and through that debate there is a greater level of respect for each other and a greater level of respect for each other's views. I suggest that if this Parliament were to make one change, it should be to introduce intervention into the debate in this Parliament. It is something I would most dearly love to see happen.

The second thing I would like to mention is that we now have on our doorstep probably the biggest and worst impending drought this state has ever seen. It is most important for whoever is in government after the next election to remember that we owe a huge debt to country Victoria. This morning I listened to the Premier making his statement about what he proposes to do, but I promise that is only a start. If this drought is as bad as it looks like it is going to be, we will need enormous assistance for country Victoria, and I ask whoever is in government to consider that very closely.

Thirdly, and it is the last thing I want to say, we have probably had the greatest wake-up call in respect of the need to better manage our water. I am not being critical in any way of the efforts that have been made to date, but we are only just scratching the top at the moment. The problem with the limitation of water in the state of Victoria is going to be dramatic. In the past Victoria has led Australia. I hope we have the ability, the sense and the wisdom to lead Australia again in the way we manage water over the next 10 to 15 years. If we get that right, we will probably do more for the future of Victoria for the next 30 to 50 years than we could with any other single thing.

I will certainly miss the friendliness of the staff here, including the attendants, the clerks and the staff in the dining room, who always look after us. I know there is a problem with putting on a few pounds in old age, but the kitchen in this place does not help! Someone mentioned Bill Schober at the back gate: everyone who works here looks after us as friends. I hope that I leave this place without an enemy, but I will leave that to others to judge. I feel that the best part about being a member of Parliament is the opportunity to meet and make friends with people on all sides of this house.

I thank you, Speaker, for giving me the privilege of being an Acting Speaker during this Parliament. Again it is a part of the role that I enjoyed most, and I thank you sincerely for that.

I want to finish by saying that I was honoured when I was given a verse written by an old stockman from an outback cattle station in western Queensland that I worked on many years ago. I will recite this very short poem, which is entitled *Ode to Tony*:

You have mentioned, old mate, you're closing the gate
On Parliament once and for all,
For tailing that mob is a cruel, thankless job.
You're most remembered for playing the ball
So straight as a die, I tell you no lie,
Sadly missed if never around
Traversing the land with an old caravan
To wherever some voters are found.

When you hang up your spurs from political burrs
May contentment and peace yard your soul.
Keep the fire burning bright on any dark night
Unless deeming to gaze at the coals.
When you stroll through those gates give a thought to your mates
Old times and true friends never change.
Try not to refrain from saddling again
Should we muster out over the range.

Dedicated to a friend.
Bill Whitham.

I conclude by saying that it is the friends and the mates that you make through your life who are special, and it is the friends and the mates I have made in this place that make it so special to me.

Mr LEIGHTON (Preston) — Where have the 18 years gone? It was just yesterday that I took my seat next to the member for Morwell, and I am still sitting next to the member for Morwell now — but after 18 years there is a different member for Morwell! I am a little sad at leaving this place, but I think that now is probably the right time to do it, not when somebody taps you on the back and tells you it is stumps. Mind

you, I will be glad to hand back my pager and not have to respond to the division bells like Pavlov's dog ever again.

Whilst on the subject of division bells, there was one member — I assume he was a Shellback — who had imbibed a little too much one night and fell asleep in his office. The next morning, hearing the division bells being tested, he raced into the chamber. Those were the days when, as former minister Tom Roper put it, every member of the parliamentary Road Safety Committee had at one time lost their licence! I do hope Tom was exaggerating.

On a more serious note I wish to thank the people of Preston and the Australian Labor Party for giving me the privilege of serving for 18 years in this place as their member. Preston is a strong and vibrant community that is enriched by people from diverse backgrounds. It was said in the 1980s that there was an undue focus on marginal seats. I am proud to say that the Bracks Labor government has not forgotten its heartland. Preston has been assisted by so many initiatives, such as the Panch Health Service, the new Preston police station, community building, extra teachers and major maintenance on our schools. The task ahead is to ensure that as Preston and Darebin gentrify we do not forget the areas of greatest need, such as East Reservoir and East Preston. The neighbourhood renewal program is a very positive step towards looking after those areas.

I will admit to one mistake which was the result of a lapse in judgment. I originally opposed the amalgamation of the former City of Preston and the former City of Northcote, because I preferred an amalgamation with another council. In the City of Darebin we now have a fine council with good governance. It is well managed and provides progressive programs and services.

I advocated for mental health in my first speech in this Parliament, and I do so again in my last. Those with a psychiatric illness do not have the same power as consumers of other health services to lobby politicians. This places a special responsibility on us which I urge all my colleagues not to forget.

We need a return to asylums — not, of course, to large institutions providing congregated, whole-of-life care but to places that, in the original sense of the word, provide safety and security. To those members and staff who may have felt frightened by somebody appearing at the front counter while having an acute psychotic episode I say that they are often not half as frightened as the individual concerned. As a society we do not

always provide the mentally ill with a safe place. It is also important that we do more to provide a comprehensive range of community psychiatric services.

In my first speech I said I was proud to be entering Parliament from the trade union movement. The view I expressed then, and I express it again today, is that the trade union movement and the Australian Labor Party are, respectively, the industrial and the political wings of the labour movement. There are now considerable challenges facing unions with the casualisation of the work force, technological change and the contracting out of services. However, one only needs to look at John Howard's WorkChoices to see that unions are needed as much as ever today. It will be the unions at the front line defending workers wages and conditions.

The Internet has the great potential to enable citizens to participate in the political process. The participation of people with physical disabilities in the review of the pension scheme by the Canadian Parliament is one of the most empowering examples I have seen of the use of information and communications technology. When I look at developments in IT, I say it is an exciting time to be alive. It empowers us in a way that only a few years ago was the stuff of science fiction. For example, those of us who learnt computing on DOS machines could not have dreamed that a few years later we would be using our home computers to videoconference with people on the other side of the world at almost no cost.

I value the role I played in my privilege complaint in defending the rights and freedoms of members of Parliament to come in here and speak without fear or favour. I wish the Summerhill residents well in their continuing fight for a fair go.

I am proud to be the son of a Jewish refugee. My father, despite being imprisoned and shipped on the *Dunera* to Australia during the Second World War, chose to stay when he had the option of returning to England. After his active service in the Australian Army, he found Australia a country that gave him enormous educational and professional opportunities. That is probably why I would nominate the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act as the piece of legislation introduced by the Bracks Labor government which is the most special to me.

As members we cannot do jobs without the support of our families. Our spouses put up with our long working hours and live all our pressures and stress. Increasingly MPs have young children, and at times it is difficult for them to understand why daddy cannot come to a special event at school just because 'silly old Parliament is sitting'. I say that in quotation marks before I offend the

Speaker. I want to thank my wife, Judi, and my children, Sarah and Samuel, who are here in the public gallery, for all their support and love throughout my parliamentary career. That is why I am most looking forward to retirement — so I can spend quality time with my family.

I also want to thank my staff, Robin Scott, Christina Han, Steve Gagen and Remzi Unal, for doing a fantastic job above and beyond the call of duty. Their advice and expertise is regularly sought by other MPs and electorate officers. However, unlike me they are not retiring so I wish them continuing political success. I look forward to having their friendship in my retirement.

I finally wish members on both sides of this house all the best for the future. I want to thank all the staff of the Parliament for their support. We could not perform our roles without their support. I am going to single out one group of staff for particular mention, and that is the IT unit. I acknowledge the work of John Lovell, June Neilson and all the other staff. The IT unit has come a long way in the last four years. The fact that IT staff get headhunted indicates their technical competence and, more importantly, their customer focus.

I thank you all very much for your friendship and the opportunity to work with you over 18 years.

Mr DOYLE (Malvern) — In one of his great speeches, ironically just before he falls on his sword, Othello says:

I have done the state some service ...
No more of that.

I know how he feels — and I mean the service part, of course, not the sword part.

I spoke on the very first day I was in this Parliament back in 1992 and therefore I am very grateful to the house for being able to speak on the last day that I am in this Parliament. Along the way I have tried to speak and make contributions of passion and compassion and of commitment, I hope with thoughtfulness and intelligence and also with a sense of humour and civility.

It is interesting to follow Michael Leighton, the member for Preston. I know I have not made a contribution in this place to compare to the one I heard from John McGrath, the former member for Warrnambool, back in 1993. It was a privilege to be here to hear him talk about his sons and their drug use, schizophrenia, mental illness and suicide. It is the best speech I have had the honour to hear in this place. I can

still hear John's exhortation: 'Walk with me!'. He certainly changed the way I thought about mental illness, and I thank him for that.

Although that 1993 speech was the best I have heard in this place, I have heard many fine speeches by members from all sides of this house — speeches that have brought tears and laughter, that have provoked thought and argument and that have been made with conviction and out of principle. Today's farewell speeches are a pretty fair selection of that too.

I am very proud of the work we do here in making the laws of Victoria. It is a matter of sorrow to me that our profession — our work — is often widely and publicly denigrated. I have been very proud to serve with you all. I have been very proud to serve with men and women from both sides in both houses whom I consider admirable people and members. The best members never forget the charge that is contained in the motto of the Black Prince and all the Princes of Wales that you walk over as you leave the foyer and come to Queen's Hall — 'Ich dien', or 'I serve'. I hope I have lived up to that charge.

I wish my successors well — Ted Baillieu, as the leader of our great party, and Michael O'Brien, who I hope will be a member of this house. The former Premier used to say to me, 'Robert, even you could not lose that seat'. I hope the same is true for my successor, Michael.

The major thing I want and am very pleased to do is thank the people who have supported me over 15 years. First of all I want to thank, as so many members have done, my electorate and more broadly the people of Victoria — generous, proud, kind, funny, committed, caring and difficult people at times. It has been a privilege to serve them. I want to thank my electorate office staff. I forget who it was who said it — perhaps Tony Plowman — but they are so vital to us all. If I am well thought of in my electorate, it is not my doing; it is because of them. From Bev Menzies and Andrea Coote back in 1992 to Judy King and Rob Mandanici today I have been served by first-rate electorate officers.

I want to thank the professional and support staff of this Parliament: our clerks and the serjeants-at-arms that we have had, the library staff, our attendants and protective service officers, our dining room and cleaning staff — and aren't they a bunch of characters! — the table and office staff, the information technology staff, and of course Hansard. I have always admired the quiet, professional way that they go about their job, which is to make this place work, and indeed it does work extremely well because of them.

I want to thank my party, parliamentary members both past and present, and the wider volunteer party. They have been an inspiration to me. I particularly want to thank my electorate councils and chairs and the administrative committees that I served with as leader, especially the three presidents, Ian Carson, Helen Kroger and Russell Hannan. I want to thank the professional staff at our headquarters at 104 Exhibition Street and the two state directors with whom I have worked, Brian Loughnane and Julian Sheezel. I want to thank the members of Parliament past and present — the men and the women with whom I have served on both sides and in both houses — whether friends, colleagues, political opponents or allies. I have really enjoyed the battles.

I want to thank the Premier. I must say that, whether personally or professionally, courtesy and professionalism have characterised my relationship with the Premier, and I thank him for that. It demonstrates one thing, I suppose: that your political opponents are not necessarily the same people as your political enemies — but I might leave that.

I want to thank my leadership team, the people who served with me during my time as leader — principally Phil Honeywood, of course, who served for so long as my deputy and my friend, and more recently Louise Asher; and my upper house friends and colleagues who were part of the leadership group, first Bill Forwood and Carlo Furletti, and then Phil Davis and Andrea Coote. I want to thank the remarkable men and women who worked so hard in my office during my time as leader, and I mention particularly Ron Wilson and Rob Clancy, great blokes and good mates. I want to thank Michael Kroger and Peter Costello, two men whose support, friendship and counsel have been invaluable and special to me over 15 years.

I want to say a heartfelt thanks to my family. Like many of us, I think perhaps they bear the unfair burden of politics. I thank my three wonderful children, Andy, Bridie, and Antonia, of whom I am so proud, and the three special women whom I love, my mother, Jenny and Emma. Particularly in the last year, which has been liberating but very difficult, I do not think I could have got through it without Emma.

I have loved my time here. I have loved our work, I have loved what is possible and I have loved the changes and reforms that you can make as a member of Parliament. Very quickly, there are four highlights for me. Very early in my career I worked on the Crime Prevention Committee, looking at sexual offences against women and children. In this Parliament over the last decade both sides have enacted very good law,

even up to today. Secondly, after 1996 I worked with carers, those selfless people who work and live for loved ones who have a disability, a mental illness or a chronic disease or have the frailty of ageing. Thirdly, there was the work I did on the trauma system in Victoria in late 1998 and 1999. I give credit to this present government for having implemented that so we can deliver the best care in the most timely way to those most in need. Finally, of course, there was being elected leader — but let me put leadership aside.

I am very proud to have been a member of this Parliament. Personally I am very proud of the long journey that I have made. It is a long way from the back of a hairdressing shop in Myrtleford in country Victoria to leading the Liberal Party in this great state. But let me tell you all that I know every day that the right decisions were made to stand down as leader and, now, to leave this Parliament.

As I stand here it strikes me that I have actually traversed this Parliament. I have not come back to the start, as my friend the member for Doncaster has. Back in 1992 I began over there in back right-hand corner of the Parliament, in Bay 13, with my mate a then young, fresh-faced Peter Ryan. Since that time I have made the journey down to the centre table. Now, in 2006, I am back up in the left-hand corner, the departure lounge, with my good mates Phil Honeywood and Victor Perton — but I don't think it is catching!

If there is one regret I have, it is that in traversing the chamber I did not get the chance to pause and stop on the front bench in government. I envy those of you who have had that responsibility and privilege. But still I am well satisfied with this journey, because I have come to recognise one thing, and it is why I can leave as I do, without regret or rancour but with satisfaction and clarity. We are all ambitious here. An election is coming on. We are ambitious to retain our seats or be elected as members, to win government or to be returned to office — or perhaps to be a minister or part of the leadership team, or even to be Premier. We are politicians. We tend to measure success in that way and in those terms.

Over the last year I have come finally to understand one thing: the only real success is to be a success as a person. For those of you who wish it, I hope you find that success here, in the Parliament of Victoria. I am sure that is possible for some of you, but not for me. So goodbye, and my very best wishes to all of you.

Mr MILDENHALL (Footscray) — On 27 October 1992 I rose in this place to deliver my inaugural speech. In my final remarks in the Parliament today I want to

return to my inaugural aspirations and reconcile the accounts. I also want to reflect on some of the highs and lows of those 14 years and conclude with some thanks to the many who have shared this long journey with me.

The fears that I expressed in my inaugural speech during the first weeks of that newly elected government about funding and community service cutbacks were mostly realised, from the closure of the Maidstone police station to the loss of community services and removal of public servants. The many specific aspirations which I had for the electorate and which I referred to in that speech have been largely delivered: a new aquatic centre is teeming with families, the majority of public housing in Braybrook and Maidstone has been redeveloped, the regional presence of the Environment Protection Authority has been re-established — I had forgotten that I had even aspired to it — and the rights of and respect for public servants have been restored. Other personal initiatives that I set myself, because you need positive projects to work on when you are doing the negative work of opposition, have generally fallen into place. I refer to the rejuvenation of the Footscray business district, aged care facilities within Dousta Galla Aged Services, and the further development of the community health centre.

I also noted in that speech the anticipated arrival of another little Mildenhall and the extra noise that might be heard in the household as a result. My beautiful now 13-year-old daughter Sinead did arrive as expected, and I was right about the noise — but I had better watch out, because she is in the gallery today.

What else while I remember about the 14 years? I was a shadow minister in eight portfolios but a minister for none, so I had my opportunities to be on the front bench. In hindsight I guess I was not the media performer I had hoped to be, or perhaps I was not assertive enough in crunch debates and negotiations. While I would be misleading the house — and I will never do that again after a dreadful experience in 1998 — to say that I never really wanted to be a minister, what may mean as much to me over the long term as frontbench experience is the acknowledgment of my contribution via a number of deeply moving presentations and functions over recent months from a range of individuals and organisations: by the Premier and Deputy Premier at a wonderful function in May organised by my neighbour and friend the Federal member for Gellibrand, Nicola Roxon; by the Minister for the Arts and Arts Victoria; and by the Western Bulldogs, the Vietnamese Community in Australia, the western suburbs Indigenous Gathering Place, the

Footscray police, the Quang Minh Temple, the Heavenly Queen Temple, the Australian-Polish Community Services, the Australian Vietnamese Women's Welfare Association, the Footscray Community Arts Centre, the Western English Language School, the Ethnic Chinese Happy Age Society and, last but not least, the veterans unit at the Heidelberg repat.

That was particularly meaningful for me, because it was to that unit that my father, who was a Tobruk veteran, was admitted when the impact of that conflict overtook him in the early 1960s. It was from that time on that he was not able to take on any real role in the family, so I was pleased to be able to assist the unit's requests for improved facilities.

Particularly since the election of the Bracks government I have had the privilege of working on some great initiatives, including developing the veterans strategy as part of the Premier's responsibilities — and you can imagine how that resonated with me given my previous comment. The highlight of that was taking the nine young Victorians on a mutual journey of discovery to the First World War's Western Front. We went to sites where some of the most horrific action imaginable took place and where young Australians lost their lives and showed the most extraordinary courage and endurance.

Other projects include the Melbourne Recital Centre, which will be a breathtaking icon in the cultural precinct near the National Gallery of Victoria; ports, trucks and freight strategies in the inner west; the establishment of the State Services Authority and the Victorian community cabinet program; the constitutional reforms; assisting the Attorney-General in his legislative program; and the uncounted multicultural and diplomatic representations. It has all been challenging, exciting, engaging and a great learning experience.

I suppose I could have done without the Hazardous Waste Siting Advisory Committee. We got tossed out of more towns than I have seen in a VicRoads directory, but we ended up with some sound recommendations that still stand.

Parliamentary committees, properly resourced, produce world-class work. It was a great pleasure to be part of the parliamentary Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee with its outstanding researchers, Sandy Cook and Pete Johnston, my parliamentary colleagues the member for Richmond and a member for Melbourne West Province in the other place, the Honourable Sang Nguyen — and even the member for Mornington, I have to say.

There are projects that will carry me beyond my time in Parliament. Maybe I just cannot help myself! In 1992 I reflected on the three motivations behind my parliamentary work: a commitment to community service, a concern for the underdog — and I will resist repeating my comments about underdogs and Bulldogs becoming top dogs — and the progressive public policy manifested through the ALP in government. Those drivers have been there for nigh on 30 years and have guided my work as a community activist, a local government councillor, a local government officer, a state public servant and a state MP. I want to slow down a bit, but I cannot deny some of my core personal ways of engaging with the outside world. So I will be assisting with a couple of community health and diabetes initiatives, some education and digital divide projects, sports projects and arts and youth initiatives — mostly within the community I have grown to love. I might even get a haircut and a real job if I can balance things out.

I turn to my workmates — firstly, the Premier. It helps when you admire and respect the boss and when you have a relationship that goes back 20 years. What is best about that is that when you are dealing with difficult issues — and I have had a few in my time — you can totally trust the boss to support your work. My other minister is the Minister for the Arts: she and the arts community have opened up a different world for me and have given me some great projects. In fact I was so taken with the arts portfolio that I met and married an artist, my lovely wife, Karen, who is here today.

As for the other ministers and my fellow members of Parliament, I have worked on great projects with those terrific ministers — projects too numerous to mention — and combined with MPs to work on various issues. I wish them all the best on 25 November. I hope the government is re-elected. It has been a stable, positive administration that has achieved a great deal for the state and certainly for my electorate. In terms of spirit, unity and commitment to hard work, this group of MPs has set new standards. It has been a privilege and a pleasure to be among you all. I must also concede it has not been as bad as I thought getting to know and work with MPs on the other side of the house. I take my hat off to you all.

After seven years in opposition and seven years in government I have had an equal share of the worst and best of parliamentary experiences, and it is time to move on. I am comfortable with the achievements I have been associated with. To be frank, with the maturing of the classes of 1999 and 2002 and the new wave of recruits coming in to the Parliament, I know I

will not become a minister, and I do not want to become resentful and brood on what might have been. I want to leave at a time of my choosing and embrace a new future. They tell me there is a life outside politics, and I want to undertake a fact-finding mission to investigate the matter further.

From day one I have been blessed with outstanding staff who have created a great office. I am indebted to my electorate office staff — George Karaisaridis, Matt Phelan, Stacey Lynn, Debbie Fewster and Clive Bracey — and to Janette Mailer, Kate Berryman and John Phillips in the Premier's office. I hope the Minister for Consumer Affairs in the other place, the Honourable Marsha Thomson, will soon be taking her place in my electorate office. I would not have had this opportunity without the confidence of the ALP at the state and local levels, and I pay my respects and tribute to those people.

My family has been a central support for a gruelling and stressful job. I concede that I have not managed the balance between work and home life well. That is a contributing factor to my wanting to reclaim that part of my life. Over the next few years — and with members of my family present in the gallery today — I commit and I promise to redress that balance.

It has been a long way from the East Reservoir housing commission to here. As I mentioned before, my journey is not finished yet. I thank you all for befriending me and assisting me on the way, and I wish all of you the best of luck during the challenges ahead.

ADJOURNMENT

The SPEAKER — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Law Reform Committee: regulatory efficiency legislation

Mr PERTON (Doncaster) — I could not resist the invitation to speak in this last adjournment debate. The matter I raise is for the Treasurer and it is quite an old matter. The 1996 report of the Victorian Law Reform Committee on regulatory efficiency legislation was a good report and a report that has found favour in many jurisdictions. It has not yet been implemented in this jurisdiction.

The report investigated the most appropriate way to frame regulatory efficiency legislation as a means of reducing the regulatory burden on business while

ensuring that regulatory standards are not compromised and regulatory objectives continue to be met.

The members of the committee included myself as chairman and Neil Cole, the former member for Melbourne, as deputy chair. Strong participants in the inquiry were the Deputy Premier and Minister for Environment, and the President of the Legislative Council. Other members of the committee included Florian Andrighetto, the Honourable Carlo Furletti, Peter Loney, who joined me today in making his valedictory speech, Noel Maughan, who did the same, and Alister Paterson. The point I make is that in the context of the government's recent \$42 million Reducing the Regulatory Burden initiative to cut red tape by 25 per cent over five years and create a better regulation unit it seems remiss to not have taken up the systematic and practical recommendations made in the report.

The government in its budget statement indicated that it would be spending this money, that it would make changes to the way regulation is made and that it would undertake sectoral reviews. I know that the Treasurer has talked to the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry and other employer organisations about their taking a more active role in dealing with regulatory proposals at the time they are made and also making a contribution to the sectoral reviews the government intends to hold. While the commitment of funds to reduce red tape is a good start, the money should not be wasted on endless initiatives and reviews. If the government is serious about reducing red tape, cutting the regulatory burden and encouraging economic growth, then it would do well to implement the better systems as recommended in the report.

As I have indicated, the Deputy Premier was a part of that inquiry. It made very sound recommendations. It has been 10 years since the report was prepared. Today the government has allocated \$42 million to new initiatives and regulatory reform, and I put it to the minister and to the government that the time has come.

Midfield Meat International: apprentices

Mr HERBERT (Eltham) — The matter I raise is for the attention of the Minister for Education and Training. The action I seek is for the minister to direct the Department of Education and Training to undertake a review of the training operations of Midfield Meat International located in Warrnambool.

Serious concerns about a broad range of training matters at Midfield have been raised in both federal

Parliament and the local media. The first concern about training at Midfield involved the tragic death of a young apprentice called Aaron Leslie Willis. Mr Willis was an apprentice at Midfield International when, according to newspaper reports, on 31 May 2005 he fell 3 metres into a mincing machine. While the machine was switched off, young Aaron was knocked unconscious and taken to hospital in an ambulance. He remained unconscious for 18 hours, and about a year later he died.

Dr Napthine interjected.

The SPEAKER — Order! The member for South-West Coast can still be suspended.

Mr HERBERT — I appreciate that accidents can happen in any workplace. We all know that abattoirs are particularly dangerous places, but that is why we need to ensure that the highest standards of accountability for the welfare and training of young apprentices apply. In the case of young Aaron Willis, it is alleged that, contrary to normal employment practices for apprentices, Mr Willis was employed and paid as a casual. It is also alleged that, contrary to expectations, the accident was not reported to WorkCover. No compensation appears to have been paid to Mr Willis, and it would seem that Midfield Meat International terminated his employment the day after the accident occurred.

These matters alone are cause for concern, but another concern relates to the number of apprentices this company employs. It is estimated that every year some 100 of the 500 strong work force at Midfield Meat International are apprentices. In a country town like Warrnambool surely there is a limit to the number of apprentices needed to ensure a sustainable meat industry. I simply cannot see how a company that trains such large numbers of apprentices does not employ them once they finish their training. It is alleged that the large number of apprentices employed is more a matter of the cost of the labour than the skill-based needs of the company.

The third and related matter concerns Midfield Meat International's application — and it has been granted — to bring 100 Chinese meatworkers to Australia under 457 visas. In other words, Midfield will employ 100 Chinese workers and another 100 apprentices out of a total work force of 500. I simply cannot understand how we can have 100 trainees every year and 100 Chinese 457 international foreign workers in a meatworks employing 500 people, say that the training in that

institution is of a satisfactory standard but then be unable to employ the trainees on an ongoing basis.

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

Hospitals: rural and regional

Mr DELAHUNTY (Lowan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health. The action I request on behalf of rural and regional hospitals and the communities they serve is that the minister review the casemix funding and change it so as to deliver on her promise that no country hospital will have a reduction in funding.

The background to this matter is that back on 3 May this year the Leader of The Nationals asked the minister to guarantee that no country hospital would suffer a reduction in its funding as a result of the changes that may be made in the casemix formula or its application. The minister responded by saying that she could give an absolute guarantee that there would be no reduction in the funding of rural hospitals either within or without the casemix funding process. Since then, with the help of my staff and others, I have had a look at the Victorian public hospitals and mental health services policy and funding guidelines for 2006–07.

We have put together a chart which shows that what the minister said is not true. It highlights that under the new weighting regional hospitals will see a reduction of 964 WIES — weighted inlier equivalent separations — units. Rural hospitals will have a reduction of 190 WIES units — a total loss in rural and regional Victoria of 1083 units — whereas the metropolitan impact will be an increase of 508 units. When you multiply that by dollars, you find that country Victoria will miss out on \$3.682 million and the metropolitan impact will be an increase of \$1.66 million. That again highlights that what the minister said was not going to happen has really happened.

We in The Nationals strongly believe all Victorians, especially those living in country Victoria, should have access to top-quality health services within the community and a range of specialist medical services within the region. This recalculating of WIES funding has meant that our rural and regional hospitals will get less money for doing the same work and will have to do much more work to be able to get a little extra money. The reality is that many country hospitals will be losing money under the new WIES guidelines. The hospital reports released today show that three of the five hospitals in my electorate have had big reductions in their bottom lines. This means that many health

services will be capped or reduced. This has already happened in my electorate.

I have had received a letter from Dr Pickering of Dimboola, who is upset at the reduction of diabetic services from the Wimmera Health Care Group. That highlights yet again that because of the recalculating of the WIES formula country hospitals will lose out under the new system.

Again I ask the minister on behalf of all rural and regional hospitals to review and change the WIES funding so as to deliver on her promise that no country hospitals will be less fortunate than they were under the old WIES system.

Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve: funding

Ms LOBATO (Gembrook) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Environment. The action I seek is for the minister to support the ongoing work of the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater by considering additional funding to assist the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve.

The Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater have worked tirelessly for many years for the protection and survival of the helmeted honeyeater. The helmeted honeyeater is a faunal emblem of the state of Victoria, and as the member for Gembrook I am very proud that it is located in the electorate. The recognition of the possible extinction of this beautiful bird led to the creation of the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve. This reserve is home not only to the helmeted honeyeater but also to other endangered species and Victorian emblems such as Leadbeaters possum and pink heath.

My outer east colleagues, the members for Monbulk, Evelyn, Seymour and Kilsyth, and I have worked very hard and strongly supported the efforts of the Friends of the Helmeted Honeyeater. We have been very pleased to support the fabulous, dedicated and selfless service they provide to ensure the continued survival of the bird and the preservation and protection of the environment. The educational role also performed by the friends group is instrumental in ensuring — —

Mr Crutchfield interjected.

Ms LOBATO — I have just heard the interjection by the member for South Barwon.

The SPEAKER — Order! I hope not: he is out of his seat!

Ms LOBATO — He has also been a supporter of the helmeted honeyeater and has visited the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve.

I was referring to the educational role performed by the friends group and how instrumental it is in ensuring that our children learn about the detrimental effects that we humans have upon our animals and our environment. My children have certainly benefited from the knowledge that the friends group provides on assisting the honeyeaters in their survival, and they have learned about the destructive practices that cause environmental damage. My children are also fortunate enough to have visited the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve on a number of occasions, as has the Minister for Environment, who was a witness to the work carried out by the friends group in the areas of weed management, fencing and purchasing and planting native vegetation.

I believe that, if it were not for the work of the friends group, it is unlikely that the helmeted honeyeater would still exist. I believe Victoria owes not only this group but all friends groups a great deal of gratitude. Again I stress my support for the continuation of the beneficial works at the Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve.

Schools: Bulleen electorate

Mr KOTSIRAS (Bulleen) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education Services. I ask the minister to provide some money to improve a number of classrooms in three of the schools in my electorate in order to bring them into the 21st century.

The are rooms at Templestowe College, Templestowe Heights Primary School and Manningham Park Primary School that need urgent attention. All three schools offer excellent educational opportunities for their students. They have good curriculums, outstanding and hardworking staff and committed school councils. However, they need some assistance from this government to ensure that the education they offer their students continues to be of a high standard.

For instance, at Templestowe College a number of classrooms, the school canteen and the school library are old and outdated. The rooms need new carpet, electronic whiteboards and new computers, while the school canteen is old and needs a major upgrade to make it student friendly. At the Templestowe Heights Primary School there is an urgent need to upgrade and redevelop the classroom teaching space to meet the current needs of students. Some of the classrooms are old and outdated and need to be redesigned to meet the needs of teachers and their students. There is an urgent

need to upgrade the information technology infrastructure at the Manningham Park Primary School. The school's computers and the infrastructure required to accommodate them are in urgent need of upgrading.

As has been the case in the past, this government has ignored the needs of schools in Manningham, in both the seat of Doncaster and the seat of Bulleen. If our students are to be offered the best education possible, it is important to ensure that their schools have the best equipment and the best infrastructure. I urge the government to provide the extra funds to ensure that the students of Manningham, Bulleen and Doncaster attend schools which provide them with the best opportunities for their future lives. I urge the minister to visit those schools in the next few weeks to see for herself the need to upgrade the rooms so that our students are given the care and attention they require.

I ask the minister to provide extra funding to ensure that the classrooms at these three schools are upgraded to meet the future needs of our students.

The Nationals: Gippsland East candidate

Mr MAXFIELD (Narracan) — I rise this evening to ask the Attorney-General to take action to make sure that our electoral boundaries are correct in the lead-up to the election. Within Gippsland there are a number of candidates standing for Parliament, and obviously all of them will be lobbying in their communities. It will probably come as a bit of a surprise to some that The Nationals candidate, Chris Nixon, is seeking votes in Morwell, Traralgon and the Leader of The Nationals' area of Sale. For a while we were wondering whether he was challenging his leader and intending to stand for Gippsland South or whether he had his sights on the Latrobe Valley and wanted to represent the people of Morwell and Traralgon. It is a bit of a puzzle. The other possibility is that he thinks he is standing for federal Parliament and is trying to represent The Nationals in Canberra by replacing Peter McGauran, the federal minister for agriculture.

It is interesting to look at The Nationals web site, where one discovers a map of the Gippsland East electorate. According to the map Morwell, Traralgon, Sale and Yarram, right down through South Gippsland and East Gippsland, are in fact in the electorate of Gippsland East. On a closer look it appears that on their web site The Nationals have mixed up the federal electorate of Gippsland with the state electorate of Gippsland East. We are really not too sure what The Nationals approach is. Given their proposal to dam the Mitchell River, with the death of the Gippsland Lakes and the resultant problems that will cause the party, maybe they are

seeking to change the boundaries to get into the better territories of Sale and the Latrobe Valley, where people might be less angry about the destruction of the Gippsland Lakes as a result of their policy on water.

We in Gippsland are quite puzzled about whether there has been a secret change of boundaries or whether The Nationals really have no idea of which towns belong in what electorates. Apparently The Nationals web site is run from Queensland. Perhaps in Queensland they have no idea about the geography of Gippsland. It has been suggested that the reason The Nationals have a web site based in Queensland is that they had to go that far to find a person in the party who could use a computer. There will be locals in Gippsland who will be looking up the web site with great interest to discover the boundary changes that apparently have occurred.

The SPEAKER — Order! I have been unable to identify anything in the member's adjournment matter that relates to Victorian government business, so I rule it out of order.

Rail: Wodonga bypass

Mr PLOWMAN (Benambra) — In what will be the last time I speak in this house by way of an adjournment debate, I raise a sad matter with the Minister for Transport — —

Mr Batchelor interjected.

Mr PLOWMAN — My old friend! I call it a sad matter, because as I leave this house the construction of the rail bypass at Wodonga remains to be started, let alone completed.

The action I seek from the Minister for Transport is that he provide the community of Wodonga with a time frame for the completion of this most important project, including the date when we will see the bulldozers at work and the date on which we will finally have the rail line permanently removed from the central business district of Wodonga.

Leading up to the 1999 election I obtained confirmation from the then Premier, Jeff Kennett, that he would construct the rail bypass for Wodonga. Jeff is an astute man and could easily see the benefits to the area and to the state that would come from this project. Another thing I can say clearly about Jeff is that when he said he was going to do something, he got it done. If the coalition had won the election in 1999, the Wodonga rail bypass would already have been completed and been there for all to see.

The incoming Bracks government also saw the wisdom of having the bypass and announced in December 2000, along with the commonwealth government, in-principle support for the project. In the 2001 budget it committed \$30 million over three years to complete a project that was then costed at \$57 million.

When we go forward five and a half years we find that work on the Wodonga rail bypass is yet to commence but that the price to complete it has grown to \$120 million. It is a real concern to me that this project, which is most vital to my electorate and to the city of Wodonga and which, in my view, is one of the more important transport projects in the state of Victoria, is yet to get the green light from the state government.

I call on the minister to put the City of Wodonga out of its misery and announce a starting date for a project that he would gain a lot of credit for.

Schools: Yan Yean electorate

Ms GREEN (Yan Yean) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education Services. The action I seek is that new educational facilities be provided to serve the families who will move into the growth corridors of my electorate in the next four to five years.

The Bracks government has a proud educational record in my electorate, with numerous upgrades and new schools already completed, funded or under way, including upgrades to the Epping and Diamond Creek East primary schools, both of which I had the privilege of opening, the Apollo Parkways, Meadowglen and Strathewen primary schools, St Helena Secondary College, Diamond Valley College, Whittlesea Secondary College and Yarrambat Primary School. I will also be delighted to attend the official opening next Friday of Hurstbridge Primary School, which has been rebuilt better than ever following the tragic fire of 2003.

I want to thank the minister for the privilege of serving on the planning committees of three new schools being built at Mill Park Lakes, Epping North East and Laurimar. In particular I want to applaud the Mill Park Lakes school, due to open in February next year, which will be an icon for state education in this state. It will comprise a prep-to-year-4 campus and a year-5-to-9 campus, which is important for the middle years of schooling, and it will also have a special development school component on the same site. I look forward to continuing to work with fabulous educational professional Kerrie Heenan, who has been appointed principal at the school.

All these new schools will be sufficient to meet current demand, but new schools will be needed in the next four to five years. The city of Whittlesea population is currently at 128 000 but is expected to grow to 150 000 by 2011 and to 200 000 by 2021, with the most growth in my electorate at Mernda, Doreen and Epping North.

I am really pleased to reiterate the Bracks government's record on education in my electorate. Average class sizes have reduced in the P-2 area to 19.9. Education is the Bracks government's no. 1 priority, and I urge the minister to continue to fund the schools in my electorate, as she has been doing, and keep the area a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Brauer College: science block

Dr NAPTHINE (South-West Coast) — The issue I wish to raise is also for the Minister for Education and Training. The action I seek is that the minister provide \$1.4 million for an urgently needed upgrade and redevelopment of the 35-year-old science block at Brauer College in Warrnambool. Brauer College is an outstanding school. It is a very high-performing school and, with 1400 students, it is the largest secondary school in regional Victoria. It has quality leadership, excellent teachers and support staff, an innovative school council and great parents and students. It is a school that really does get results. However, its science block is a disgrace. It has not been upgraded for 35 years.

During a recent visit in the company of the principal I found the following faults: several large holes in the floors of the science classrooms; fume cupboards that were all closed due to occupational health and safety issues; classrooms that were only 60 and 61 square metres when they should be at least 100 square metres for a modern standard science room; the sinks were all permanently blocked; there was no storage space for chemicals, and indeed the chemicals were stored in very unsafe circumstances; the windows could not be opened; there were 13 listed non-WorkSafe compliance issues issued by WorkSafe; there were no preparation areas; there were old wooden benches; and there were old finger-slicing blackboards.

The science area of this school is simply not up to standard. We need to bring it up to an acceptable standard for teaching science in the 21st century, when science is so important. Indeed the school was promised funding for a new science block 18 months ago and was advised to go ahead with plans. The school itself spent \$80 000 on those plans and developed a very good plan to remodel and redevelop the science block. The school was further advised that \$1.4 million was

going to be allocated in the May state budget for this development. To the surprise of the school and the school community, the money was not provided. It was also a surprise to members of the government, because in a press release which was dated 6 May but was actually put out on 6 June Ms Carbines, a member for Geelong Province in the other place, said:

Brauer College in Warrnambool will install state-of-the-art solar technologies into its refurbished science wing thanks to over \$90 000 in support from the Bracks government.

Unfortunately, the school got the \$90 000 worth of state-of-the-art solar technologies but did not get the \$1.4 million for the science block in which the solar technologies were going to be installed.

The school has been seeking information from the department's regional office and from the government to try to get some response to when its science block will be redeveloped. It is simply not good enough that the school is being fobbed off time and time again. This is a very good school, a school that is delivering great results for its students and is well respected in south-western Victoria, and it deserves to have a science block that meets the needs of those students. A 35-year-old science block with 13 occupational health and safety listed items is not good enough.

Telecommunications: mobile phone towers

Ms NEVILLE (Bellarine) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Information and Communication Technology in the other place. The action I seek is that the minister, in her telecommunications role, undertake negotiations with the telecommunications companies about strengthening the code that applies to the placement of mobile phone towers, particularly in relation to community consultation and the appeals processes.

In my community Telstra has notified a limited number of residents of its intention to install three mobile phone antennas on top of a local church in Leopold. Telstra notified only 60 local residents of its intention to install the transmitters on top of the Lumen Christi Catholic church in Kensington Road. Residents were then given less than three weeks to respond to its application. Because this tower is only about 2.7 metres high it is considered low impact and, as per the commonwealth regulations, does not require a planning permit from the City of Greater Geelong.

There are therefore limited controls and rights that apply in relation to this proposal. This is largely covered by the code that has been adopted by the telecommunications companies. The code is quite weak

and has little capacity to enforce its elements. It requires companies to undertake consultation with the community, but as we all know 'consultation' can be interpreted in a range of ways. Giving less than three weeks for people to express views and also limiting the notice to only 60 residents in the large community of Leopold is not what I would consider appropriate consultation.

A spokesperson for Telstra commented that the company had followed the code, and I think that is probably technically right — it had followed the code — and that is my point. Work needs to be done on this code, and the minister, through her responsibility for telecommunications and in her dealings with Telstra and other telecommunications companies, has a capacity to raise the issue and negotiate for the industry to actually improve the way in which they relate.

There are a number of local and state regulations that apply to mobile phone towers, and this is an opportunity for the state to try to assist those companies to improve the code in relation to these particular issues.

However, residents in this case who are objecting and who have expressed concerns are also very worried about the fact that the work and the effort they are putting in will have no result, as the powers that exist under the code allow telecommunications companies to proceed regardless of their views and of whether this is the right placement for such a tower. We know there are a lot of conflicts between residents and people who want good reception, but in this particular case there are a number of locations around the Leopold area that would do the same job but have no impact on residents. I ask the minister to undertake those negotiations.

Responses

Mr BATCHELOR (Minister for Transport) — On this the last sitting day of Parliament the members for Doncaster, Eltham, Lowan, Gembrook, Bulleen, Narracan, Benambra, Yan Yean, South-West Coast and Bellarine have raised matters with various ministers — the Treasurer, the Minister for Education and Training, the Minister for Health, the Minister for Environment, the Minister for Education Services, the Attorney-General, the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Information and Communication Technology — and those matters will be passed on to the relevant ministers.

The SPEAKER — Order! The house is now adjourned.

House adjourned 6.48 p.m.

