

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

28 May 2002

(extract from Book 7)

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

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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CONTENTS

TUESDAY, 28 MAY 2002

ROYAL ASSENT.....	1165	ADJOURNMENT	
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE		<i>Berwick hospital</i>	1230
<i>Tertiary education and training: student</i>		<i>CELAS Youth Network</i>	1231
<i>concessions</i>	1165	<i>Greyhound racing: industry code of practice</i>	1231
<i>Business: Internet presence</i>	1165	<i>Ministers: adjournment responses</i>	1231
<i>Youth: proof of age</i>	1166	<i>Gas: heater maintenance</i>	1232
<i>Education Week</i>	1166	<i>Rail: Charlton crossing</i>	1232
<i>Energy and greenhouse technologies centre</i>	1167	<i>Child care: regulations</i>	1232
<i>Sport and recreation: funding</i>	1168	<i>Maribyrnong: aquatic centre</i>	1233
<i>Berwick Primary School</i>	1168	<i>Water: authorities financial ratios</i>	1233
<i>Mineral sands: government initiatives</i>	1169	<i>Monash Medical Centre</i>	1233
<i>Retail tenancies: review</i>	1170	<i>Somerville Rise Primary School</i>	1233
<i>Small business: Yellow Pages survey</i>	1170	<i>Garfield Primary School</i>	1234
		<i>Responses</i>	1234
<i>Supplementary questions</i>			
<i>Tertiary education and training: student</i>			
<i>concessions</i>	1165		
<i>Youth: proof of age</i>	1166		
<i>Energy and greenhouse technologies centre</i>	1167		
<i>Berwick Primary School</i>	1169		
<i>Retail tenancies: review</i>	1170		
MOTIONS TO TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS			
<i>Tertiary education and training: student</i>			
<i>concessions</i>	1171		
<i>Youth: proof of age</i>	1173		
<i>Energy and greenhouse technologies centre</i>	1174		
<i>Berwick Primary School</i>	1175		
QUESTIONS ON NOTICE			
<i>Answers</i>	1176		
SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS			
COMMITTEE			
<i>Alert Digest No. 5</i>	1176		
PAPERS.....	1176		
STATE TAXATION LEGISLATION (FURTHER			
AMENDMENT) BILL			
<i>Second reading</i>	1177		
ELECTORAL BILL			
<i>Second reading</i>	1180		
BUDGET PAPERS, 2002–03.....	1183		
ENERGY LEGISLATION (FURTHER			
MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL			
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	1230		
MAGISTRATES' COURT (KOORI COURT) BILL			
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	1230		

Tuesday, 28 May 2002

Supplementary question

The **PRESIDENT (Hon. B. A. Chamberlain)** took the chair at 2.02 p.m. and read the prayer.

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent on 21 May to:

Crimes (DNA Database) Act
Fisheries (Further Amendment) Act
National Crime Authority (State Provisions) (Amendment) Act
Racing Acts (Amendment) Act
Rail Corporations (Amendment) Act
Theatres (Repeal) Act

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Tertiary education and training: student concessions

Hon. A. P. OLEXANDER (Silvan) — I refer the Minister for Youth Affairs to the Bracks government's youth pledge of 1999 which promised, among other things, that Victoria's tertiary students would receive a reduction in the cost of transport concession cards from \$108 to \$6.20 in line with school cards. After nearly three years in government this key Labor election pledge has still not been fulfilled. When will the government honour its promise to Victorian tertiary students?

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Youth Affairs) — The Bracks government is concerned about the level of the student concession cards for TAFE students, and when it came into government it had discussions with the private operators in the transport industry. I emphasise 'private operators', because the opposition when it was in government sold off our transport system. We had negotiations and discussions with the private operators and were able to reduce the cost of the concession cards. However, the private operators are still out to make a profit. We were able to negotiate the cost of the concession card down to the current figure. As a result of the opposition's selling off the transport industry, these private operators are not prepared to negotiate the price down further. We are committed to ongoing discussions with the private operators. However, they have made the commercial decision that they will not reduce the concession card price beyond the figure we successfully negotiated when we first came to government.

Hon. A. P. OLEXANDER (Silvan) — The minister should be aware of the public call last week by student representatives from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Monash, Deakin, La Trobe and Swinburne universities for the government to deliver on its election commitment. Can the minister explain why the government has not made funds available to the Department of Education and Training for private operators to fulfil its promise for that reduction in concession cards?

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Youth Affairs) — As I explained in my answer to the previous question, the government has had discussions with the private operators. We negotiated with them a reduction in the concession card, but because of the previous government's selling off of our public transport system the private operators took a commercial decision that they were not prepared to reduce the concession figure below the amount that we were able to negotiate after we took office, which was less than the price it was when the opposition was in government.

Business: Internet presence

Hon. D. G. HADDEN (Ballarat) — The Internet is becoming an essential tool for businesses. Can the Minister for Information and Communication Technology inform the house how the Bracks government has assisted in getting business onto the Internet?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Information and Communication Technology) — I thank the honourable member for her question. I have on many occasions in this house indicated the importance of using new technologies and the Internet as a way of enhancing the capacity, particularly of small business, to do business. I was fortunate last Friday to be in Churchill, in Gippsland, where I launched gippsland.com, a portal which provides listings of over 500 businesses throughout Gippsland, probably closer to 600 if the truth be told. Half of these companies had no Internet presence before this portal was established through the Victorian e-commerce early movers scheme, or VEEM, as it is called. VEEM was built by a local company, Messenger, that has been working with businesses in relation to understanding how they can use the Internet and this site to advance their businesses. This is another example of working very closely with local government and the importance of partnerships.

The VEEM project has had the involvement of the Latrobe, Baw Baw, East Gippsland and Wellington councils. It has involved a series of e-commerce workshops and the creation of a regional information database. It is important that we look for innovative solutions and that businesses and organisations also look to the Internet to advance their opportunities.

Another example is the Regional Online Festivals network, which has received \$150 000 from the Bracks government to produce a network that will increase e-commerce, professional development and IT skills development opportunities for regional festivals.

Very important in the promotion of regional festivals is the capacity to have a marketing presence online, and this opportunity will be taken up under this network project. It will also help provide IT skills for those working in the festivals industry and encourage them to look at how they can use technology to advance festival marketing and the successful growth of festivals in regional Victoria.

It will develop a statewide virtual network to provide online learning and industry development. It will also automatically syndicate regional events information to Tourism Online and the ABC Online web sites. It is a great opportunity to further market regional festivals.

The Bracks government cares about growing the whole of the state and about ensuring our regional festivals use new technology to enhance their marketing capabilities. We want to ensure Victoria is innovative and competitive and has a connected economy.

Youth: proof of age

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — I refer the Minister for Youth Affairs to the no-proof, no-entry sheet put out by the Victorian licensing law branch, which shows that the learners permit is acceptable identification for purchasing alcohol. I refer her also to the letter from Kerry Riseley, the policy officer for the tobacco policy unit, dated 23 April this year, which says that the Minister for Health has decided that learners permits are not approved as evidence-of-age documents. Will the minister explain to the house and the youth of Victoria the logic behind this bizarre situation?

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Youth Affairs) — The Minister for Small Business has made a decision regarding liquor licences that because of new technology introduced for learners permits the learners permit is an acceptable level of identification in the purchasing of liquor. The Minister for Health is reviewing the situation regarding the technology in

place for learners permits, but at this point in time it is not an acceptable form of identification for the sale of tobacco. This government has done more to reduce the sale of tobacco to our youth and will continue to do so to ensure that retailers are provided with appropriate proof to enable them to be satisfied in selling tobacco to young people that they are of an age acceptable according to the law. The Minister for Health still has some concerns about that, and we are looking at the issue at this moment, but the learners permit is not an acceptable form of identification.

Supplementary question

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — The minister has explained to the house the situation that I posed in my question, that it is legitimate to use a learners permit as identification for the purchase of alcohol although it is not legitimate to use it to buy tobacco, even though the person is in the same shop. What I am trying to elucidate from the minister is the logic behind the situation where it is legal to use it for the purchase of one product and not legal to use it to purchase another product in the same premises at the same time. I am trying to understand the rationale behind this decision.

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Youth Affairs) — As I indicated, the Minister for Health has concerns about the photograph identification used in learners permits that are three years old. He has indicated at this time that the learners permit is not an acceptable form of identification for the purchase of tobacco.

Education Week

Hon. E. C. CARBINES (Geelong) — I refer my question to the Minister for Education Services and in doing so I would like to congratulate the minister on the fantastic success of last week's Education Week. Accordingly, I ask the minister to advise — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The honourable member has not even got her question out yet. I ask the house to settle down and allow Ms Carbinés to ask her question.

Hon. E. C. CARBINES — I ask the minister to advise how the Bracks government recognised during Education Week individuals who have contributed greatly to the Victorian education system.

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Education Services) — As the honourable member stated, last

week was Education Week, and it was a fantastic success for the whole education community. One of the most rewarding experiences I had during the course of Education Week was in recognising those who have contributed to their school communities across Victoria. Many of these communities were decimated by the previous government when it closed down over 300 schools and sacked over 9000 teachers.

Hon. B. W. Bishop — Boring!

Hon. M. M. GOULD — I know the opposition thinks it boring that it closed 300 schools. I know it thinks it is boring that it sacked 9000 teachers, because we know that it did not care then and it does not care now!

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister has been asked a question and is entitled to answer it in a way that the rest of us can hear it.

Hon. M. M. GOULD — Despite these closures our schools survive largely as a result of the commitment shown by parents, teachers and school councillors throughout the dark days of the previous government. These members of our school communities now work in partnership with the Bracks government to turn things around and to make Victoria a great place to be for every student in the state.

The Education Week gala dinner that was held last Thursday provided a valuable opportunity to honour the achievements of many members of our school communities. Those honoured included members of the teaching profession, retiring school councillors and recipients of community services awards. A new award for the outstanding parent was also announced.

These awards are yet another way the Bracks government encourages excellence in our schools which in turn encourages the excellent teachers to stay in the public system. I was particularly proud to present awards to retiring school councillors — which falls within my portfolio responsibilities — formally recognising those who work to make schools better places. These parents have given 15 years or more service to their school councils and have now chosen to retire. That means they have often been working on school councils for years after their children have left the school. Giving them recognition of their support for local schools and communities was very good. It shows that the Bracks government cares about our schools and school communities and that we are turning things around, especially in the education system.

Energy and greenhouse technologies centre

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — I refer the Minister for Energy and Resources to the government's budget announcement of the creation of a centre for energy and greenhouse technologies. Given that according to the government's own comments the centre will not undertake any research and, further, that it will utilise existing facilities and expertise across Victoria, I ask the minister: how many new direct jobs will be created by establishing the administrative component of this centre in the Latrobe Valley?

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources) — For a moment there I thought the honourable member was going to ask me about the precise location of the centre, since that is also a matter of great interest in the Latrobe Valley.

Following the announcement in the budget and prior to that in the government's business statement of the creation of the centre, the government is consulting with stakeholders in terms of the best possible way of committing these funds, and it is the intention of the government to take full advantage of existing research facilities and resources and to endeavour to attract both private sector and commonwealth funding to this important initiative.

The further development of the initiative following those consultations will settle the answers to the questions that the honourable member has raised in terms of the final form that the initiative will be implemented in.

Supplementary question

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — Budget paper 2 indicates funding for this centre of \$12 million over the next three years. The Treasurer of this state was speaking in Morwell last week, and said:

The government will commit up to \$12 million over the next three years —

not to the centre, but —

towards projects sponsored by the centre.

I ask the minister: how much of this \$12 million will actually go towards creating the administrative centre of the centre for energy and greenhouse technologies?

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources) — I think I really did answer the question in my previous response. As I have indicated, the government wishes to take full advantage of partnership opportunities with the private sector and the

commonwealth government in relation to research or project work — it amounts to the same thing — before determining the precise allocation of these funds over the next three years.

It is not the government's intention to spend this money in a way which consumes large amounts through administration and facilities; it is the government's stated intention to ensure that these funds are delivered to projects which will contribute to the further development of these technologies.

Sport and recreation: funding

Hon. JENNY MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — I refer my question to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. In light of the minister's commitment to delivering quality sporting opportunities to all Victorians, what steps has he taken to ensure that this outcome is achieved?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I welcome the honourable member's question. In the last week or so I have had the great pleasure to announce the outcomes of the Community Facilities Funding program and also the Better Pools program. This is no doubt reinforced by the level of interest that has come from honourable members of both houses.

I want to demonstrate how significant these programs are by referring to a couple. They include the announcement of the Yarra Junction pool project, which was a successful applicant and has been funded to the tune of \$1 million over the next two financial years. This money will enable the Yarra centre to expand to include a 25-metre pool, a learners pool and a toddlers pool.

I congratulate the community representatives who were in attendance on the day of the announcement: they have been working since 1995 to bring together this pool project. It is always heartening to give out money to local communities, but on this particular occasion the local community members from the pool project committee had tears in their eyes because they were so excited. It is quite remarkable, because this project has been funded under a Labor government. When the Liberal coalition was in government they were unable to fund it. It reinforces that those local members could not deliver to their local communities but we as a Bracks Labor government are delivering to those communities.

As well as that — this is a terrific portfolio because it is one of good news all the time — yesterday I had the good fortune to announce \$2.5 million to the City of Maribyrnong over the next two years for a regional

facility to be located at the Rob Barrett reserve in Maribyrnong. It is a \$17 million project.

What the two projects reinforce is that as a government we are growing the whole of the state. We are investing, and are proud to invest, in communities. Not only that, but we are providing good governance for all of Victoria. We know that stands in stark contrast to the opposition when they were in government. Now that they are in opposition it is still the same — they are divided and confused. You stand for nothing, and we know and the community knows you do not care!

Berwick Primary School

Hon. N. B. LUCAS (Eumemmerring) — I direct my question to the Minister for Education Services. The government recently split builders bids for reconstruction of the relocated Berwick Primary School into two tenders. One was for the new buildings; the other was for the oval and car parking. Those works are being jointly funded by the government, the Casey City Council and the school community.

The department assured the council's chief executive that the cost of the total project will be taken into account in the tender evaluation. The buildings successful tenderer was \$20 000 below the next tenderer for the new buildings, and \$60 000 higher for the oval and car parking. The effect of this is that \$40 000 of funding from the school community and the local council has been wasted. If an all-up price had been sought from tenderers, \$40 000 of community funding would have been saved. Why has \$40 000 of community funding been wasted, and what are you going to do to redress this situation?

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Education Services) — The City of Casey and the Department of Education and Training have been finalising a joint user agreement for the oval and the car park to be shared by the new Berwick Primary School and the community. At the time of going to tender for the construction of the school, the joint use agreement had not been finalised, and for this reason the school's architect decided to tender only the school component of the project and to obtain an indicative cost of the oval component in order to assist the City of Casey.

As honourable members would appreciate, it would be inappropriate to put out a tender for a project when no agreement had been signed. That would not be good practice. The code of practice for the building and construction industry does not support that proposal of putting out tenders without agreements, so on that basis there was only an indicative cost for the car park.

In accordance with the code of practice, the department acted appropriately and properly to accept the best and lowest tender for the project. I am advised as recently as this morning that an in-principle agreement has now been reached to the extent that they are prepared to sign off on the project with respect to the oval. Agreement has been reached with the council, and that project will go ahead.

With respect to the construction of the school, it was appropriate to get the school out to tender as soon as possible once agreement had been signed off. That agreement has been reached. With respect to the car park and the shared facilities with the council, final documentation had not been signed off, but I am advised that that has now been done. That project can now proceed in line with the building and construction industry code of practice.

Supplementary question

Hon. N. B. LUCAS (Eumemmerring) — The Minister for Education Services has just acknowledged that the tender and the quote were done separately. That confirms the fact that the community is \$40 000 net worse off. If you save \$20 000 on one project and spend up to \$60 000 more on the other project, then you are \$40 000 net worse off!

The chief executive of the council verified with the department that as long as all tenderers were able to submit a price for the varied project, no tenderer would be disadvantaged. In other words, the department had within its rights the ability to get a tender and a quote on the total project, which could have saved \$40 000 of community money. Given the government had the ability under its tender procedures to obtain an all-up price and chose not to do so, will the minister agree to the government carrying the \$40 000 difference in the cost?

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Education Services) — As I indicated, it was inappropriate for a tender to go out where there was no agreement between the city council and the department with respect to the shared joint facility of the car park. It is not in line with the code of practice of the building and construction industry. I have now been advised that that has been signed off. There can be variations to the tender process.

With respect to this project, the department has acted — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I ask both sides of the house to allow the minister to answer the question.

Hon. M. M. GOULD — The department has acted appropriately and in line with the code of practice. It would be inappropriate to get a tender for something for which there was no agreement. It was indicative — —

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Mineral sands: government initiatives

Hon. G. D. ROMANES (Melbourne) — Will the Minister for Energy and Resources inform the house of new Bracks government initiatives that will be of direct benefit to the mineral sands industry?

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources) — I thank the honourable member for her question. Yesterday I had the great pleasure of addressing the Australian Journal of Mining's third global mineral sands conference in Victoria in as many years. More than 100 delegates from 11 countries attended the Melbourne conference to hear briefings on developments in Africa and Australia as well as Canada and on the marketing, finance and secondary processing of mineral concentrates.

The emergence of the Murray Basin mineral sands province, incorporating parts of Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia, is one of the most significant developments in the industry worldwide in the past 20 years. The interest in these conferences reflects the fact that Victoria is at the heart of developments in the Murray Basin, with three projects at the moment and a highly competitive business environment. Of the seven major mineral sands projects in total in the basin, five will use Victorian transport systems and Victorian ports to export their products.

I am pleased to inform the house that I launched the north-west freight transport strategy at the conference yesterday. The strategy will be of direct benefit to the mineral sands industry, among many others in the state's north-west, and is part of the Bracks government's commitment to growing the whole of the state. The strategy and action plan are another government initiative which identify better ways to use existing infrastructure by developing new and enhanced intermodal freight facilities and removing barriers to the efficient movement of freight, as well as increasing the use of rail for long-distance freight shipments. The north-west freight transport strategy is part of delivering the Bracks government's objective of increasing the proportion of freight carried to ports and markets by rail to 30 per cent by 2010, which is a much bigger vision than the previous government ever had.

The strategy was developed by the Department of Infrastructure and Vicroads in close consultation with the cities of Mildura and Swan Hill and the North West Municipalities Association, and I would like to take this opportunity to place on the record my thanks to everyone involved for their efforts. The strategy builds on another Bracks government initiative to increase Victoria's competitiveness by committing \$96 million to standardising the rail freight network. The strategy is just one example of the actions this government is taking to support the mineral sands industry.

Another example is in the recent state budget, which allocates \$77 million for the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline — obviously of benefit to the water-intensive mineral sands operations. This is in addition to the commitment of funds for a mineral sands action plan in the Building Tomorrow's Businesses Today statement and the Bracks government's ongoing commitment to the Victorian initiative for minerals and petroleum.

These actions by the Bracks government demonstrate that we are delivering on our promises and planning for the future. We will continue to invest for the future, as the 2002 budget demonstrates, and maximise the benefits to Victoria from the mineral sands industry.

Retail tenancies: review

Hon. W. I. SMITH (Silvan) — In a press release of 24 October 2000 the Minister for Small Business announced a retail tenancies review. Given that that was one year and seven months ago, will the government be introducing retail tenancy legislation in the Parliament this session?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Small Business) — I thank the honourable member for her question. The retail tenancy review that was undertaken by the government will result in a piece of legislation that is important to small retailers in particular. When I have spoken about this issue in the house before I have indicated that it is important for us to get this piece of legislation right.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. M. R. THOMSON — I was going to answer this straight, but given that members of the opposition have thrown it, let us have a look at the debacle of the legislation that was brought in by the previous government, which has caused more problems for small retailers. It has created more confusion and has not helped.

There has been intensive consultation about this piece of legislation, to the point where it has been determined

that there should be a total rewrite of the act. As part of that process the government intends putting out an exposure draft of the legislation, which will enable it to ensure that it has covered all the issues on which it has committed and is not making any of the mistakes that were made by the previous government, which rushed legislation into this house to deal with a problem without taking into account the ramifications of the amendments.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I cannot hear the minister's response because of the noise on my left. I ask honourable members to settle down and allow the minister to finish her answer.

Hon. M. R. THOMSON — That piece of legislation has led to a debacle. Everyone in the retail sector — whether they be from the property council, the shopping centre council or the Australian Retailers Association through to retailers — knows that the current legislation is confusing, is causing problems and is the reason why we are having so many disputes about retail tenancy.

I look forward to bringing the new legislation into the Parliament when we are confident that it is legislation that will be effective, will work and will stop the confusion that currently exists.

Supplementary question

Hon. W. I. SMITH (Silvan) — I raise this question because the industry expectation was that the legislation would be introduced in this session. Nineteen months ago the government started this review. One of the areas the industry is really looking for — and the minister put it out in her press release — is the provision of reasonable security of tenure to retail and commercial tenants. Nineteen months later the government still has not resolved the issue it went to the community with. I ask the minister: when will she resolve it and when will she bring back legislation to give the retail area some certainty?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Small Business) — As I have already indicated, because of the debacle of the previous government's amendments the legislation requires a total rewrite. As I said, the exposure draft will be released and we will have the legislation in the Parliament in spring.

Small business: Yellow Pages survey

Hon. S. M. NGUYEN (Melbourne West) — Can the Minister for Small Business inform the house of

any recent measure of small business confidence in Victoria?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Small Business) — I thank the honourable member for his question. I am pleased to say that the recent Yellow Pages survey indicates that the confidence levels of Victoria's small and medium-size enterprises have increased and that they are feeling extremely confident. As a matter of fact, when it comes to having a sense of confidence, Victoria is the first among the major states.

Since the last survey was conducted we have seen a 14 per cent rise in confidence levels — the highest confidence level in the two surveys of any state or territory. This is on the back of the government's Building Tomorrow's Businesses Today package, in which it announced a number of measures, both in new manufacturing and the new manufacturing agenda, to encourage innovation in businesses and to ensure that they are preparing for the future. During the term of this government a number of taxing initiatives have resulted in over \$1 billion in business tax cuts.

Not only is this business confidence being seen in metropolitan Melbourne, it is also being seen in regional Victoria with this government's meeting its commitment to grow the whole of the state. As a matter of fact, the level of confidence among businesses in regional Victoria is the greatest of all states other than Tasmania — the only place where there is a difference.

Indications are that both on sales performance achieved and future sales expectations Victoria is ahead of the national average. Its capital expenditure, an indication of the true confidence of small and medium-size enterprises, has increased against the national trend. In fact, together with the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria has the strongest trend.

All this indicates that Victorian small and medium-size businesses are feeling confident about their future and the economy. The government looks forward to continuing to work with small businesses to deliver for their future and to grow the whole of the state.

MOTIONS TO TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS

Tertiary education and training: student concessions

Hon. A. P. OLEXANDER (Silvan) — I move:

That the Council take note of the answer given by the Minister for Youth Affairs to a question without notice asked by the Honourable A. P. Olexander relating to travel concession for tertiary students.

It is a sad fact that the Minister for Youth Affairs has decided not to stay and debate her answer to my question regarding a key promise by the Labor Party to young Victorians at the last state election. Why should we be surprised? The Labor Party has not been prepared to debate any of its key pledges to young Victorians here or elsewhere. This is wearing thin with the youth community in this state.

My question went to a very simple issue, which is: should political parties, when they make promises to sections of the community, deliver on those promises when they achieve power?

In its youth pledge of 1999 the Labor Party made a key pledge to young Victorian students. It said to them that it would provide tertiary students with a concession, in line with school concession cards, of about \$7. Today, after three years of this government, that commitment has still not been delivered. There was a promise, and there has been absolutely no performance on that promise. As recently as last week campuses around Victoria called on the government to honour its commitment.

In the last campaign the Labor Party made only ten commitments to young Victorians in its youth pledge, and this was a key one. On the basis of its promise at the last election many young Victorian students decided that they would support and vote for the Labor Party. Many young Victorians supported and worked for the Labor Party at the last election because they believed the Labor Party would come through and deliver. But it has not — despite the fact that it inherited a record budget surplus of \$1.2 billion and that most recently it had a windfall of at least \$800 million as a result of stamp duty takings which have occurred as a result of an unforeseen, unpredicted housing boom.

You would have thought all this money would have made it possible for the Labor Party to have delivered a better deal for tertiary students in this state. But it has not. Instead it has made excuses, and those excuses are wearing thin. Every time the opposition or student groups ask the government to honour its own commitments, it blames the previous Kennett government. This time the minister had the audacity to get up in this chamber and say that the real reason the government has not delivered on this promise is that we have a privatised public transport system.

News flash: we had a privatised public transport system when this promise was made by the Labor Party. So why does the minister continue to run this line that there is no promised delivery because of the Kennett government's privatisation?

In an article in the *Herald Sun* last week the minister's colleague in the other place, the Minister for Education and Training, repeated the allegation that the promise is impossible to deliver on because we have a privatised system and the government has gone as far as it can possibly go. That is patently false. If the government was committed to delivering on its promise it would make the funds available to the Department of Education and Training to pay private operators to provide concession cards to tertiary students at the promised reduced rate, which is around \$7.

It is beyond the opposition and the Victorian student community why the Bracks government has decided not to do so. It simply cannot be because of a shortage of funds, because we all know that the government is flush with funds. It has a lot of money and is announcing projects all over the place, but it is not honouring real commitments it has made. This puts the lie to the government's commitment to young Victorians.

Young Victorians, particularly tertiary students, are drawing the inevitable conclusion: that the promise the government made in the youth pledge was made for cynical political reasons designed to win votes at the election — which it did — and it has no intention of ever honouring this promise.

Hon. G. D. ROMANES (Melbourne) — As the Honourable Andrew Olexander has said, the Bracks Labor government has inherited the legacy of a privatised public transport system from the previous government. Perhaps that is not the key cause of the problems the government has inherited from the previous government, but the way the previous government privatised the public transport system has made it difficult for this government to achieve many of the improvements it wants to see happen in the public transport system to make it more attractive and accessible and more often frequented by the Victorian public.

The system that was put in place by the previous Kennett government is fragmented by the way the passenger franchises were broken up between the trams and the trains and by the way other parts of the system were broken up under private ownership with a central revenue-collecting body. In lots of ways that makes it difficult to deliver a coordinated and smoothly running system in this state. One of the legacies of the previous government is the way the contracts were drawn up and, as we know, if ever there is to be a variation to a contract, negotiations to do so are expensive.

The improvements the government has endeavoured to put in place in the last 2½ years have been the subject of tortuous negotiations with the private operators. As the minister has said previously, the private operators will not negotiate down further. The current system is in place and we are in a position where it is difficult to deliver the improvements that we envisage.

I contrast the system, with its disastrous Onelink ticketing system — which is costing this state hundreds of millions of dollars and is not delivering a seamless, coordinated system to facilitate use of the transport system — with what I saw when I visited three cities in Canada and the United States last year. There I saw good public transport networks which are coordinated, planned with seamless transfers between different modes of transport and providing regular, frequent services. Those networks, which operate effectively, are underpinned by a ticketing system which is easy to use and facilitates those seamless transfers between the modes as well as accessibility.

Hon. A. P. Olexander — On a point of order, Mr President, the motion was very simple, just like my question was. It was about tertiary concession cards in the state of Victoria. However interesting it may be to listen to a travelogue of the honourable member's trips overseas and how she encountered ticketing systems in Ottawa and other places, it is certainly not speaking to the motion. I submit that she be brought back to the motion at hand.

Hon. G. D. ROMANES — On the point of order, Mr President, the very point I was about to make relates to the way students and others use the Ottawa system because of the discounts involved.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The question was specific in its relation to the state of Victoria. The honourable member can clearly look at what is happening in other jurisdictions as an example of what might happen here but she should really address the issue raised by the Honourable Andrew Olexander.

Hon. G. D. ROMANES — In Ottawa, public transport use is growing and it is currently at twice the rate of public transport use in Melbourne. One of the key elements to the success of that transport system is its use by students, pensioners and others who get concessions and assistance because they are regular users. They are the core customers of that service and in that city 70 per cent of transport users pay in advance — they are the discount holders who get incentives to use that system. That demonstrates to us how important public transport is to groups like students and pensioners and those who regularly use

and depend upon it and how important they are to a viable and growing public transport system. Therefore student concessions are vital to the future of the system. It is a way for young people to learn to get around and understand the value of the public transport system and how it can serve their needs in the future.

Motion agreed to.

Youth: proof of age

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — I move:

That the Council take note of the answer given by the Minister for Youth Affairs to a question without notice asked by the Honourable Bill Forwood relating to the use of learner permits for proof of purchase of liquor and tobacco products.

My question, like my colleague's, was simple and to the point. I asked for an explanation of the logic behind the bizarre circumstance where a young person aged over 18 can walk into a liquor store and produce a learner-driver's permit and be permitted to buy alcohol, but at the same time cannot use the same piece of identification to buy a packet of cigarettes.

This is no great rocket science; this is an issue of simple logic. If a learner-driver's permit is permitted as identification for someone over the age of 18 to buy liquor, there seems to be no reason why — nor situation where — logically it should not be used for exactly the same purpose to buy tobacco.

I make the point that logic does not seem to be the strong point of the government today because we just heard the most extraordinary justification from the Government Whip, the Honourable Glenyys Romanes, for a very simple proposition — why the government has not fulfilled an election commitment, which, as my colleague has pointed out, was specific and has demonstrably not been kept by the government.

The Honourable Glenyys Romanes suggested it was because of privatisation or another reason, whatever it may be. The issue is simple: if the government wishes to keep its election promise, all it need do is make the funds available through a Treasurer's advance or a line item in the budget. This is not an issue of privatisation; it is about credibility. Does the government want to keep its promise? If it does there are community service obligations — —

Hon. Jenny Mikakos — On a point of order, Mr President, in line with your ruling just a few minutes ago, I direct your attention to the fact that the Leader of the Opposition is speaking on the previous

take note motion, and I ask you to direct him to come back to the present motion.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The honourable member will also recall that I gave very wide latitude to the Honourable Glenyys Romanes, but she kept on going regardless of my advice. The motions are clearly interwoven. This motion is about the eligibility criteria to get the student discount, and the contrast between liquor and tobacco was referred to. This is another identification card issue, so the honourable member is able to weave the two in together, as the Honourable Glenyys Romanes did so very skilfully.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — One wonders at the sensitivity of the government over these issues such that the Honourable Jenny Mikakos decides she needs to protect the Government Whip. We know there was no logic in the whip's response, but I make the point that if the government wants to keep its promise to the people of Victoria, all it needs to do is make a community service obligation available.

I now turn to another important issue — the issue I started with — that is, the logic behind the government's extraordinarily bizarre position in relation to whether a learners permit is suitable for identification. In response, the minister suggested that the Minister for Health did not believe the learners permit was secure enough to be used for this purpose — that is, for the purpose of buying tobacco. If that is the case, it must equally apply to the purchase of liquor. If it does not apply to the purchase of tobacco it should not be used for alcohol either.

The government has now got itself into this extraordinary position where one piece of identification is suitable for one product but the identical identification is not suitable for the purchase of another product. My question was specific and simple regarding the logic of it, and I did not get an answer to it. No amount of wordsmithing by honourable members opposite will explain away this circumstance. I look forward to the attempts that may come, because blind Freddy can see that a learners permit used for one purpose must, by definition, be equally useable for the second purpose.

The Liquor Stores Association of Victoria is seeking a review and has written to the Minister for Health, but the minister locked into his previous position in replying to the association by saying that he is not prepared to alter his position but that he might review it at a later date. This government has now 701 reviews — —

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Hon. JENNY MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — I think the opposition understands this government's commitment and concerns about under-age drinking and dangerous driving by young people and the fact that it has taken a number of initiatives with respect to this area. One initiative was the banning from retail sale alcohol-based food essences that were in domestic-size containers. That is evidence of the government's determination to act decisively and effectively in this area.

Hon. Bill Forwood — What does that have to do with it?

Hon. JENNY MIKAKOS — It has a lot to do with it because it demonstrates the government's commitment to tackling under-age drinking and driving. It is appropriate that as part of the government's commitment to decrease under-age drinking it regularly assesses the merits of existing and emerging forms of identification which are acceptable evidence of age for the purpose of the licensee defending a prosecution in respect of allowing a person under 18 years of age on licensed premises or supplying them with liquor. Honourable members will be aware that the Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 specifically provides for this flexibility in prescribing acceptable evidence of age.

The application of hard-card technology for the production of learners permits issued by Vicroads has eliminated the concerns that previously existed for the acceptability of the permit for evidence of age. It is probably some time since honourable members obtained their learners permit, but I recall when I got my learners permit many years ago it was not in the form of a plastic card, as is commonly used now and which is similar to a drivers licence; it was a piece of paper that could easily be forged. For this reason there were a number of concerns relating to using that type of documentation for evidence of age. We have now been moving towards hard-card technology for learners permits, which means those concerns have decreased.

We should remember that in talking about using a learners permit as evidence of age we are acknowledging the fact that people as young as 16 years can obtain a learners permit, but in presenting that type of identification obviously a holder would need to demonstrate to the licensee that they are 18 years of age or over. Unfortunately young people have been ingenious in their ability to forge identification in the past, and by moving to hard-card technology it is hoped it will be more difficult for young people to forge that type of identification.

Evidence does indicate that most instances of young people obtaining liquor illegally is a result of retailers inadequately checking the identification of minors rather than the presentation of false identification.

The learners permit issued by other states and territories continue to be unacceptable in Victoria for liquor licensing purposes due to the variability in control over their manufacturing and issue. I understand that the merit of including the learners permit issued by Vicroads as acceptable evidence of age for the Tobacco Act is under review by the Minister for Health. I have not seen the correspondence that the Leader of the Opposition has referred to in his contribution, but I understand it is now being looked at because the Tobacco Act has provisions regarding the acceptable evidence for young people purchasing cigarettes. As we are moving to hard-card technology, the Department of Human Services is looking at whether there should be a similar approach under the Tobacco Act as there is for liquor purchases.

In summary, the learners permit issued by Vicroads — —

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Motion agreed to.

Energy and greenhouse technologies centre

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — I move:

The Council take note of the answer by the Minister for Energy and Resources to a question without notice asked by the Honourable P. R. Hall relating to the centre for energy and greenhouse technologies.

The establishment of the centre for energy and greenhouse technologies came as a surprise. It was an unannounced initiative that suddenly appeared in the state budget papers tabled in Parliament a few weeks ago.

It was totally unlike a lot of the other budget initiatives which had been previously mentioned. Most of the elements in the budget were well known to the people of Victoria by the time the budget papers were presented because the government had leaked what initiatives were going to be in the budget to gain maximum publicity.

However, it did not leak information about the centre for energy and greenhouse technologies, and for some time I wondered why this information was not leaked before the budget was announced. It is only now after the minister's answer in the house today that it is apparent why information about this initiative was not

leaked. It was not leaked because the government did not have any idea of how it would work or how it would be set up. Even today, the answer given by the Minister for Energy and Resources confirms that the government is consulting about how it might work and what it might look like. It seems that she has no idea of what form it will take, nor do other members of the government.

It is a bit like the regional fast rail project and the Snowy River water project where the government tells us what it will do but has no idea how it will do it. It is the same with this centre for energy and greenhouse technologies. The government said it would allocate \$12 million, but it has no idea how that money will be spent; what form the centre will take; what it will look like or what benefits will come to Gippsland with the project.

It is another example of a misleading budget headline. The budget papers had a map of Victoria and an arrow pointing to the Gippsland region which said \$12 million would be spent on the centre for energy and greenhouse technologies. That is a misleading diagram in the budget papers because \$12 million will not be spent in Gippsland on the centre for energy and greenhouse technologies.

In my search for information on this I referred to page 64 in budget paper 2. In reference to the \$12 million to be spent on the centre for energy and greenhouse technologies it said:

The centre will facilitate research, development, demonstration and commercialisation of technologies ...

While the centre will not undertake research itself, it will coordinate, facilitate and fund relevant energy projects ...

It does not say that the government will spend \$12 million in Gippsland. It says that the centre will fund research projects all over Victoria — not just in Gippsland.

On 15 May the Minister for Energy and Resources answered a question without notice in this house. She did not add a great deal to the limited information provided by the budget papers but she did tell us that the centre will employ 'existing facilities and expertise from across Victoria'. Once again we do not know if there will be any new jobs at all for the people of Gippsland. All we are told is that the administrative centre will be located somewhere in Gippsland. We do not know what form it will take.

My search for further information took me to comments made by the Treasurer last week when he addressed the annual meeting of Advance Morwell. He

described as one of the state budget initiatives for Gippsland the:

... establishment of the centre for energy and greenhouse technologies in the Latrobe Valley (with other nodes across the state). The government will commit up to \$12 million over the next three years towards projects sponsored by the centre. The centre will support development of technologies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by promoting the efficient and sustainable supply and use of energy.

Once again this gives no clear indication that the \$12 million will be spent in Gippsland.

My grave fear is that this is another misleading budget headline by the government. The people of Gippsland have been led to believe that this is a \$12 million initiative for our area. It is not. I anticipate that we will have a couple of public servants, providing the secretarial component for the centre, sitting in the Department of Infrastructure office in Traralgon and that is all we will get.

If we are going to get something better let the government come clean and tell us. It had that opportunity today; it did not. I call on the government to do so.

Motion agreed to.

Berwick Primary School

Hon. N. B. LUCAS (Eumemmerring) — I move:

That the Council take note of the answer given by the Minister for Education Services to a question without notice asked by the Honourable N. B. Lucas relating to the tender for the Berwick Primary School capital works.

I raised this matter to do with Berwick Primary School because I was concerned that \$40 000 has been wasted. Four of my children went to Berwick Primary School. I was on the school council and was involved with fundraising at that school. Now I find that funds held by that school and by the City of Casey will be wasted because this government chose not to seek a total tender for two works for the relocation of the primary school.

The facts are that the successful tender for the buildings was \$20 000 lower than the next bid. The fact also is that this government, through the Department of Education and Training, obtained quotes for other works, being the school oval and the car park. The bid of the lowest tenderer for the buildings was \$60 000 higher than the lowest bid for the same works by another tenderer. Had the government added the \$60 000 and the \$20 000 it would have quickly realised that it was going to dud the local community \$40 000.

What was the minister's reason for this? She said that because the joint-use agreement had not been signed with the school and the council a tender could not be obtained for the extra works for the oval and the car park. However, the minister admitted that the government had obtained quotes for these works. If the government could obtain a quote and tender on two different works why could it not put them together? Or indeed, and this is the really important point, why did it not ask each of the tenderers to come up with a total price on the works?

The minister did not answer that question. The government answered it through a government department and the answer appeared in a press release by the City of Casey in which the mayor, Cr Smith, said that the Department of Infrastructure:

... had confirmed that, as long as all tenderers were able to submit a price for the varied project,

The varied project being the two sets of works: the buildings, the car park and oval — —

no tenderer would have been disadvantaged.

That is a fact. The quote goes on:

Accordingly, the savings could easily have been made.

They were not easily made because the government chose not to proceed in this way, which the department has admitted to the council could have been done.

This minister is in charge of a department which is not looking after the real interests of the community. It is willing to waste \$40 000 of funds raised within the community by the city ratepayers and the Berwick Primary School council. The record will show that the minister, the Honourable Monica Gould, is not in the house. I assume she is hiding in her office so she will not have to answer the questions asked; she is not game to be in the house to take up this issue. She is out there somewhere, hiding from members who are accusing her of being in charge of a department that will waste \$40 000 of community money. That is why the minister was removed from her previous position as Minister for Industrial Relations; that is why the minister should be removed from her new position as Minister for Education Services.

I call on the government to sack this minister for incompetence. It is an outrage that a government can stand by this disgraced minister and waste \$40 000 of community funds. The people of Berwick condemn the government for its poor practice. The Berwick Primary School council believes it has witnessed the total

wastage of \$40 000. This is a disgrace and the minister should resign.

Motion agreed to.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Small Business) — I have answers to questions on notice 2409, 2467–71, 2483, 2502, 2512, 2624, 2693, 2719–24, 2734, 2756, 2768, 2771, 2779, 2797, 2798, 2804, 2805, 2827–9, 2837–9, 2888, 2889, 2900, 2901, 2904–9, 2917.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 5

Hon. A. P. OLEXANDER (Silvan) presented *Alert Digest No. 5 of 2002, together with appendices.*

Laid on table.

Ordered to be printed.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Casino (Management Agreement) Act 1993 — Authorised changes to Drawings relating to Crown Limited's Second Hotel Tower.

Environment Protection Authority — Neighbourhood Environment Improvement Plan Proposal Guideline, May 2002.

International Fibre Centre Ltd — Minister's report of 13 May 2002 of receipt of the 2001 report.

Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria — Report, year ending 30 September 2001.

Murray-Darling Basin Commission — Report, 2000–2001.

Parliamentary Committees Act 1968 —

Minister's response to recommendations in the Family and Community Development Committee's report upon the Inquiry into Marketplace Discrimination Against Women Consumers.

Minister's response to recommendations in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's 43rd Report on the 2001–2002 Budget Estimates.

Minister's response to recommendations in the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee's report upon the

Inquiry into the Summary Offences Act 1966, Final Report.

Planning and Environment Act 1987 — Notices of Approval of the following amendments to planning schemes:

Ballarat Planning Scheme — Amendment C44.

Bayside Planning Scheme — Amendment C21.

Bendigo — Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme — Amendment C9.

Cardinia Planning Scheme — Amendment C29.

Casey Planning Scheme — Amendment C42.

Geelong — Greater Geelong Planning Scheme — Amendment C34.

Kingston Planning Scheme — Amendment C28.

Melbourne Planning Scheme — Amendment C63.

Moonee Valley Planning Scheme — Amendment C30.

Southern Grampians Planning Scheme — Amendment C4.

Wyndham Planning Scheme — Amendment C16.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament:

Business Names Act 1962 — No. 31.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Nos 33 to 35.

Zoological Parks and Gardens Act 1995 — No. 32.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 —

Minister's exception certificate under section 8(4) in respect of Statutory Rule No. 32.

Minister's exemption certificate under section 9(6) in respect of Statutory Rule. No. 31.

STATE TAXATION LEGISLATION (FURTHER AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This bill introduces a number of measures designed to ensure that the state's taxation system operates fairly and equitably and that business compliance costs are reduced. The bill includes major changes to the motor car duty provisions in the Duties Act 2000 (Duties Act) and a significant improvement to the means by which the unimproved value of land is calculated for land tax assessment purposes. The bill also makes minor amendments to the documents duty provisions of the

Duties Act, following further consultation with industry. Minor but important amendments are also made to the Land Tax Act 1958 and to the Pay-roll Tax Act 1971.

The bill includes proposals to replace the current motor vehicle duty collection regime with a more robust arrangement.

Following industry consultation with Vicroads, the Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce and Consumer and Business Affairs Victoria, agreement has been reached to replace the current collection system. The objective of the new model is to simplify the payment system for acquirers of motor vehicles.

The new collection system includes the provision of a single payment point at Vicroads, thereby eliminating the need for the dealers to deal with two separate agencies.

It also requires that all applications for transfer be accompanied by the payment of duty, with a penalty for any failure to pay the duty within 14 days of the sale.

Under the new collection system, the licensed motor car trader (LMCT) will collect the duty from the acquirer. This will include both new and used car dealers.

There is also the provision of a separate penalty on both disposer and acquirer for understatement of value of the vehicle, thereby addressing the risk of collusion to minimise duty.

The new system also streamlines the recovery of unpaid amounts by deeming the application for transfer to be an assessment.

The proposed changes will provide more certainty within the marketplace with a more simplified and efficient collection regime. The impact on revenue will be negligible.

The new collection arrangements will commence on 1 July 2002. The State Revenue Office is undertaking extensive communications with taxpayers and licensed motor car traders to ensure that the changes cause minimal disruption and are clearly understood by all stakeholders.

The bill also makes important amendments to the Land Tax Act.

The bill abolishes the existing equalisation provisions from 2003 and replaces them with an indexation factor.

Equalisation factors for each municipality were used for land tax between 1984 and 2001 to determine the

unimproved value of land for land tax assessment purposes. They reflected the Valuer-General's estimate of the average movement in site value within a municipality from the time of the last general valuation to a common date set by the Treasurer. The factor derived was applied to the site value of the municipal valuation used for land tax purposes, to provide a notional unimproved value.

Equalisation factors were necessary as until 2000 not all councils conducted their general valuations at the same time and the returned general valuations were applied for land tax for some years after their initial use for council rating purposes.

Each year the Valuer-General set an equalisation factor for each municipality. The factors were made by regulation and were not subject to objection or appeal by taxpayers.

From the 2000 general valuation, all Victorian municipalities now undertake general valuations on a common two-year cycle.

The 2000 general valuation is being used for the first time for land tax assessing in 2002. It is proposed, however, that where a general valuation is used for a second time for land tax, such as when the 2000 general valuation is used for the 2003 land tax year, it should be adjusted to reflect the movement in property valuations since the valuation was made.

The bill provides that the Valuer-General will determine the indexation factor. The factor will be prescribed by regulation. This is consistent with the equalisation factor arrangements.

A consequential amendment is made to the Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 to ensure that the regulations prescribing the indexation factor are not subject to a regulatory impact statement (again, the same as for the regulations prescribing the equalisation factors).

The proposed new formula, to be called an indexation factor, will remove some of the anomalies and inequities created by the existing equalisation factor. The factor will reflect an amount which, in the opinion of the Valuer-General, would as nearly as possible represent half the percentage movement of the aggregate value of taxable land for the municipality between the general valuation in use for land tax and the next general valuation returned by council. There are numerous benefits of this model.

One obvious benefit is that the unimproved value used for land tax assessing would approximate the average of two actual municipal valuations.

This will smooth out extreme fluctuations in tax liability and reduce distortions between the existing general valuation in use for land tax and the next general valuation.

Also, valuations derived from the formula would not be distorted by variations in the valuations of non-taxable properties. In calculating the indexation factor, the Valuer-General would exclude valuations of residential properties which are exempt and rural land. The new indexation factor will be simple to apply, and easier for land taxpayers to understand, because it is based on actual valuations.

In determining the value of taxable land the Valuer-General would exclude from the calculation the value of properties classified as rural land and those which are exempt as principal places of residence. The Valuer-General would, in relation to principal residence exempt land, rely upon information provided by the commissioner regarding the aggregate value of exempt land for each municipality. Where this information was not available, the Valuer-General would be permitted to estimate the value of the land so exempted. As most commercial and industrial properties are both rateable and taxable, the average valuation movement of these types of property between both valuations would be reflected in the indexation factor.

The bill also includes a minor amendment to exempt from land tax land that is owned by non-profit organisations which have as their principal objectives the conduct of agricultural shows, farm machinery field days, and similar activities where these organisations use the land for those purposes.

There are few organisations running agricultural shows and related events directly affected by land tax. Most use municipal land, which is currently exempt, or where they own the land it is often valued at an amount below the land tax liability threshold.

While the promotion of agriculture can come within the charitable purposes exemption these organisations usually cannot meet the 'exclusively for charitable use' test. Due to the need to finance their primary activity most would hire the land to other organisations for short-term activities.

The impact on revenue of providing the exemption is minimal and the amendment will operate retrospectively to cover the 2002 land tax assessment year.

The amendment to the Pay-roll Tax Act included in the bill relates to the exemption for non-government and non-profit schools and colleges.

The provisions will extend operation of the existing exemption applying to wages paid by not-for-profit schools or colleges in existence before 27 May 1997 to otherwise eligible technical schools that provide education predominantly at or below the secondary level to students that are aged under 19 years.

The amendments also preserve the exempt status of schools which qualified under the current provisions. There have been objections to the tax by non-profit bodies, primarily those offering ballet and drama education, which believe that they should qualify for the exemption on the same basis as other non-government not-for-profit education providers. The proposed amendments will resolve a contentious area of the law.

The minor Duties Act amendments I mentioned at the outset comprise a number of technical amendments to various provisions to ensure that they are wholly consistent with the current policy intent, clarify uncertainty and safeguard against potential avoidance activity. The important changes can be summarised in the following way:

Aggregation of dutiable property

Section 24 of the Duties Act is an anti-avoidance provision which ensures that items of dutiable property purchased under one arrangement are assessed for duty on their aggregated value. The provision imposes three criteria — namely:

- that the transactions occur within 12 months; and
- the transferee is the same or the transferees are associated persons; and
- the dutiable transactions together indicate the existence of one arrangement.

The main thrust of the Victorian provisions is to ensure that, when broadacres were purchased and subdivided prior to settlement, the individual transfers are subject to aggregation. The 12-month limit means that purchasers under terms contracts settling over a period exceeding 12 months would pay less duty than should be the case. The amendment will ensure that these transactions are captured by section 24.

There is also evidence that the need to satisfy all the aggregation criteria leads to duty minimisation in circumstances where separate companies owned or controlled by related parties purchase different elements of dutiable property used in conjunction, such as separate purchases of land and goods under one

arrangement. A further amendment to section 24 will eliminate this opportunity.

Unit trusts

The conveyancing provisions of the Duties Act provide in section 7(1)(b)(vi) that a change of beneficial ownership in dutiable property is subject to duty other than a change in regard to an estate in land through issue, transfer, redemption or cancellation of units in a unit trust.

The reference to land instead of the wider term of dutiable property means that such a change of beneficial interest in unlisted marketable securities in a unit trust is subject to duty.

Notwithstanding the impending abolition of marketable security duty from July 2003, the bill will ensure that Victoria has uniform provisions for the duration of the tax.

Declarations of trust for unquoted shares

Section 34 of the Duties Act exempts declarations of trust made by an apparent purchaser in respect of dutiable property where the real purchaser has supplied the purchase monies. As a result of quoted marketable securities being removed from the dutiable property list (prior to enactment) these declarations in respect of quoted marketable securities are subject to duty, whereas declarations in respect of land and unquoted marketable securities are not. Such declarations did not attract duty under the Stamps Act.

Under the Stamps Act declarations by a trustee in favour of the beneficial owner who provided the purchase monies was not liable to duty regardless of the asset the trust was in regard to. It was intended the Duties Act would reflect this policy and the bill will restore the Stamps Act position.

Transfer to a special trustee

The Duties Act provides an exemption in section 33(2) for transactions relating to the change of trustees for dutiable property. Special trustees, defined as including trustee companies under Victorian and corresponding acts and trustees of complying superannuation funds, are not required to satisfy the commissioner as to the capacity in which they hold the dutiable property.

A recent case has demonstrated that there is opportunity for exploitation of the exemption as trustee companies may be involved in a series of commercial transactions and are not limited to exclusively holding property merely as trustees. To guard against duty avoidance an

amendment contained in the bill will ensure that the exemption will only apply where it is established that the transfer of property to the trust was executed only because of a change of trustee.

Transfers resulting from declaration of trust

Section 7(1)(b)(i) of the Duties Act charges duty on a declaration of trust in respect of property already vested in the person declaring the trust and also any identified property 'to be vested'. The wording of the trust provisions has the potential for imposing double duty on the declaration and also the transaction by which the property is acquired by the declarant. A provision in the bill will ensure that double duty is not payable.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned for Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) on motion of Hon. I. J. Cover.

Debate adjourned until next day.

ELECTORAL BILL

Second reading

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Victoria's principal electoral legislation, The Constitution Act Amendment Act (the act), was enacted in 1958. The 1958 act succeeded other acts of the same name, the first of which was enacted in 1890. In turn, the 1890 act incorporated electoral provisions dating back to the 1850s.

The fact that Victoria's electoral legislation is included in The Constitution Act Amendment Act is confusing, as the name of the act does not indicate its relationship to electoral matters.

The act has never been thoroughly revised, yet has been amended on numerous occasions. The result is that Victoria's electoral legislation has a number of deficiencies:

it is extremely prescriptive in some areas and lacking in detail in other areas;

it is written in difficult language and is poorly organised;

it does not provide for modern election management practices; and

in some cases, it is out of step with current electoral practice and community expectations.

An example is section 251 of the act, which provides that carrying a gun, pistol, sword or bludgeon at an election is punishable by a fine of not less than \$4 nor more than \$40. Accounts of elections in the 1850s suggest there was a real need for this provision at that time, when a fine of up to £20 would have been a deterrent. However, the provision serves little purpose today.

It is time for a new electoral act for Victoria. I note that the Electoral Commissioner made this recommendation in his report on the administration and conduct of the September 1999 state election. I am pleased to say that this bill includes the recommendations made by the Electoral Commissioner and clearly sets out the rights and obligations of all participants in the electoral process, from voters to candidates to political parties.

The key aims of the bill

Reforms in the bill are the result of a comprehensive review by the Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC). The reforms will:

improve administrative procedures for the conduct of elections;

make it easier for candidates and other election stakeholders to understand electoral procedures; and

enable the application of new technology to the conduct of elections.

The bill will also make provision for election funding and expenditure.

The bill will retain all essential electoral principles while leaving more detailed administrative procedures to regulations. The bill provides for the VEC to issue an election manual and directions regarding election procedures. The manual, including any directions, will be published and available to members of Parliament, registered political parties and prospective candidates. This will provide more flexibility and allow the VEC to improve the efficiency of election management and at the same time ensure transparency and accountability in the election process.

The impact of the bill on electors

Many of the reforms in the bill are aimed at encouraging more Victorians to vote by making it easier for electors to enrol and to cast their vote at election time.

The bill makes it easier for electors to update their enrolment. Electors who have changed their address will receive an invitation to update their enrolment and the necessary form from the VEC.

To protect electors' privacy, electoral rolls will no longer be available for sale, and enrolment information provided by the VEC will be prohibited from being used for a commercial purpose. Electors will be able to inspect lists of electors at the VEC and contact the VEC to check their own enrolment details, as they can now.

The bill provides for the VEC to use technology to assist electors. For example, in the future the VEC will be able to use computers at interstate and overseas early voting centres. This will make it easier to identify electors' enrolment details and issue ballot papers for their electorates and will make voting more convenient and efficient for electors.

The bill makes it clear that electors must be enrolled for their principal place of residence and can vote only for that address. Electors who have not lived at their enrolment address for more than three months before election day will not be entitled to vote for that election.

The impact of the bill on political parties

The bill clearly sets out the duties and obligations of political parties in the electoral process.

The bill provides that political parties will be entitled to receive enrolment information and information about ordinary, postal and absent voters from the VEC. This will be balanced by a requirement that information provided by the VEC be used by the parties only for purposes connected to an election and for monitoring the accuracy of the enrolment register. Any misuse of the information will attract penalties.

Requirements relating to the registration of political parties will be tightened, so that only parties with substantial community support are registered.

The bill provides that the VEC is empowered to review registered political parties to determine whether they remain eligible to be registered. Where a party fails to obtain an average of 4 per cent of first preference votes for all electorates contested by that party at a state election, or 4 per cent of first preference votes at a by-election, this will trigger an automatic review by the VEC of the party's eligibility to continue to be registered.

Registered political parties will be required to nominate their candidates with the VEC, instead of having the choice of nominating candidates with the Electoral

Commissioner or with individual returning officers as at present.

The impact of the bill on Independent members of Parliament

The bill provides that Independent members of Parliament will not be able to register a political party merely on the basis of their parliamentary status without meeting membership requirements that will apply for the registration of a political party. This reform is consistent with the rationale of only allowing political parties with substantial community support to be registered.

Independent members will be entitled to receive from the VEC enrolment and vote information relating to their own electorates and will be able to use this information only for purposes connected to an election, monitoring the accuracy of the enrolment register and performing their functions as a member.

The impact of the bill on candidates

The bill clearly sets out the position of candidates standing for election.

The bill provides that to be qualified to stand for election a candidate will have to be enrolled as an elector instead of simply being entitled to enrol as at present. Candidates will be required to declare on the nomination form that they are qualified to be elected, with a false declaration attracting a penalty. The criteria for rejection of a candidate's nomination will be clarified.

To increase candidates' privacy, the bill provides that only the candidate's name and nominated contact details will be made public by the VEC.

The bill provides that candidates will be entitled to receive the electoral roll for their electorate from the VEC but can use this information only for purposes connected to an election and for monitoring the accuracy of the electoral roll.

The impact of the bill on the Victorian Electoral Commission

The bill facilitates the use of modern election management practices by the VEC. It will also provide more flexibility to the VEC in managing electoral processes.

The bill establishes the Victorian Electoral Commission as a body corporate with all the associated rights and obligations. The VEC will consist of the Electoral

Commissioner, whose current functions, powers and duties will be transferred to the VEC.

The bill modernises electoral terminology. For example, returning officers will now be known as election managers (a more accurate description of their position than returning officer). Polling day will be known as election day, and polling places will be known as voting centres. Pre-poll voting, hospital voting and interstate and overseas voting will be known as early voting, and the locations for such services will be early voting centres.

The bill clearly sets out the powers and obligations of the VEC. The bill provides that the VEC will have authority to gather information from government agencies and power companies for enrolment purposes. The VEC will use this information to assist electors to update their enrolment when they change address. The information provided will also help the VEC to identify any cases of enrolment fraud.

While the bill requires the VEC to provide enrolment information to candidates, members of Parliament, registered political parties and others, it will prohibit the sale of electoral rolls, to prevent abuse of enrolment information.

The VEC will be required to appoint, resource and advertise voting centres as needed for the conduct of an election. It will also be empowered to appoint early voting centres and determine operating times and service recipients and whether centres will be mobile — to provide for hospitals and nursing homes — or fixed. In deciding on the location of early voting centres the VEC will be required to have regard to accessibility issues for voters.

The bill will facilitate the application of technology to the conduct of elections. Besides enabling electronic voting at interstate and overseas voting centres, the bill will permit computer counting of votes where this will speed up the result, allow for electronic transmission of electoral documents and provide for the use of electronic rolls to take absent votes on election day.

Current detailed provisions on such matters as the packaging and storage of ballot material by the VEC are simplified in the bill, giving more flexibility to the VEC to determine the necessary arrangements which will be prescribed in regulations or determined by the VEC's directions, as appropriate.

Section 85 statement

It is the intention of clause 129 to limit the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. Clause 129 provides that a

decision of the Court of Disputed Returns is final and cannot be appealed.

The Court of Disputed Returns is comprised of a single judge of the Supreme Court. However, the practice and procedure followed by the Court of Disputed Returns does not follow the practice and procedure that is followed by the Supreme Court in accordance with the Supreme Court Rules. Rather, the practice and procedure followed by the Court of Disputed Returns is provided for in this bill. Consequently, this clause is a limitation on the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court.

Clause 129 is consistent with the normal practice of electoral legislation to provide that a Court of Disputed Returns is the forum to deal with disputed elections quickly and conclusively in the interests of certainty in the electoral and parliamentary process.

Clause 129 is the same as section 292 of The Constitution Act Amendment Act 1958 and does not alter current arrangements.

Electoral funding and expenditure

Under Victorian law there is no public funding of political parties and candidates. In contrast, the commonwealth, New South Wales, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory have systems of public funding.

It is government policy to make election contests fairer through limited public funding of election campaigns. The aim of public funding is to reduce parties' dependence on corporate money and to put parties on a more even footing.

Funding of election campaigns

Public funding of registered political parties and independent candidates will be on the basis of an amount per vote for both houses of Parliament. The initial amount will be \$1.20 for each first preference vote received where a candidate obtains at least 4 per cent of the first preference votes, and it will be indexed according to the CPI.

Parties and candidates will receive funding only if they provide the VEC with an audited statement that their electoral spending has been no less than their entitlement under the \$1.20 per vote formula. Parties and candidates that have spent less than their entitlement will receive only what they have spent. There will be penalties for false statements, and the VEC will be entitled to request further information if it is reasonably satisfied that information in a statement is materially incorrect. These provisions will prevent the

'profiteering' on elections that has occurred occasionally under the commonwealth system.

Capping of donations by licence-holders

The government's commitment to cap political donations from gaming operators will be implemented through a cap on donations from the holders of casino operator's and gaming operator's licences. Persons who hold such licences will be prohibited from making donations to any one registered political party totalling more than \$50 000 in a financial year. If the holder of a prescribed licence contravenes this provision, the amount above the \$50 000 cap will be forfeited to the state.

The question of whether additional licences should be covered by the cap will be referred to the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee, which will be requested to report by 30 June 2003.

Conclusion

The bill is clear, simple and rationally organised and more accessible to voters and other stakeholders in the electoral process. It sets out essential principles of electoral law, while providing the flexibility to improve services and the conduct of elections.

Victoria will have modern electoral legislation in time for the next state election, which can be held from November 2002.

The bill is also designed to ensure confidence in the integrity of the electoral system. Public funding reduces parties' reliance on private funding, which may come with strings attached.

Victoria's first electoral legislation came at a time when Victoria led the world in democratic electoral reform, introducing the secret ballot and giving the vote to nearly all men over 21. This bill will place Victoria again at the forefront of electoral legislation.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned for Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) on motion of Hon. I. J. Cover.

Debate adjourned until next day.

BUDGET PAPERS, 2002–03

Debate resumed from 16 May; motion of Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources):

That the Council take note of the budget papers, 2002–03.

Hon. S. M. NGUYEN (Melbourne West) — I am delighted to speak in support of the budget for 2002–03. The reason I strongly endorse the budget is because of the many good things in it — things that Victorians deserve to get from the Bracks Labor government.

The budget is not only looking after the people of Victoria but at the same time it is looking after the business of Victoria and the growth of the Victorian economy. The government wants to ensure that every opportunity is there to help Victoria to become better and stronger every day.

This budget is pro-business and is a financially responsible budget. That statement was delivered by Treasurer John Brumby on 7 May 2002 in the lower house in front of members of Parliament, the media and the Victorian community.

The budget is committed in many ways to the way we want to see Victoria — as one of the best state economies in Australia. It is true. Our state economy has won a lot of support from the private sector, including the business community, and at the same time from many welfare agencies in Victoria. It is a budget that the Bracks government is proud of presenting to the people of Victoria. We have committed so the business community will get the benefit of \$1 billion from this budget. At the same time, we will spend money on improving the health sector and also improving education for our younger generation. We will also invest in a lot of projects in infrastructure — building Victoria and building confidence for the future.

Business people know they will get benefits because we have lower and fewer taxes. We want to bring confidence to the investors in Victoria who want to invest in Victoria. They will get a lot of benefit and they support opportunity. The result is very clear — the economy in Victoria has grown.

In question time today I asked the Minister for Small Business a question about small business confidence. The Yellow Pages quarterly survey for May 2002 released today shows that Victoria's business confidence net balance has increased by 14 per cent. That shows the confidence that small and medium-size businesses have in the Bracks government. It is not easy to say that when the world economy has gone down. Victoria's economy has improved because this government knows how to manage the economy. It has a policy for business and for spending money on building infrastructure to create jobs and give the Victorian community more confidence in the future.

That is why it has a good record with small and medium-size businesses.

Today there are a lot of positives in the construction and housing industries. People out there still believe the Victorian economy has helped the industry. It was supposed to have collapsed six months ago after the events of 11 September — which strongly affected every country — when everyone believed the economy would go down very fast. But now we are almost in June, eight months later, and our state economy is still very positive and strong and Victorians are still confident in investing in the housing industry and spending more money and doing business to help our economy grow.

The government's policy is strongly supported by many other sectors, including the union sector and the Victorian Council of Social Service, which have spoken out in support of the budget.

We were elected two and a half years ago on a policy of improving health and education, and providing a safer community for Victorians. We have spent more money in education and on upgrading many education services, not because we want to spend money but because we want to see the education system in Victoria as one of the best in the world. The budget highlights many things relating to education.

Last week was Education Week. The Minister for Education and Training and the Minister for Education Services presented the government's policy and commitment to schoolteachers, principals, students, parents, and the community about the future and its commitment to seeing younger students getting better education and skills and receiving the best services in the world.

The government has spoken to the people in Victoria. As a result it has spent about \$34.5 million on improving numeracy programs so that younger students — 96.5 per cent of Victorian year 3 students and 94.3 per cent of year 5 students — have reached the national numeracy benchmark. That shows the government is committed to improving the numeracy and literacy skills of younger students.

It has also spent money on supporting 15 Koori educators and six home-school liaison officials. It has allocated \$3.6 million over the next four years for improvements so that the Koori community can enjoy the education services provided by the Bracks government.

It has also spent money on improving school sports and has invested \$8 million to support Melbourne hosting

the 2005 Pacific School Games to see young people committed to sport. Australia has a good reputation in playing and organising sports, and we want to continue that.

The Bracks government has also placed a strong focus on and spent money in rural and regional Victoria. It will be spending \$105.3 million directly on rural and regional education. Regional schools have benefited from a \$334 million investment in the statewide innovative program. The program is targeted at 15 to 19-year-olds.

The budget also contains an allocation of \$70.6 million to fund extensive capital works programs in rural Victoria, including the specialist preschool program in Gippsland, and major improvements and upgrading of schools in Drouin, Pakenham, Baranduda, Chilwell, Derinya, Rosebud, Benalla and so on, and the stage 1 development of the Maryborough education precinct, a new Koori education centre, the replacement of relocatables with stable and permanent buildings at Bellarine Secondary College, and major building improvements at Edenhope P12 College.

We are rebuilding fire-affected schools at Mooropna and Corio. So this is one of the examples of the Bracks government's commitment to rural and regional Victoria. It is one of the examples of a program the government wants to highlight to show that the Victorian education sector and parents can be confident and encourage students to do better and gain a better future. That is what Victoria needs.

In education, in metropolitan Melbourne welfare workers are employed to help our students to stay at school longer. Why do we have to do that? Not to waste money or create more jobs for the welfare sector, but to solve a problem. In our education system 10 years ago a lot of young people who left school early became involved in unhealthy activities. They left school at 13, 14 and 15 years of age and got involved in drugs. Not long ago in Parliament we debated legislation about spray cans. Many young people who do not go to school end up on the street somewhere without the support of their parents and family and they end up doing something silly. These welfare workers in schools can keep an eye on the students and make sure they attend school regularly. If students drop out, the welfare workers will contact their teachers and parents and find out what is wrong with the students. They will find a way to help them solve their personal problems rather than punishing them.

The present program is one which the Bracks government has tried to implement in the past believing

that young people learn more and are less likely to get involved in crime. These are just some of the programs working with community groups, schools, parents, and government departments, finding a way to help younger people. We can see that there will be fewer problems than before because when children do not go to school the school will contact their parents right away and try to encourage them to stay at school. We hope there will be no young people under 16, especially aged 13, selling drugs on the streets, because we will be keeping them at school. Four or five years ago there were a lot of older people using kids, approaching them outside school and asking them to sell drugs for them. We have tried to stop that because we know it will be good for everyone if kids are kept in a safe place. The program's many welfare officers will be working closely with school councils, parents and teachers to ensure that.

I turn now to another issue. We are committed to appoint more police to look after the safety of the community. On the weekend we saw the media release from the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, André Haermeyer, which said that crime statistics for 2001–02 showed a record decrease of about 25 per cent in robbery, home invasion, drug cultivation and possession of illegal drugs, car theft and many other problems. So the investment of 800 extra police has worked and is helping the community.

To deal with the police figures in more detail, from 4 July 2001 to 25 April this year, manufacturing and trafficking of drugs had dropped by a massive 21.3 per cent. Drug possession fell by 9.5 per cent; burglary decreased by 7.1 per cent; home invasion was down by 6.6 per cent; car theft was down by 5.6 per cent, and rape by 1.1 per cent. So that shows how the community safety program has worked and is helping to make Victoria a safer place to live.

I want to go into some detail about budget initiatives as they affect Footscray, which is part of my electorate. The appropriation for the building of the Footscray police station and the provision of more police officers, costing about \$12 million, demonstrates the government's commitment to improving the safety of the people of Footscray. About \$875 000 is being spent on the Footscray North Primary School; the Western Hospital will receive \$380 000 for medical equipment; the North Maidstone preschool and play centre will receive \$185 000 for building and safety work; the Kingsville kindergarten will receive about \$65 000 for building and ground safety work; the Maribyrnong kindergarten will receive \$120 000 for building and ground safety work; the South Kingsville preschool will receive about \$20 000 for building and ground

safety work; the Maribyrnong city library will receive \$15 000 and the Brimbank city library will receive \$15 000. That is good for many families, especially the children, who will benefit from the work in the preschools and the libraries. It is a commitment to the younger generation of Victoria.

I turn now to the government's commitment to improving the transport infrastructure of Victoria. The four-year Linking the Suburbs project for new public transport and the upgrading of roads has been allocated \$704 million — a significant infrastructure initiative. The government is spending \$445 million for the construction of the Scoresby freeway. The railway line from Broadmeadows to Craigieburn will be electrified to cater for the extension of the metropolitan train service. The no. 75 tram route will be extended to Vermont South, and stage 1 of the Knox tram extension is costing about \$30 million, with \$12 million being allocated over the next four years for operating costs. So there is an extension of the tramway system in that area with those upgrading works.

The budget has allocated \$62 million to upgrade the arterial suburban roads, including the Narre Warren–Cranbourne Road in Narre Warren, costing \$22 million; the Cranbourne–Frankston Road in Langwarrin, costing \$11.7 million; Fitzgerald Road in Laverton, costing \$17.3 million; the Macedon Street bridge in Sunbury, costing \$4.1 million, and Edgars Road in Epping, costing \$10.3 million.

The government is committed to building residential crossings for the rail network and upgrading works costing approximately \$12.5 million. The road safety initiatives for motorists and motorcyclists have received \$21.2 million. Upgrading the bus service, including upgrading the bus route around Melbourne, is a commitment over four years. The list goes on. A \$10 million package will guarantee rail access to Lascelles wharf at Geelong; the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds will receive \$101 million and the Australian synchrotron will receive \$100 million towards a \$157 million project; the Melbourne Sports and Aquatic Centre will receive about \$50 million; about \$10 million is being allocated over four years to build on the innovative Transit Cities program, and \$4 million also over four years is allocated for the Dandenong Development Board.

To assist the environment, the government is building the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline, which is a \$300 million project. It is allocating \$77 million to that project.

Hon. R. A. Best — Do you know anything about it?

Hon. S. M. NGUYEN — Yes, I do know about it. I know that the federal government is contributing very little to it. The government is very disappointed that the federal government is not prepared to match the funding of the state government.

I know some honourable members representing country electorates are concerned about foxes, and the government is spending about \$3 million on that project. Rural and regional Victoria will benefit by the allocation of \$102.3 million for upgrades to the Calder Highway, the Warrnambool–Melbourne railway line, the Henty Highway, the Corio Quay Road and the Maroondah Highway. About \$70 million is being invested to upgrade 40 regional schools and one TAFE college, including \$4 million for the Maryborough education precinct. The government is spending \$77 million for the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline.

We will invest \$12 million to set up a centre for energy and greenhouse technologies — —

Hon. R. A. Best — You said \$77 million before.

Hon. S. M. NGUYEN — I said \$77 million and \$12 million for the centre for energy and greenhouse technologies in the Latrobe Valley.

We will spend \$26 million on agricultural programs including Farmbis, Landcare and fox control. We will spend \$5 million for 12 new rural police stations, and \$44 million to boost rural health and aged care services, including upgrades to eight country hospitals and four new ambulance stations. They are the things we want to invest in for rural and regional Victoria. There is more to come.

In innovation and information and communications technology, \$27 million over four years has been invested. This includes a biotechnology strategic development plan. Over two years \$9.2 million has been allocated to ensure Victoria is recognised as a centre of design excellence; \$100 million in capital and a further \$2.9 million a year has been invested to establish the Australian synchrotron as a national platform for groundbreaking research. So that is more money involving telecommunications for our future technology.

The government is also committed to supporting culture. We have allocated a further \$84 million to help Victorian sports with a focus on developing state-of-the-art facilities for the 2006 Commonwealth Games. An additional \$100 million will be invested in the arts and in infrastructure projects including a \$54 million investment over five years to the \$61 million Yarra precinct arts integration project to

build the Dame Elisabeth Murdoch recital hall and a home for the Melbourne Theatre Company in Southbank.

They are the things the government is committed to. I am sure we will not try to create a black hole or spend money which we do not have. This government is accountable and very responsible. We are helping to create jobs and business opportunities in Victoria.

Last month, a media release from the Minister for Employment stated that Victoria's unemployment has gone down to 5.7 per cent — the lowest in Australia. The community strongly believes the government can run the Victorian economy, and the unemployment rate has dropped. Five per cent is a good record. Any government that provides under 7 per cent unemployment is running a good economic program. Victoria has only 5.7 per cent unemployment. In April our employment rate increased by 1.2 per cent, which means that a further 28 300 people were employed. It is ahead of the national growth rate in jobs for the same period. So the people know what we can provide for the businesses of Victoria.

The government is also committed to resolving many social issues through the Department of Human Services. We have language services, and we have spent \$425 000 for language services of a total \$7.8 million in the health area. A lot of people need this service before they can have treatment.

In aged care the allocation has increased by \$530 000 for multicultural home and community care. This service is provided to 61 ethno-specific and multicultural agencies.

In housing and community funding the government has increased funding by \$600 000 in multicultural programs. In mental health the government has increased funding by \$300 000 for ethno-specific programs.

In community care we have increased funding by over \$200 000 in projected multicultural funding. In public health there has been an increase of \$124 000 for thalassaemia services.

Not long ago the government introduced the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act. The legislation passed through Parliament over a year ago.

Consumer and Business Affairs Victoria has through the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria committed nearly \$350 000 to provide information to landlords and property managers and recently arrived migrants and refugees about their rights and

responsibilities in the private rental market. There is information in multilingual services in the consumer affairs department so that people will better understand and know their rights before they sign their leases.

Also, we support the Women's Policy and Cultural Diversity Inventory project, thus helping the understanding of many women of legal and social issues in Victoria. There are also multicultural job seeker's programs — we spent \$300 000 to develop multilingual information so people can understand how to get employment and how to help themselves in a new country.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environment has a pilot program run by the Environment Protection Authority; it is called the Cultural Diversity program and is a program to train its work force in enhancing communication within the wider multicultural community.

There are many things in the budget which I cannot go into because of the time limit. I raised a question in Parliament two weeks ago when the federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, announced his budget and the big funding cut for foreign languages. I raised this in Parliament to ask the state minister to talk to the federal education minister about the concerns as a result of funding for some foreign languages being cut. The government has been talking about doing business in foreign countries. There are courses in university which are designed to help people who are interested in doing business in other countries to help them to learn the language and also to learn the culture and how to do business. The cut in funding will not help many business people to develop their skills or the skills of their staff in order to send them overseas to work with a foreign country to develop a business link between Australia and that other country.

The funding cost is about \$30 million over four years. That is a small grant, but the federal government does not see the benefit for the future. So many universities in Australia will suffer under the cuts to this program. Many courses rely on government funding, and they will not be able to afford to continue helping companies to train their staff. So this is a big miss for Australian training and education.

When I read about the federal budget in the newspapers I asked myself, 'What is the budget for Melbourne West?'. I found that it allocated only \$12 million in new measures for education, science and training for the whole of Australia, the same amount that this government has provided for a new police station in Footscray. The whole policy of the federal government

will cost only \$12 million, compared with this government's allocation of \$12 million for the Footscray police station.

The federal government has nothing for education because it gives education a low priority.

What has the Victorian government done for Melbourne West in the state budget? It is improving schools in Sunshine, Williamstown, Altona and Yarraville and will be making improvements to kindergartens in North Sunshine, Williamstown, Newport, Kingsville and Maribyrnong. It also provides \$390 000 for extra equipment in the Western Hospital, \$394 000 for equipment for the Sunshine hospital and \$200 000 for extra equipment in the Williamstown hospital.

That is more than the federal budget for Melbourne West. On the future role of the western suburbs, the Victorian budget has provided extra funding for public libraries run by the councils of Brimbank, Maribyrnong and Hobsons Bay. The Bracks government has provided more than the federal government for Melbourne West.

In conclusion, the Victorian budget is not big spending like the opposition says it is, it is spending money in a responsible way to fix the problems of Victoria and is providing funding for building Victoria's future. That is in stark contrast with what the federal government has done for Victoria, which is very little. I am sure an honourable member for Geelong Province will say more about it in her contribution. I support the budget papers.

Hon. R. A. BEST (North Western) — It is a pleasure to rise to make a contribution to the debate on the budget papers for 2002–03. So far as I am concerned, there are four main issues that are very clear: firstly, by any standards this is a high-taxing government. What I wish to demonstrate in my contribution is the areas of increases in tax and the percentage increase they represent since the government came to office in 1999.

Secondly, there has been a strategic shift in the allocation of budget funds towards the suburbs of Melbourne, in many cases at the expense of projects that have been identified throughout country Victoria.

Thirdly, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of public servants on the state government payroll who will need to be funded through recurrent funding; and finally, this unquestionably is a budget for the next election. My prediction is that we will have an

election in Victoria in November or early December this year.

Hon. A. P. Olexander — What date?

Hon. R. A. BEST — I think there are two weeks of window of opportunity, Mr Olexander, and I do not think you have to be too clever to work out what they are — it will be either the last week in November or the first week in December.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order!
Mr Olexander is out of his place.

Hon. R. A. BEST — On the first issue, which relates to the taxes imposed by the government, I point out that the government now collects about \$1500 per person per year more in tax than it did when it came to power in 1999, which means that this year it will collect an increase of \$2.7 billion in revenue from Victorian taxpayers.

Stamp duty is up by 84 per cent, and the government now collects around \$1.8 billion a year from that tax. When you compare Victoria's stamp duty with that of other states you can see how far above the national average it is. Currently the national average is about 3.24 per cent. In Queensland the rate is 2.43 per cent, and in New South Wales it is 3.09 per cent, but in Victoria the rate is 4.05 per cent. Most people would be aware of the activity that has been going on in the housing sector over the past four to five years. Unquestionably prices are continuing to rise, yet the government has had a windfall gain at the expense of many young couples who have been trying to enter the housing market to realise that great Australian dream of owning their own home.

Even in places like Bendigo, where the median house price of \$111 000 is well below that of the metropolitan area, most couples who are purchasing a home would be paying stamp duty in excess of \$2500. Clearly this is money that is going into the government's coffers and is a windfall for the state government.

By next year land tax will have increased by 66 per cent. The national average is around 1.96 per cent. In Queensland it is 1.64 per cent and in New South Wales, 1.68 per cent, but in Victoria — surprise, surprise! — the land tax rate is 2.32 per cent, which is above the national average on the eastern seaboard, where we compete most.

The government is unashamedly ripping off businesses and Victorian investors. It is obvious that not only is it cheaper to do business in New South Wales, it is cheaper anywhere other than Victoria. The government

is sending a clear message, a very arrogant message I believe, to the investment community, which is, 'If you want to do business in Victoria you will have to pay and pay dearly in stamp duty and land tax'.

It does not stop there. While the government has announced reductions in payroll tax, in reality the tax take will be up 27 per cent.

To understand the facts I only have to refer to my local newspaper. The problems created by the government because of its lack of sensitivity to business are clearly understood by the editor and the journalists who work for that newspaper. In an editorial on 24 April under the heading 'Tax and the big picture' the editor says:

From 1 July this year Victorian businesses will have their payroll tax dropped from 5.45 per cent to 5.35 per cent.

A year later it will drop to 5.25 per cent.

Does it surprise you that our state's main business groups have not been loud in the public arena praising the reduction?

It goes on to say:

Take that payroll tax drop: in conjunction with other sweeteners for business, it is meant to convey that this government is aware of the pressures of doing business and is trying to encourage business and therefore job creation.

It continues:

Just to give you an example: on the same day that the new business 'incentives', including the payroll tax change, were announced, it was also announced that the state government was pillaging the property market.

That refers to media coverage of the windfall gains in stamp duty tax. The editorial continues:

The stamp duty on property sales rose 54.1 per cent.

It concludes:

In the two years, it raked in \$1.8 billion. About \$750 million more than the government expected.

And yet we're supposed to be delighted about a 0.1 per cent drop in payroll tax, surely the most anti-employment tax ever devised by greedy governments.

We'll hold off the cheering for now.

It identifies and highlights the failure of the government to return some of the windfall gains to businesses and ordinary Victorians. It exposes the government as a callous and non-caring government that is unwilling to share the spoils of the good times. As I will show shortly, the government is clearly trapped into bloating the public service, and while it is fine to say that there are more teachers, more police and more nurses going into our system, it comes at a cost. The Victorian

business community is unashamedly concerned that the government is removing the incentive to do business in Victoria.

Not only are householders and the business community being taxed more, look at what is happening to motorists. Motoring taxes are going up 17.4 per cent, while police fines have increased by a massive 240 per cent since 1999. A motorcyclist will now cop a \$50 fee to supposedly assist with road safety measures. I do not agree with the government's obsession with fining motorists to try to curb our road toll. I was a member of the Road Safety Committee in this place for seven years, and I am particularly concerned that the implementation of the reduction in tolerance for speedometers in cars and people with high blood-alcohol levels are not going to work on their own to reduce the road toll.

When I travel down the Calder Highway I am concerned that the people who pass me are mainly P-platers. We need early intervention and education programs which change the attitude of young drivers in the way they behave once they get behind the wheel of a motor car. I am concerned that we do not start sending out road safety messages until people are equipped with licences. It is an underlying mistake in strategy and strategic direction that the government is making by simply relying on inflicting more fines on motorists, heavier penalties on speeding motorists and reduction in the tolerance in speedometer limits. It has the potential to create more accidents than it actually resolves because people are going to become so conscious of the speed at which they are driving that they will look at their speedometers more than they look at the road.

The government is also dipping its fingers into the insurance industry. While it has been loath to give any assistance with public liability insurance to the many organisations and community groups affected by it, it does not stop it from inflicting further tax increases on insurances. Taxes on insurances are predicted to grow from \$696 million to \$790 million, a 12 per cent increase in revenue. That reinforces what a high-taxing government this is. In 1999–2000 the budget figure was just \$380 million. So within two and a half years, the budget figure has gone up from \$380 million to a predicted income next year of \$790 million. Again, ordinary Victorians are paying, businesses are suffering and a whole range of people are affected not only by increased premiums but increases in the cost of doing business.

We only have to look at the love affair that the government has with gambling to see what I believe is

an unhealthy reliance on gambling revenue. This year gambling taxes are expected to increase by 31 per cent. At the last election the government made a commitment to return gambling losses back to the community through funding infrastructure projects. I was particularly interested to read some research done by the Bendigo campus of La Trobe University which stated that the Bendigo community is losing \$32 million per year to gambling. But what has the government returned to Bendigo? Not very much. The research done by La Trobe University, which the government loves to rely on, exposes it for the lack of money that it is providing back into the Bendigo community to assist with many infrastructure projects.

With all the increases in taxes, one would think that the government would look after the average Victorian family — no way, unfortunately. The Premier and the Treasurer are both clearly on the record as saying that there will be no stamp duty relief. There are to be more fines for motorists and a fee applied to motorcyclists, and ordinary Victorians will miss out.

The previous government exempted the first home from land tax. This government is doing very little to assist ordinary home owners and ordinary taxpayers who are contributing substantially to the tax revenue and the tax take of this government. If you think that ordinary Victorians have missed out, the logical question to ask is, 'There must be an emphasis somewhere. How did business go?'. The fact is that for every \$30 in extra tax revenue that the government will receive, there is only going to be \$1 going back to business next year. The government is increasing its tax take on business while at the same time trying to suggest that the introduction of payroll tax relief is going to assist business. The truth is it is just not going to happen.

It is no wonder that the Victorian economy is losing momentum in comparison to the rest of Australia. Unfortunately — and I do not want in any way to talk down the Victorian economy — there are disturbing signs, particularly within our manufacturing area, that manufacturers are losing patience with this government and are leaving the state. To see that you only have to look in the metropolitan area at companies such as Arnott's, Hugo Boss, Orica and Holeproof that have closed their Victorian operations down. But it does not only occur in the metropolitan area. Unfortunately it is also occurring in Bendigo and other areas across the state.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — Wangaratta.

Hon. R. A. BEST — Wangaratta — Mr Baxter assists me with his interjection on an example from his own electorate.

When challenged, local members often have said in the past, ‘But we have the Pauls dairy upgrade, \$70 million. We have encouraged Pauls to increase their operation at the Bendigo factory, and it is going to create 70 jobs’. They held this great example as one of the ways in which their government was attracting investment to Victorians. It is extremely disappointing to have to report that on 30 March Pauls confirmed that its proposed expansion, which was to create 70 jobs, would not go ahead. That is an enormous blow, not only to Bendigo, but to the Bendigo economy.

That is bad enough. But we have also lost the Stafford Ellinson clothing manufacturing plant at Eaglehawk, with the loss of 50 or 60 jobs. So unfortunately while this government makes much play of what it is doing to attract business to Victoria, on a statewide basis, unfortunately — and again I say ‘unfortunately’ because I do not want to talk the Victorian economy down — business leaders and business investments are withdrawing from Victoria.

The second issue I wish to address relates to the strategic shift in the Labor government’s funding priorities. In the Treasurer’s speech he unashamedly outlines the government’s intentions and shift of focus. In budget paper 1, which is the Treasurer’s speech, on page 4 it says under the heading ‘Stronger suburbs’:

... a major focus of this budget is the expanding suburbs and growth corridors of Melbourne.

These are the places where Victorian families are increasingly choosing to live — and where much of Victoria’s future population growth will be concentrated.

In this budget, the government has committed \$704 million to a major Linking the Suburbs transport strategy.

That is fantastic, and I congratulate my many colleagues in the metropolitan area who are going to be the beneficiaries of this windfall because what we are going to see is a range of projects that will assist the suburbs.

At the same time, what is happening in my patch in regional Victoria? I specifically refer to Bendigo, because I put out a wish list before the last budget identifying a number of projects that I thought the government should fund and that would assist in the infrastructure for Bendigo and district. This wish list included upgrading of the funding of the Queen Elizabeth Oval. I am delighted to say that as part of this wish list only last week the minister came to Bendigo

and finally announced the upgrade of the Queen Elizabeth Oval and the Bendigo Aquatic Centre. I welcome that because it is money being spent in country Victoria and it is a project that has attracted much of my attention, particularly the upgrade of the QEO over the last three years, because I have consistently asked the minister about it — and I have letters here dating back to 10 November 1999 that I can refer to relating to the upgrade of the QEO, but consistent with the way this government works, it has only taken it two and a half years to finally get to the stage of announcing funding for the project.

I do not mind consultation and I do not mind discussing issues that are important within the community. However, this upgrade of the QEO was identified by all sportspeople in Bendigo as being the major disappointment as far as quality of sporting facilities in the whole of the Bendigo area is concerned. We had people from basketball clubs and from other football clubs supporting the upgrade of the QEO because it was clearly embarrassing: the changing rooms were inadequate, and it limited Bendigo’s ability to host major events.

The Bendigo Livestock Exchange has also been one of the most outstanding facilities that was built under the previous government. It has enabled Bendigo to take its place as a livestock trading centre at the elite end. I do not have the exact figures, but I believe we have the largest throughput of sheep of any selling centre across the state. By any standard the investment that the previous government has made in the livestock exchange has been a commitment that has returned substantial benefits, not only to farmers and graziers, but also to buyers and to the City of Greater Bendigo.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — Including the road upgrade.

Hon. R. A. BEST — I must mention again my appreciation and thanks that in Mr Baxter’s time as Minister for Roads he was able to ensure that the road linkages from the highway at Epsom to the livestock exchange were improved to such an extent that they have contributed significantly to the success of the Bendigo Livestock Exchange, so again I thank him on behalf of my colleague the Honourable Barry Bishop for the work that the former minister did in Bendigo.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — And the road safety initiative at the intersection, too.

Hon. R. A. BEST — Absolutely.

What we need now is to look at the future provision of the selling facilities available at the Bendigo Livestock Exchange. It is unfortunate that on two occasions there

have been applications to fund shelters to ensure the cattle at the yards would be under cover. I call on the government to again consider the application and look at the infrastructure that is provided at that selling centre, the livestock exchange, and ensure that it continues to provide the best quality facilities that will encourage farmers and graziers to sell their cattle through that exchange.

Another issue that I would like to refer to relates to the Prince of Wales Showground, where I have continually called for the upgrade of the pavilions to host the wool and sheep breeders show. Clearly, this is a signature event for Bendigo now. Back in July 2000 when it was first moved to Bendigo from the Royal Melbourne showgrounds there were over 1000 exhibitors, and something like 10 000 people attended the event. We are at a stage in the development of this facility where we need to move from being a tent city, because currently when the show is held, which is in July — in the wet months of year, the winter period — every tent in northern Victoria gets hired out because there are no permanent facilities to house the many exhibitors that attend the show.

The exhibitors have made an application to the government, but the government has been silent on their application. They desperately need \$3.5 million from the infrastructure fund to provide a much-needed upgrade so the wool and sheep breeders show can be staged at Bendigo on a permanent basis. It would be an absolute shame if for some reason the organising committee of the event were to look at other locations around Victoria. The pavilion would provide not only a permanent home on the site of the Prince of Wales Showgrounds for the wool and sheep breeders' show but would also provide Bendigo with an opportunity to host other events. That would address any speculation about whether this is a good investment that would be utilised to its fullest extent. Clearly there is an opportunity here, and it would be very disappointing if the government let it slip through its hands.

One of the other issues that is of special significance to me is the upgrade of the Long Gully housing redevelopment. In 1999 the then Minister for Housing, Ann Henderson, announced that the coalition government would provide \$6 million to ensure an upgrade of the public housing stock within that estate. It is absolutely disappointing to me that on two occasions now the Labor government has reannounced the funding for this project without any substantial work being undertaken. The audacity of the minister in reannouncing the \$6 million project in March 2000 was bad enough, but a fortnight ago in another place the honourable member for Bendigo East reannounced the

funding! That is symptomatic of what this government is about: it puts more spin on issues than the best Shane Warne leg break. It is a government based on public relations and one interested in announcing projects with substantial time frames before implementation.

Another good example is the announcement of the air ambulance helicopter for Bendigo. That was a fantastic initiative, but it was something like 18 months before we actually saw the helicopter on the ground. Announcements build expectations and people are led to believe that things are really happening. That is one of the reasons this state is losing momentum; this government is all spin and no substance.

I have been a huge supporter, as I think are my colleagues in the National Party, of the Country Fire Authority. Unquestionably there is a need at the Golden Square fire station in High Street, Golden Square, for an upgrade to be undertaken. The station was constructed in 1909 and is now woefully inadequate for the demands of a modern firefighting force. It was built to house a horse and horse-drawn fire cart but now has several modern fire vehicles crammed inside. That is clearly unacceptable and requires some immediate attention by the Country Fire Authority through funding out of its capital works program, which is provided to it by the state government.

A range of other issues relate to Bendigo, but I am conscious of ensuring that other people have an opportunity to speak to the budget papers, so I will move on.

The third issue I would like to address relates to the dramatic rise in the public service and the cost in recurrent funding of employing these extra people. We need to establish whether that will lead to better services, better care, and better outcomes. I am concerned that again the government has fallen for the three-card trick, and I am not convinced that much difference can be seen in what the government claims it has done for our hospitals, our schools and our housing. I will give some examples based on Bendigo figures, because that is where I live and obviously where my interest lies.

When I came to this place in 1988 as a successor to the then Leader of the National Party, Bernie Dunn, he reminded me in no uncertain terms of what his first issue would be if we were to ever win government. In 1988 the Liberal and National parties failed to win government and a Labor government was re-elected with a majority of one seat. Mr Dunn told me the first thing he would do would be to get a stack of buses lined up outside the government offices and ship the

bureaucrats out of the metropolitan area because we had a bloated public service that we could not afford.

I am fearful of that happening again, Mr Deputy President, and I will give some examples of what is happening in our electorate at the Bendigo end. One only has to look at the Bendigo Health Care Group and the impact on waiting lists to know what I mean. As we have heard through announcements by government members, there has been an increase in nursing and in budget allocations to the health care group, although I question that at this time because I have not seen the final figures. But the waiting lists, particularly the semi-urgent ones, show that people are waiting longer than the ideal time.

Recently when the government announced it would provide \$6 million to address the non-urgent waiting lists, guess who missed out? The Bendigo Health Care Group. No money was allocated to it to address the increases which had been identified and which had seen the waiting lists increase so dramatically. I should remind the house that the previous government spent \$40 million on the Bendigo Health Care Group and provided a physical structure that was the envy of many other regional centres. But unfortunately this government has not provided sufficient funding to address the blow-out that is occurring in waiting lists.

I wish to quote statistics from the government's *Hospital Services Report* of this government. Although I get the figures on a quarterly basis, I normally apply them annually to ensure a level of appropriate methodology in comparing like with like.

In March 1999 the semi-urgent waiting list was at 139. In March 2000, under Bracks, it had gone to 273, and by March 2001 it was up to 328. I hasten to add that while the figures are here, they continue to increase even further. So the waiting list for semi-urgent patients has increased by about threefold. In March 1999 there were seven people on the waiting list for longer than the ideal time for semi-urgent operations. By March 2000, under the Bracks government, that had increased to 84, and by March 2001, that had crept out to 155.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — It is hardly creeping; that is a big jump!

Hon. R. A. BEST — Mr Baxter, I am concerned that the figure will be even larger, because by September of 2001 it had reached 240. So in March 1999, 7 people were waiting for longer than the ideal time for semi-urgent operations, in March 2000 there were 68, by March 2001 there were 155, and in September 2001 that figure had blown out to 240!

For all the words of this government and this minister, their figures speak for themselves. They are not my figures which I am using to manipulate the system in any way — it is in their figures that they produce on a quarterly basis. I have extrapolated from their documents to show how the extra nurses in the government system are not reducing waiting times or waiting lists — or helping the numbers of patients waiting for non-urgent surgery to get off the waiting lists. But that is only one sector, to answer Mr Baxter.

The other sector I will refer to is one where there is much affinity between the government and the teachers' union — class sizes from prep to year 2. I have figures that show that in the Bendigo region, where there are 33 schools, there are five small schools: Axedale, which has 44 students; Eppalock, which has 49; Goornong, which has 61; Lockwood South with 64; and Marong with 77. They show that there are a number of smaller schools that assist in bringing down the average class size. It can be misleading unless you take the opportunity of extrapolating the figures and applying a methodology to get the right information from them. As we know, the government's benchmark from prep to year 2 is 21 students per class. Yet 20 out of the 33 schools in the Bendigo region are over the government's benchmark of 21. That includes all those little schools.

Hon. W. R. Baxter interjected.

Hon. R. A. BEST — Mr Baxter, I should have you holding up my prompt cards, because it gets even better.

Right in the Bendigo area, where there are 21 schools — obviously they would be of a reasonable size because they serve the suburbs of Bendigo and there are no small townships associated with provisional school education — surprise, surprise, only four of the schools are under the government's benchmark of 21 for prep to year 2. Of the 21 schools in Bendigo, 17 are above the government's benchmark of 21 students in prep to year 2. What has happened to all the extra teachers and funding that have been put into the system? By the government's own standards it is failing to address the prep-to-year-2 benchmark it has set for itself. Again, these are not my figures; they are the government's figures. It is failing its own tests. On two issues, health and education, the government is failing to meet its own benchmarks.

The other benchmark we should look at is housing waiting lists. If we look at the waiting lists for the Loddon–Mallee area we see that they have increased by over 10 per cent in under two years, while in Bendigo

alone there has been an increase of over 20 per cent. From 1127 people on the waiting lists in 1999 it has now blown out to 1487 — something like 360 families are waiting longer for accommodation in the Bendigo region.

As I said, these are not my figures; these are government figures. The government puts more spin on its issues than the best Shane Warne leg break. I guarantee that the majority of people in Bendigo would believe that the government has addressed all the problems it has identified in the lead-up to the last election in housing, health and education. But by its own figures it is exposed as in fact presiding over a period when there have been increases in every sector. It stands condemned for its actions.

Finally, the fourth issue I will address is that this is an election year budget. It has all the hallmarks associated with Labor Party big spending — the pitch for the vote in the suburbs and the projects for the south-east — and it is clear that the love affair the government had with regional Victoria has turned out to be nothing but a one-night stand. Unquestionably the Labor government has dumped many of the projects that the National Party identified as being required to assist with the provision of infrastructure and capital works — in favour of redirecting the money to the outer eastern suburbs in an attempt to weaken the Liberal Party's hold on the seats in that area.

There is no more graphic illustration of that than in the government's own budget paper 3. Page 164 looks at major outputs and deliverables as performance measures. Under the table headed 'Investment facilitation and attraction' are shown investments attracted to rural Victoria in millions of dollars. The actual amount for 2000–01 was \$645.6 million. The target for 2000–01 was \$300 million. The expected outcome for 2001–02 is \$400 million. The target for 2002–03 is a drop to \$300 million.

The government is signalling through the budget papers that it is giving up on regional Victoria; it is giving up attracting investment to rural and regional Victoria. Clearly, the government has ended its love affair with rural and regional Victoria and is shifting its attention to the suburbs of Melbourne. That may be fine for my metropolitan colleagues, but the people of rural and regional Victoria will not be fooled.

As I said earlier, this is a big-spending government. In the last two and a half years Victorian taxpayers have paid an extra \$1500 in taxes. Stamp duty has increased, gambling revenue is up and insurance taxes are up. Motorcycle taxes have increased by \$50 and, of course,

there is significant revenue from increased road fines. At a time when state debt has reduced from \$32 billion in 1992 to \$6 billion in 1999, and reduced even further now, there is no benefit from the windfall to Victorian taxpayers and businesses.

As I have highlighted in my contribution, Bendigo has numerous projects, such as the Long Gully Housing Estate, the Prince of Wales Showgrounds, the livestock exchange and other projects that require funding, but while we are searching for assistance with those projects class sizes have increased, hospital waiting lists are going up and we have not yet seen the fast-slow train! It was much vaunted as a partnership between the government and the private sector. I have said continually that I welcome anyone coming to country Victoria, but this project, announced two and a half years ago, still has not got off the ground. There is still no private sector interest and it does not address the major concern — that is, the frequency of service and not the speed of the trains. We need more services with greater interaction between towns along the Bendigo corridor rather than having a fast train running express from Bendigo to the metropolitan area. It will not solve our transport problems let alone address the issue of interconnection from outlying areas.

We have a major problem in Bendigo with the holding of prisoners in police cells. The Bendigo police cells were never meant to hold prisoners, yet for the past two and a half years we have seen a consistent overcrowding of prisoners in those cells. The government has already announced that it is removing the Bendigo jail and that another jail will not be built in Bendigo. We face the potential removal of jobs in the prison system and a reduction of a very important infrastructure program for the building sector.

Of course, there are still problems associated with the Calder Highway. Recently I raised my concerns in this place about the problems associated with the Harcourt bypass and the FR 4 option that has been identified by the planning panel which met to consider that issue. We have ended up with the worst of all worlds because many of the community groups, including Vicroads, were not aware of the criteria to be applied by the panel to choose the options. The community wanted to create a village-type atmosphere in the township of Harcourt, which meant the FR 4 option was chosen by default. That brings with it a raft of problems that will cause enormous difficulties. I am not happy that it will potentially take 18 months to 2 years before we can resolve the Harcourt bypass section. It is extremely disappointing that while the government is trying to play politics on funding for the Calder Highway it cannot get its house in order and resolve the issues

surrounding the Harcourt bypass, let alone not sending letters of request to the federal government for matching funding for sections of the Calder Highway.

This is a disappointing budget for rural and regional Victorians because although announcements have been made, announcements such as the development of the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline have such a spin on them that even Shane Warne would be proud of them! I am particularly concerned that this is a do-nothing government. While it makes many announcements, it makes the same ones over and again. The funding for the Long Gully housing estate is a classic example. In 1999 the previous government indicated that \$6 million would be provided for that estate, yet that money is still not forthcoming. The minister made a similar announcement in 2000, and the honourable member for Bendigo East in the other place announced just a few weeks ago that money would be provided. However, the housing estate is still in the same state it was in two and a half to three years ago.

This government has failed on four principal issues: firstly, by any standards it is a high-taxing government; secondly, there has been a major shift in funding allocations from regional and rural Victoria to the suburbs of Melbourne; thirdly, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of public servants on the state government payroll which has not led to better outcomes in my area in education, housing or hospital waiting lists, and fourthly, by being a budget for the next election, it clearly signifies that it will do anything, spend anything or say anything to get re-elected.

Hon. E. C. CARBINES (Geelong) — I am pleased to speak in support of the Bracks government's third budget and, indeed, to celebrate the Bracks government's third budget. I congratulate the Treasurer, the Honourable John Brumby, for his work in delivering the budget and building on the solid foundations the government has established in the state over the past two years. It demonstrates a clear vision for the future of the state. This budget is about investing in our future, providing excellence in education, building an innovative economy and furthering our commitment to growing the whole of the state. It gives all Victorians the opportunity to share in the prosperity of the state by delivering initiatives in services and programs which make a real and positive difference to the lives of people, no matter where they live. Of course, it is great to see the Treasurer deliver a budget that has an operating surplus of \$522 million, which contrasts with the recent federal government budget.

Nothing is more fundamental to investing in the future of Victorians than investing in education. This budget

commits more than \$550 million to education in various initiatives. These initiatives will consolidate the Bracks government's commitment to life-long learning through access to education from preschools to post-compulsory education. Victorians have made it clear to the government that they care deeply about the public health system, and the budget continues the government's commitment to rebuild Victoria's public health system with a \$960 million increase in the budget over four years. This very welcome initiative will allow more patients to be treated and 700 more nurses to be employed and will reduce hospital waiting lists even further. It provides \$69 million for older Victorians; \$65 million for child protection and \$55.4 million to improve disability services.

The community safety initiatives have seen an additional 800 police in Victoria since the election of the Bracks government, and they are boosted further by a \$360 million investment in a high-tech upgrade of the communications system. This will provide for a major overhaul of the police and emergency services radio communication network.

I am pleased to see that the budget also announces over \$200 million in environmental initiatives, again, investing in the future for all Victorians for generations to come.

As a member in this place who represents a regional seat, I am pleased to again see in the budget the demonstrated commitment of the Bracks government to people who live in regional and rural Victoria. This provides a stark contrast to the Kennett government which was only interested in the top end of town, and that town was Melbourne. This, our third budget, continues our deep commitment to rural and regional Victorians.

Initiatives that invest in the state's future by growing rural and regional Victoria include \$102.3 million to improve regional transport links, including the biggest boost to country bus services in more than 30 years. My electorate has shared in that boost and we are very thankful for it.

Some \$70 million has been allocated to upgrade 40 regional and rural schools; \$4 million has been invested to establish the Maryborough education precinct; \$101 million has been allocated to upgrade the Royal Melbourne Showgrounds; and \$44 million has been allocated for major initiatives in rural health and aged care. These are just some of the announcements for rural and regional Victoria included in the third Bracks Labor government budget.

The government continues to look after the sporting and cultural interests of all Victorians by investing an additional \$84 million into sport, and that includes money allocated for the Commonwealth Games to be held in 2006, which we all greatly look forward to.

An additional \$100 million is being invested into arts and infrastructure projects, including a major boost for our indigenous communities which is very welcome indeed.

Looking after the future investment of our state, this budget injects \$298 million into innovation, and information and communications technology initiatives, including \$100 million to establish a synchrotron as a centre for national research. Today I spoke about the synchrotron to a constituent who told me how fantastic it was for our state to establish this research centre in Victoria and he congratulated the government on that achievement.

Given my background as a state secondary school teacher for close to 20 years, my major area of interest is education. I am very proud of the fact that the Bracks government's first priority is education in recognition of the fact that education is the key to the rest of one's life.

History will show that the meanest, most miserable indictment of the Kennett government was its absolute disregard for public education and for the interests of the children who attend public schools in our state. History will surely condemn the Kennett government's closure of 300 schools and the removal of 9000 teachers from the system. These acts devastated schools and their communities and displaced students and longstanding members of the teaching profession. The Kennett government raised class sizes to disgraceful levels where students were forced into huge classes with scant regard for an individual's capacity to learn. Schools became businesses required to fundraise for basic items. Having taught in the state school system during the Kennett years, I can fully attest to the impact of its policies.

Over the past two years the Bracks government has worked very hard to turn around public education in Victoria. We have already invested more than \$2.2 billion in education, employing more than 3000 additional teachers and staff. We are working to bring class sizes down and are well on the way to reducing to 21 prep to grade 2 class sizes.

I can remember my own son in 1999 in grade 3 in a class of 35 students in a Geelong primary school. As we know that was the final year of the Kennett

government. My son being in a class of 35 students caused me and my husband great concern because as teachers we knew that the size of his class was impeding his learning. Indeed the chance of any child getting any individual attention in a class of 35 students is greatly limited. The following year, 2000, my son was in grade 4 and a class of 25 students. What a difference a year made: 35 in 1999; 25 in 2000. The real story in that little story is what a difference a new government made: a government that cared about public education so much that it is its no. 1 priority. Let's contrast that with the federal government's approach to public education as demonstrated by its budget released just over a week ago which saw its greatest increase in education spending going to private schools at the expense of state schools.

This, the third Bracks government budget, builds on two years of investment in education: two years in investing in the future of our state. The education budget invests more than \$550 million in education initiatives over the next four years to build a world-class education system from preschool to post-compulsory education. This brings the total Bracks government investment in education to \$2.75 billion.

Over the next four years an additional 925 teachers will be employed in classrooms across the state, and the most needy schools will receive additional assistance. We have already employed about 3000 additional teachers and staff in our schools, so this brings to about 4000 the number of additional teachers in the system compared to the Kennett government. That is having a huge impact on the ability of schools to deliver curriculum and to reduce class sizes.

The education budget also allocated \$216 million to construct new schools and modernise existing schools and TAFE facilities. I understand that that now brings the ratio to one in three schools currently being upgraded in the state. I can attest that in my electorate of Geelong Province lots of schools are being upgraded as announced in previous budgets, and 11 schools were announced in this budget, so Geelong schools are certainly faring well in having their much-needed facilities upgraded.

As part of the education budget \$43.3 million will be spent over four years to further reduce class sizes in years prep to grade 2 to improve early years literacy and numeracy, with an additional 285 teachers. Those years are so important to building the foundation for future learning. Over three years \$34.6 million will be spent on an additional 150 early years numeracy teachers to lift the mathematics skills of children in the

first five years of schooling. This is an area of much need and I know schools have welcomed this initiative.

An exciting new program will see an injection of \$81.6 million spent over four years on an Access to Excellence program, which includes more than 300 additional secondary school teachers allocated to schools which are showing higher-than-average absentee rates and lower-than-average rates of year 12 or equivalent completion. I know this will be targeted at the most needy of our schools — schools that need extra help to deliver their curriculum to get their students through. I have already discussed this with a couple of principals in Geelong who welcome the initiative.

Over four years \$84.3 million will be spent for new middle years innovation grants for primary and secondary schools to employ 70 teachers and develop local solutions to keep students engaged in education in those important years between years 5 and 9. Evidence shows that it is in those years that students start to become disengaged from education. The problem starts for some in year 5 and unfortunately by the time they get to secondary school they are already sufficiently alienated from learning and the school system that their early years of secondary school are jeopardised. The focus on the middle years 5 to 9 is very welcome and backs up the research and evidence that shows that is when students are at risk of becoming disengaged from their education.

Over four years \$47.7 million will be spent to employ 120 extra teachers to assist in the statewide implementation of the new Victorian certificate of applied learning, or VCAL. I am pleased that one of the great state schools in Geelong is trialling the new VCAL program — that is, Corio Bay Senior College. Earlier this year I was at the launch of the new VCAL program at Corio Bay and met the dozen or so students who are undertaking that trial through the school and engaging with the automotive industry as well. It has been an interesting year for those students and the staff involved. I discussed it with the principal on Friday night when I attended the Corio Bay deb ball. He told me it has been an exciting year for those students and the staff, and they welcome the rollout of the VCAL certificate across the state.

Of course I was very pleased with the announcement in the budget of \$28.3 million for Victoria's preschools. This is welcome news indeed and goes a long way to redressing the cruel 20 per cent funding cut imposed on Victoria's preschools by the Kennett government, which saw fees quadruple and voluntary parent committees struggle to come to terms with the

unprecedented need to fundraise to supplement teachers' incomes. The most devastating consequence of that 20 per cent funding cut by the Kennett government to Victoria's preschools was the Victorian children who were unable to access preschool because their parents could not afford to pay the increased Kennett government-imposed fees. I know from my own work as secretary of St Luke's Highton Kindergarten that children were unable to attend because their parents could no longer afford the increased fee, which went from \$40 a term to \$120 a term.

The Bracks government recognises the vital role that preschools play in a child's education, and is pleased in this budget to act on the recommendations of the Kirby review by injecting a much-needed \$28.3 million into Victoria's preschools.

Of course all school communities across the state will benefit enormously from the budget initiatives. As a member for Geelong Province I am delighted that, as I said, 11 schools in my electorate are to receive substantial funding for upgrades. In fact, two new schools will be built. This budget allocates \$3 million to the new Lara secondary college which builds on an investment in last year's budget to commence the construction of the secondary college. For many years the township of Lara has sought access to secondary education within its township. Those cries from the Lara people went unheard by the previous government. Daily, children are bussed out of Lara to go to secondary school in Geelong. The Bracks government made an election commitment that if elected it would build a secondary college in Lara. It is great to know that that school will open its doors next year for the very first time.

As a parent of a grade 6 student I was pleased to note when I received my information pack about secondary colleges that I could send my son to next year that one of the schools listed was Lara secondary college, with a date for its information evening. It is good to know that it was having its information evening as was every secondary college in Geelong. I understand there was a good turn-up on the night and everyone is looking forward to Lara secondary college commencing operation next year.

Corio Bay Senior College received \$2.3 million in the budget. This is much-needed money. Honourable members will have heard me speak before about Corio Bay Senior College, a school at which I used to teach. Unfortunately over a couple of years two devastating fires burnt down wings of the school and also the hall and gymnasium. The government acted very swiftly

last year to make sure that fire reinstatement funds were available so that work on the much-needed upgrade of the school would take place. This budget announcement of \$2.3 million for Corio Bay Senior College is welcome. The principal has told me how delighted he is that it ends years of uncertainty about the future of the school and that the whole community is looking forward to the fabulous facility being built.

The education budget announced \$670 000 for Ceres Primary School to upgrade its facilities; Barwon Heads Primary School received \$1.15 million to upgrade its buildings; and Chilwell Primary School has been allocated \$1.3 million. A friend of mine is on the school council at Chilwell and she said they were absolutely delighted with the announcement in the budget and that they can now move forward to progressing their upgrade.

Geelong East Primary School — another needy Geelong school — will receive \$1.7 million; South Geelong Primary School will receive \$1.5 million, and the budget announced \$1.2 million for Tate Street Primary School — another very needy school — to upgrade its facilities.

A very pleasing announcement in this budget fulfils an election commitment of the Bracks government to replace the Ocean Grove campus of Bellarine Secondary College, which consists merely of portable buildings, with a permanent facility. This is something members of the Ocean Grove community have sought for a very long time, and indeed they were concerned under the Kennett government that, because it would not commit to building a permanent facility at the Ocean Grove campus, it was intending to close it in the future. That caused much uncertainty and concern in Ocean Grove and, recognising that concern, we committed to building a new facility, replacing the portables with a permanent facility if we were elected. I am very pleased that this budget provides the money for the construction of a permanent facility at that school.

Leopold Primary School has undergone very challenging times over the last couple of years since the facilities at the school were declared unsafe and had to be demolished. The children from the school had to be relocated into portable buildings while the demolition took place and a new building is being constructed. This budget announced \$2.4 million for Leopold Primary School, which builds upon an announcement in last year's budget for an upgrade. Now we have to build a whole new school, and the money is there in this budget to provide for it.

I was pleased to visit Wallington Primary School last year with the Premier. It is a tiny, very historic school on the Bellarine Peninsula, and the people there are very excited to receive \$1.35 million in this budget to build a new facility. So investing in education in Geelong is surely a very positive investment for Geelong's future, and therefore the state's future.

Kindergartens across Geelong are to receive much-needed funds to upgrade their facilities. The Geelong Kindergarten Association has received money for fencing at 12 kindergartens on the Bellarine Peninsula. Grovedale Kindergarten has been allocated \$10 000; Grovedale East Kindergarten, \$17 000; Rosewall Kindergarten, \$11 500; Corio Kindergarten, \$5700; Grovedale West kindergarten, \$4300; Queenscliff Borough kindergarten, \$8000; and my children's old kindergarten, St Luke's preschool in Highton, \$12 000. This will, for the first time in many years, provide money to upgrade the buildings, provide fencing and provide a safer environment for the children who attend preschool.

These are just some of the examples of funding for upgrades at preschools in Geelong. Of course, all Geelong kindergartens will benefit from the \$28.3 million of funding committed in the budget — \$23.3 million of which is ongoing funding.

The City of Greater Geelong will receive \$1.1 million to support vulnerable families, and this is welcome indeed. The Geelong Regional Library Corporation will receive \$64 000 — again, investing in education through lifelong learning, making sure all members of the community have access to library services.

Agencies which provide vital services to Geelong people will also receive much-needed funding, including Lifeline Geelong, which will receive \$5000, and Scope Victoria specialist services, which will receive \$7600. The Noah's Ark Family Resource Centre and Toy Library will receive \$7600, and Gateways Support Services a similar amount of \$7600.

One of the great initiatives in Geelong, as across the state, has been the boost to funding for public transport. The electorate of Geelong Province will receive a major boost for public transport in the budget which will see increased bus services over four years in Bellarine, South Barwon, North Geelong and Geelong. This is much needed and much welcomed by my constituents, and was funding overlooked by the previous government.

The Marine and Freshwater Resources Institute located at Queenscliff will receive an additional \$3 million in

the budget. MAFRI is internationally renowned for its work to protect our marine environment. Honourable members will have heard me speak about the plan to relocate MAFRI from its current location on the harbour to The Narrows at Queenscliff. We are looking forward to that work commencing soon.

I was pleased a few weeks ago to attend Kardinia Park, now called Skilled Stadium, the home of the Cats, with the Minister for Sport and Recreation and the honourable members for Geelong North and Geelong in the other place to hear the announcement of a \$150 000 feasibility study to upgrade Kardinia Park, not only the football stadium but also the whole precinct. This is important to the Geelong community because it is an icon precinct in the heart of Geelong and a great deal of community sport takes place in there, such as netball, cricket and, obviously, football.

The Geelong Football Club is important to Geelong, and we are keen to ensure that it has every opportunity to continue to exist in Geelong and that as many home games as possible are played in Geelong as they are an important boost for our economy. Every time a game is played in Geelong it is important to our city, even when we do not win. We are pleased that the Bracks government has assisted the Geelong community by providing \$150 000 for the Kardinia Park upgrade.

A very important local issue which has been raised with me a number of times by various constituents is the need to construct a bypass road at North Shore to divert heavy traffic away from residential streets. I am extremely pleased that the budget has provided \$4.2 million to fund the reconstruction of the bypass road.

A further major initiative for Geelong in the budget is the announcement of the allocation of \$5.1 million to link Lascelles wharf to the standard gauge rail. This builds on previously announced funding — an election commitment — to link the key wharfs at the port of Geelong to the standard gauge rail. This has been enthusiastically received by those associated with the port. I refer to an article in the *Geelong Advertiser* of 8 May headed 'Victoria's future', which is a summary of the budget initiatives that Geelong received from the Bracks government. A small article entitled, 'Funds to link port to national gauge' states:

Geelong's port will be linked to the national standard gauge rail network following the allocation of \$5.1 million in the budget.

The \$5.1 million will be used to convert the Lascelles wharf spur line to dual gauge, thus linking it to the national network.

Toll GeelongPort general manager, Keith Gordon, was yesterday ecstatic about the announcement.

He said the port had been pushing for years to be linked to the national rail grid and the dual-gauge conversion would be a significant boost to the port.

'I think this gives GeelongPort some much-needed infrastructure into our bulk terminal which will facilitate some significant future developments on the back of it', Mr Gordon said.

'We would anticipate this as a platform to attract more volume.

'We will have an ability to compete in markets that we currently haven't.

'There's the possibility of mineral sands ... other products — it opens up a host of opportunities that aren't currently there'.

The very next week, building on that announcement, there was an announcement by Toll GeelongPort on 15 May in the *Geelong Advertiser* entitled 'Huge upgrade for waterfront' and states:

Toll GeelongPort is planning a multimillion-dollar expansion at Lascelles wharf.

Toll's Victorian ports manager, Keith Gordon, said yesterday Toll's plans for Geelong were buoyed by last week's \$5 million state government pledge to build a dual-gauge rail link to the wharf.

Further, he says:

We're certainly looking at building a multimodal facility to allow road, rail and sea access on one site.

There's potential for further development around the rail link that could be worth \$60 million.

Mr Gordon said the new rail link would spur Toll's plan to promote rail freight for containers and bulk goods.

This is an example of fantastic investment in Geelong's future by the Bracks government of \$5.1 million announced in this budget, and the very next week Toll GeelongPort announced a major infrastructure investment to build on the state government's investment.

Some \$600 000 has been allocated in the budget for the Geelong higher court for court custodial services. In last year's budget there was the announcement of a \$19 million to upgrade the Grace McKellar Centre, Geelong's premier aged care facility. That news was a welcome funding injection indeed, as under the previous government Grace McKellar was to be privatised. The Geelong community stood up to be counted on that issue, which played its part in the defeat of the Kennett government and saw the election of the honourable member for Geelong in the other place and me. The people of Geelong said no to the privatisation

of Grace McKellar, and the Bracks government is pleased to announce another \$3 million in the budget towards the upgrade of our premier aged care facility.

The Bracks government has gone to great lengths in its first two years to repair the damage done to the state's public health system by the Kennett government. This budget provides an additional \$960 million boost to health, of which the Barwon south-western region will receive a fair share.

Some \$700 000 has been allocated to replace cardiac catheter laboratory equipment at Geelong hospital; \$26 000 to upgrade aged care beds; \$50 000 to replace the duress system; \$24 000 to upgrade patient hoists to prevent back injuries to nurses; and \$4500 has been given to Vision Australia for shower and wheelchair access for aged patients. I congratulate the Minister for Health for all that he has done to turn around the health system since the election of the Bracks government. Recently I attended a function at the Geelong hospital with the Minister for Health to acknowledge the 160 new nurses who have been employed at the hospital since the election of the Bracks government.

The budget has certainly been good news for Geelong. It has been well received locally, as evidenced by many articles in the local press, especially the *Geelong Advertiser*. The banner headline the morning after the budget, which screamed out across Geelong, carried the headline, 'Cashed up — \$38 million for schools, transport, education'. The article went on to celebrate the announcements in the budget for Geelong. There have been positive editorials and fantastic endorsements from *Streetwork* where people have celebrated the injection of \$20 million into schools throughout Geelong. Local business leaders have celebrated the budget, and many attended a luncheon some weeks ago with the Treasurer who took them through the initiatives in the budget. Those initiatives were well received. There have been endorsements from the City of Greater Geelong where the mayor has celebrated the Bracks government's third budget in a headline saying, 'Whitbread Abley applaud measures' — very good news indeed!

Another article says, 'Regions give praise to Brumby', while another says that there is solid endorsement of the Bracks government's investment in regional Victoria.

Other articles have talked about the repairs undertaken to health and education, and a further article acknowledges a much-needed investment in infrastructure to upgrade the railway line between Geelong and Warrnambool — which is fantastic news, and welcomed by West Coast Rail.

The Bracks government has delivered welcome services and program initiatives in Geelong and across the state. They are about investing in our future and making sure that all Victorians have a fair share of the state's prosperity, no matter where they live.

The total budget is an investment in the state's future. There is a massive injection of funds into education, health, community safety, innovation, transport and community services. I congratulate the Treasurer for his work in turning Victoria around. I am pleased to celebrate the budget and speak in its favour tonight.

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Eumemmerring) — It perplexes me that we are here celebrating the proposition that the Honourable John Brumby is turning the state around — or something.

Hon. D. McL. Davis — Upside down!

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — Upside down as Mr Davis says; that is probably more appropriate. From the time she started to the time she finished, Mrs Carbines's speech was filled with the rhetoric that we have got used to hearing from this government in press releases and the like, but there is very little substance and little that could realistically be considered as an objective assessment of this budget.

I will start by putting the budget into some sort of context. The best way to do that is to return to the sound budgetary position the Bracks government inherited when it came to power in October 1999. The Kennett government inherited a desperate and unfortunate budget position from the previous Cain and Kirner governments, and it is important to make that distinction from the start. The circumstances in which this government came to power and the circumstances in which the previous government came to power were very different. It is a matter of record now that the Cain and Kirner governments left a budget running a \$2000 million recurrent deficit every financial year. It also left general government net debt of around \$32 billion. So there was \$32 billion of debt and a recurrent budget deficit of \$2000 million per annum. It was a very different position to that which the Bracks government inherited.

When the Bracks government came to power, net debt had been reduced to around \$6 billion and the budget was in a healthy surplus. Indeed in the first year in which the Bracks government came to power, the operating outcome for the state was a surplus of around \$1.7 billion. It is fine for Mrs Carbines and her colleagues to get up and trumpet what the government is doing in this budget, but they need to keep in context

exactly what the budget position was when they came to power and how it contrasted with the budgetary position inherited by the previous government.

This government has not been tested on its budgetary performance because of the sound situation it inherited and the sound economic situation which currently exists in Australia. The only real test would come in circumstances where the government found itself managing a budget in a contracting economy with rising unemployment and a reduction in investment. Neither the Bracks government nor any other state government can legitimately claim credit for the sound economic environment which currently exists. I note that comments from the Treasurer both in the budget speech and in his appearance before the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week suggested to an extent that credit is due to the state government for the sound economic position which currently exists. That is a long bow for the Treasurer to try to draw when it is accepted that state governments have very little impact on the general economic circumstances that exist in Australia.

Mrs Carbines, the Treasurer and other members of the government have been quick to pat themselves on the back with respect to the latest budget, but it is worthwhile taking some time to strip away some of the rhetoric surrounding the budget to look at what the real numbers are telling us.

I start by going back to some rudimentary fundamentals which compare the current budget with the last budget produced by the Kennett government back in 1998–99. In doing that we need to compare the way the state was left with the way the state is now, and to do that I will quote some of the figures produced in the 1999–2000 budget with respect to growth and population and compare those to where the state is currently.

From 1998–99 to the current budget period of 2002–03, the state has seen population growth of 4.8 per cent. In the same period there has been a growth in gross state product of 15 per cent. It is those figures that need to be kept in mind when looking at what has happened with the budget over the same period.

The first thing I would like to talk about with the budget is taxation. We have heard a lot about taxation. We have heard a lot about claims from the Treasurer with respect to so-called reductions in taxation. It is worth placing on the record some of the taxation figures which existed in the budget of the last Kennett government and the current budget which has just been brought down by the Treasurer.

The first taxation measure I would like to touch on is payroll tax. Payroll tax has attracted some attention in the government's latest business statement with talk of payroll tax cuts, but it is worth reflecting that for the final actual outcome of the last year of the Kennett government, payroll tax receipts were \$2192.5 million. For the current year they are budgeted to have increased to \$2710 million. This is an increase of 23.6 per cent, despite the fact that in the same period the economy has only grown by 15 per cent.

The story is very similar with land tax. In the last year of the Kennett government land tax receipts were \$380 million. The current budget records land tax expected revenue as \$611 million. This is an increase of over 60 per cent. In a period when the economy has grown 15 per cent, land tax receipts have grown 60 per cent. So for the government to trumpet its package on so-called tax cuts, it needs to be kept in the context of what has been happening with tax receipts over the period in which it has been in office.

The same story exists for stamp duty on land transfers. In the last year of the Kennett government stamp duty receipts on land transfers was \$970 million. For the current year it is budgeted at \$1590 million — an increase of 64 per cent — again well ahead of the 15 per cent growth which has been experienced in the economy.

For gaming taxes the story is similar — an increase in the order of \$60 million. Insurance taxes — and I will come back to this later — have increased from \$350 million in the last year of the Kennett government to a whopping \$789 million in the current budget period. This is an increase of 124 per cent. The economy has grown 15 per cent, but insurance tax receipts have grown 124 per cent. It is outrageous for the Treasurer to now talk about tax cuts when he has received all this windfall revenue in taxation.

Those taxation measures combined have increased by 33 per cent from \$5.5 billion to \$7.5 billion in the four-year period since the last full year of the previous government and the estimates period we are considering now.

It is worth noting that notwithstanding the fact that a number of state taxes have been abolished as part of the intergovernmental agreement on taxation which arose through the introduction of the new federal tax package, total tax revenue is still going to be \$200 million more this year than it was in the final year of the Kennett government — notwithstanding the abolition of all those taxes under the commonwealth–state financial relations agreement.

It is worth pointing out that other jurisdictions have acted to reduce the taxation burden on their citizens. I point to New South Wales, which last year abolished debits tax — something which is not going to happen in Victoria for a number of years, despite the fact we have the revenue to do it.

I would now like to turn back to that issue of insurance taxes. No doubt one of the biggest issues facing the community at the moment is public liability insurance. We have seen the Leader of the Opposition in this place, the Honourable Bill Forwood, introduce a bill which will be debated in due course, with some measures to address the issue of public liability insurance for tourism operators, because it has been a big issue in the tourism industry and in the community sector. Yet we have seen no action whatsoever on this from the government to reduce the impact of public liability insurance premium increases. The Minister for Small Business in this chamber has a role in fostering small business in this state, yet repeatedly when she is asked what she is doing about public liability insurance for small business she says it is a matter for the finance minister and she has no role in it.

The Minister for Finance at the recent estimates hearings last week was unable to point out exactly what he is doing and what he has achieved with respect to public liability premium relief for business and the volunteer community sector in this state. It is very easy to question just what this government's position is with respect to public liability insurance and how genuine it is in any attempts to reduce the impact of increases in public liability insurance premiums. The reason for that, and something we must not forget, is that this government through its stamp duty mechanisms puts 10 per cent on the top of every insurance premium that is written for public liability in this state. So this government has a vested interest in high insurance premiums, and there is very little incentive for this government to work to reduce insurance premiums when it is creaming 10 per cent off the top of every premium that is written. Hence we see the increase in insurance taxes from \$350 million under the former Kennett government to \$790 million in the forward estimates under this government. There is no doubt this issue is impacting upon the community and the volunteer sector.

Recently I, along with my colleague Mr Lucas, attended a function for the scout association where it was pointed out that this year public liability premiums for Scouts Australia in Victoria would increase from \$336 000 to over \$500 000 — a massive increase of \$160 000 in the premium for that organisation. That means a \$16 000 increase in the tax take of this state

government. Every time insurance premiums go up, the tax take of the state government goes up. You really can question the government's commitment to solving the public liability issue and premium increase issue when the government has a direct stake and a direct benefit from increases in insurance premiums.

During her contribution Mrs Carbines waxed lyrical about what she saw the government as doing in her electorate and some of the initiatives she considered were important and that the government had undertaken. I noted very carefully that invariably when she was speaking, she was talking about inputs rather than outputs. She was talking about extra money being spent on the hospital rather than extra patients being serviced and treated at that hospital and extra money being spent on the school rather than better results or more students being educated at the school.

It is interesting to reflect and again compare those two budget years that I spoke of earlier — the previous 1998–99 budget year and the forecast forward estimates budget year — and compare growth and expenditure, both on a departmental basis and also on the basis of the employment of public servants in each of the departments. It is fine for the government to talk about increased expenditure, but the thing that is of value to the people of Victoria is improvements in outcomes — better health, better education — and that does not equate to more spending on health and education. You can pour more money in but that does not mean you are going to get a better outcome. That is the situation we are seeing here in Victoria. I will talk about that in due course.

I want to run through some of the comparisons between what the previous government was spending in its last year and what the current government is spending in the forward year. The first one is the Department of Education: for the previous government expenditure was \$5200 million; for the current government it is \$6000 million — an increase of 17 per cent against economic growth of 15 per cent. There was similar growth in the cost of salaries and wages for that department.

If we look at the Department of Human Services, in the previous budget under the Kennett government, \$6797 million was allocated; in the budget under the current government, \$8900 million has been allocated — an increase of 31 per cent against growth of 15 per cent. Likewise with the salaries and expenses for public servants in that department there has been an increase of 28 per cent against population growth of 4 per cent and economic growth of 15 per cent.

There is a similar story with the Department of Infrastructure. Expenditure is up by 26 per cent and salaries are up by 18 per cent. At the Department of Justice spending is up by 25 per cent and salaries are up by 17 per cent. At the Department of Natural Resources and Environment spending is up by 51 per cent and salaries are up by 22 per cent — again against a backdrop of an economy that has grown by only 15 per cent. Perhaps the most outstanding example of this, but perhaps not the most surprising, is the Department of Premier and Cabinet — a department whose budget since the change of government to the present day has grown by 82 per cent.

An Honourable Member — By 82 per cent?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — By 82 per cent!

The economy has grown by 15 per cent, yet the budget of the Department of Premier and Cabinet has grown by 82 per cent and the staff costs have grown by 70 per cent. We can see that this government is spending well ahead of growth in the economy.

The questions have to be asked: what is the government delivering and what are we seeing from all this extra expenditure? There is no doubt that the government sector is now becoming a much more significant part of the Victorian economy. On these figures it is clear that some government departments are growing at five and six times the rate of growth of the general economy. So we have to ask the question: what are we getting? Looking at the example of my own electorate, the answer is very little.

I turn to the Dandenong Hospital. We have seen a 30 per cent increase in expenditure on the Department of Human Services. But what services have we seen delivered at the local hospital? The reality is that we have seen a decline. Since the change of government we have seen a blow-out in waiting lists at the Dandenong Hospital, a blow-out in ambulance bypasses and a blow-out in the number of people left waiting on trolleys, yet the government is patting itself on the back for spending 30 per cent more on the health budget and delivering less. My constituents get less, yet the government is spending 30 per cent more. That just does not add up.

Hon. N. B. Lucas — What about the Berwick hospital?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — What Berwick hospital, Mr Lucas? We don't have a Berwick hospital! We are spending 30 per cent more on health and getting substantially less for it. How the government can claim this is an achievement is absolutely beyond me. For

some reason the government has yet to make the connection that spending money does not equate to outcomes for the community. There are declining standards in public hospitals, yet the government is patting itself on the back because it is increasing expenditure.

Since the change of government, spending on public service salaries has increased from \$8 billion to \$9.8 billion — an increase of nearly \$1800 million on public sector salaries in the past three years. This would be okay if we were getting the service delivery, but we are not. We are seeing blow-outs in the public sector payroll and no commensurate increase in services delivered to the community.

I turn to the budget position. The first thing I would like to speak about is the windfall gain this government has achieved. By windfall gain I mean what the government has gained in revenue ahead of what it had budgeted for. This is laid out quite clearly in budget paper 3 under the revenue section.

I will compare some of the revenue figures contained in the budget in terms of actual outcomes for 2001–02 to what was budgeted for. I refer to the budget papers for 2001–02. Taxation was budgeted at \$7.9 billion, whereas the actual outcome was \$8.7 billion, which is a windfall gain of \$780 million or an increase of 10 per cent over budget. Similarly, with regulatory fees there was a budget of \$370 million and an actual outcome of \$390 million, a windfall gain of 3 per cent. Investment income was budgeted at \$940 million and had an actual outcome of \$1050 million — roughly a \$110 million windfall gain. Other revenue was budgeted at \$750 million and had an actual outcome of \$1020 million, a windfall gain of \$266 million. Even grants revenue was budgeted at \$11.3 billion and had an actual outcome of almost \$11.8 billion, a windfall of \$443 million.

So overall, last year the government budgeted to receive \$23.465 billion in revenue and actually received over \$25 billion in revenue. That is a windfall gain of \$1.5 billion in revenue. That is very important, because it goes to the underlying position of the budget. This year the government has been able to report a surplus. However, the reality is, given the expenditure side of the budget, if not for the windfall gain of \$1.5 billion, the budget outcome would have been a deficit.

I would like to run through the estimated expenditure items incurred versus those budgeted for last year. Last year the government budgeted for superannuation expenses of \$1.5 billion, whereas the actual outcome was over \$2 billion. Depreciation was at \$870 million

and the actual outcome was almost \$900 million; borrowing costs were at \$477 million and the actual outcome was almost \$500 million; employee entitlements were at \$8.4 billion and the actual outcome was over \$8.5 billion; and supplies and services were at \$7.6 billion and the actual outcome was over \$7.8 billion. Other undefined expenses were budgeted at \$4 billion and had an actual outcome of \$4.4 billion. So there was actual above-budget spending of over \$1.2 billion.

If the government had not gained the windfall revenue, the actual outcome would have been in deficit because the government overspent last year's budget by \$1.2 billion. It is only by virtue of the windfall gain that two weeks ago the Treasurer was able to come to this Parliament and report a surplus budget.

Sitting suspended 6.30 p.m. until 8.02 p.m.

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — The point I was making prior to the dinner break was —

Hon. E. G. Stoney — What was it?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — You should have been here listening, Mr Stoney. For the 2001–02 year the government had forecast an operating surplus of \$508 million. However, were it not for the windfall revenue the government gained over the course of the last financial year the actual operating result would have been a deficit of \$776 million. It was only the fact that the government obtained a \$1500 million windfall gain in revenue that it was able to record a budget surplus rather than the budget deficit it would have had had revenue remained as projected, with expenses blowing out in the way they did.

I now turn briefly to the issue of accountability. This is a government which likes to promote itself as being open, accountable and transparent in its dealings with the people of Victoria, yet in the presentation of this budget the government is exhibiting a worrying trend in reducing the amount of information being made available to the Victorian public. I should go back to 1999 when the Labor Party formed government with the support of the three Independents through signing a document — the Independents charter. As a participant in the charter, Mr Bracks, as the then opposition leader, signed up to a commitment that he would provide parallel budget reporting in instances where the budget format had changed from year to year — that is, if the budget layout or the output groups or performance measures changed from year to year Mr Bracks had committed the Labor government to providing parallel reporting.

We come now to the third budget produced by the Bracks government and in not one of these years have we seen the parallel reporting which Mr Bracks committed his government to. Indeed, not once have we seen an Independent attempt to hold the government to its commitment, which is a matter for regret.

The further point I raise about accountability in this year's budget is the way it has been stripped of detail. In previous years, particularly in budget paper 2, the government had provided details of its output and asset initiatives by department. For example, last year, I could have taken you to the section where the budget outlined on a school-by-school basis what the government intended to do in terms of capital funding for schools. This year the government has removed that detail and all we have in the budget relating to capital expenditure on schools is a single-line item noting that the government will spend X dollars on capital improvements and development for schools — one single-line item to cover what is roughly \$20 million worth of expenditure. Last year that would have been recorded on a school-by-school basis. So the government has reduced the amount of information in this budget and in doing so has reduced the scrutiny and accountability that it will be subject to.

I now address my comments to one of the two key areas of the budget, and that relates to debt management. The point I make here is that the government's approach to debt management is one of smoke and mirrors. The government accounting treatment of debt management under this budget, and indeed last year's budget, is one of hiding the true position with respect to debt in Victoria. You can understand why that is, given the previous government's record on debt management in this state. I have already stated prior to the dinner break that the previous Labor government managed to record net debt in this state to the order of \$32 billion.

Debt management is a sensitive issue for the government. That is why the government has resorted to what can only be described as fraudulent accounting treatment of debt management through its use of the Growing Victoria fund. It is of considerable concern that the government is disguising debt management in the way it is through the use of the Growing Victoria fund. What the government is doing in its presentation of debt in the budget is taking out the Growing Victoria fund which, on the surface, seems a more conservative accounting treatment of debt management, but in reality because the government is reducing the Growing Victoria fund balance from around \$1.3 billion this year to zero in 2005–06 in effect it is masking what is happening with debt management in this state.

According to the government, general government net debt, which is unfunded superannuation liabilities plus general government debt, will decline from \$2.68 billion in 2000–02 to \$2.3 billion in 2005–06. Indeed, the Treasurer in his budget speech reflects on this. He said that general government net debt was falling. If debt management is treated according to the universally accepted accounting practices, that is, that the Growing Victoria fund is included in debt calculations rather than excluded, general government net debt under this government is increasing. For the 2002 year, using the universal accounting standards, general government net debt will be \$1.3 billion increasing to \$2.3 billion in the 2006 financial year, an increase of 60 per cent to 70 per cent over the forward estimate period. Yet the Treasurer, by creative accounting, is suggesting that general government net debt is declining when it is increasing.

I make no comment on the merits of whether debt should be declining or increasing. In fact, there are some sound reasons for the government to maintain a prudent level of debt. I do, however, comment on the way the Treasurer has attempted to mask what is happening with the levels of debt in this state through his use of the Growing Victoria fund. Last week in the estimates process the Treasurer attempted to assert that net debt was falling when his own budget papers in the presentation of universal financial statements show net debt increasing. It was impossible to get the Treasurer to concede, despite the fact that the budget papers said that net debt was increasing from \$1.3 billion to \$2.3 billion, that general government net debt is increasing. I reiterate that I do not comment on whether that is a good or bad thing, but using the accepted accounting standards, general government net debt is increasing, despite the Treasurer's attempt to mask that using the Growing Victoria fund and his assertions to the contrary.

I now address some local issues that affect the constituents of Eumemmerring Province who I am pleased to represent, along with my colleague the Honourable Neil Lucas. This budget does not deliver for the people of Eumemmerring Province. The budget lacks vision and commitment to the people of my province. The first project the budget does not deliver is the Endeavour Hills police station. This was an election commitment that the then Labor opposition made prior to the September 1999 election, yet in April 2002 there is no sign that Endeavour Hills will receive its promised police station. The government has not even committed to a site for the police station, and police sources suggest that Christmas next year will be the earliest opportunity that we will have to see a police station in Endeavour Hills, despite the comments made

pre-election by the honourable member for Dandenong in the other place and the then Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Steve Bracks. The people of Endeavour Hills still have not got a police station two and a half years later.

A second project that is not being delivered in this budget is the Berwick hospital. Prior to the last election the Kennett government was ready to sign a contract for the Berwick hospital. Had the contract proceeded the Berwick hospital would have by now been open for 12 months. Instead we have a lack of action on this issue by the government and by the Minister for Health. We do not even have a contractor appointed or a site for the hospital. We are now almost three years into the term of this government and we do not have a Berwick hospital. It is another failure of a promise to deliver for the people of Eumemmerring Province.

Another project the government has not delivered is the Pakenham bypass. It is interesting to read the *Hansard* report from the other place which records the Minister for Transport having a wager with the Leader of the Opposition regarding federal funding for the Pakenham bypass. The minister is reported as asserting that there is no funding for the Pakenham bypass in the federal budget. I take this opportunity to suggest that the Minister for Transport in the other place should look at federal budget paper 2, page 156, and the budget overview, which indicates funding is provided in the federal budget for the Pakenham bypass. What he will not find is funding in this year's state budget for the Pakenham bypass. This is a \$200 million project, and \$100 million has been committed by the federal government, but not a cent has been committed by the Bracks government. Again this budget fails the people of Eumemmerring Province, and not delivering on that project fails the people of Gippsland.

In relation to the Pakenham bypass I refer to some comments made by the honourable member for Gippsland West in the other place, Susan Davies, reported in a brochure that she has circulated throughout the new seat of Bass. In the brochure she claims she is committed to the Pakenham bypass as one of her projects. At all the rallies and public meetings that the Honourable Neil Lucas, the Honourable Ken Smith, the Honourable Cameron Boardman and the honourable member for Pakenham in the other place, Rob Maclellan, and I have attended not once have we seen the honourable member for Gippsland West. I place on the record that not once has she raised the Pakenham bypass as an issue in Parliament; not once on her web site has there been a press release about the Pakenham bypass, and she has never expressed any interest in the issue at any of the meetings that have

taken place between the council and local members. I find extraordinary that the honourable member can claim that the Pakenham bypass is one of her priorities. The local members who represent that area have been working on this project. Federal funding has been secured, yet not a dollar has been committed by the state government. For the honourable member for Gippsland West to claim she is working on this project is ridiculous.

Hon. B. N. Atkinson — How much has Mr Batchelor put in?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — The Minister for Transport has put in zero dollars. Not a single dollar has come from the state budget.

Another project that the government will not deliver is the north to east connection of the new Hallam bypass.

This is a project that will require a \$13 million investment to allow traffic travelling north on the Monash Freeway from Gippsland to travel east on the new Hallam bypass. It is a \$13 million connection and is required as a matter of priority, but the government has not delivered it under this budget and has not delivered it as part of the Hallam bypass project.

The Hallam bypass will be severely limited by the fact that a vital connector has been left out of the project. It is fine for the Minister for Transport to run around and say the project has been completed 12 months ahead of schedule. However, the fact is it will only be partly completed because a vital link, the northbound to eastbound link, will not be included. It is easy to finish a project a year ahead of schedule if you only build half of it, which is what this government seems to be doing with the Hallam bypass.

Another project we will not get under the budget is the Dingley bypass, which in recent days has been canvassed extensively in the media. The government is not committed to provide the Dingley freeway, which will bypass part of Dandenong. It is a crucial piece of infrastructure to develop in order to assist the central business district of Dandenong, yet the government seems to have no interest in providing it.

Other projects that Mr Lucas and I have raised include the intersection of the South Gippsland Highway and Pound Road, where traffic lights are required as a matter of urgency. Not a single dollar is allocated in this year's budget to provide those traffic lights. Again, the government is failing to deliver for the people of Eumemmerring Province in this year's budget.

Other projects are the Belgrave–Hallam and Hallam North roads duplication and straightening; the sound barriers on the Berwick bypass and Soldiers Road at Beaconsfield; an extra lane on the Monash Freeway; and public transport for the hills area of Eumemmerring Province.

Another matter I have raised with the Minister for Education Services is full funding for a proper oval for Berwick South Secondary College, which would be of great benefit to the community. It is a much-needed facility, but the school has not been given the funds and can only build a half-size oval because this government has failed to provide the funding in this year's budget. The list goes on.

Mr Lucas has canvassed extensively the projects this government has failed to fund in this budget and previous budgets for the people of Eumemmerring Province. They are missing out in this year's budget.

Hon. D. G. Hadden — What did they do for seven years under your government?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — I will pick up the interjection from the Honourable Dianne Hadden of what the previous government did for the people of Eumemmerring Province. I am very proud to stand on the record of the previous government of delivering for Eumemmerring Province. Under the previous government Eumemmerring Province received untold injection of infrastructure in terms of education, roads and schools. The credit for that can go to my colleagues who were in the previous Parliament in Eumemmerring Province: the Honourable Neil Lucas and Dr Ron Wells, and the honourable members for Berwick and Pakenham in the other place, Dr Robert Dean and the Honourable Rob Maclellan — people who worked very hard for their electorates in the previous parliament. We saw the results because the previous government delivered in a way that this government has not done.

The government is deep in self-praise with respect to this budget. However, worrying trends are emerging with respect to the operating result. The Treasurer's comments with respect to debt management and the way he is attempting to confuse the situation are also a matter of concern.

The budget fails to deliver many of the much-needed projects for the people of Eumemmerring Province. It is a budget that has failed to capture the imagination of Victorians.

In conclusion, I would like to leave the final comment on the budget to the people of Victoria. I refer to the results of a poll which appeared in the *Herald Sun* the

day after the budget was tabled. It was a phone poll, as the *Herald Sun* conducts on a daily basis. The question was: are you satisfied with yesterday's state budget? It is a very telling statistic that when Victorians were polled — and the Honourable Dianne Hadden should listen to this — a resounding 77 per cent said no.

The budget does not deliver for the people; the people realise this and it is about time this government started doing the hard yards and delivering for the people of Victoria.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN (Ballarat) — I am pleased to congratulate the Treasurer and the Premier on what I believe is one of the best budgets that has been delivered in the state for many years.

Hon. K. M. Smith — You are deluded!

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — It is good to be able to repeat the interjection from Mr Ken Smith that I am deluded, because it seems to me that the editorials in Victorian regional newspapers agree with me. I am not sure who is deluded, but it would appear that most if not all country newspapers have been very supportive of this budget. The editorial has been very supportive of what the Premier and the Treasurer are attempting to do. If I was going to follow the usual practices of this place I would read into *Hansard* every editorial I have seen. I am not going to do that because it is a waste of everyone's time; the editorials are out there.

Hon. K. M. Smith — Where are they?

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — In the *Weekly Times*. What do they say in the *Weekly Times*, Ken? They say it is about time that Howard showed the leadership of John Brumby and Steve Bracks! The *Herald Sun* —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. G. B. Ashman) — Order! Mr Atkinson is out of his place. There has been a barrage from the minister and a number of other honourable members, and I ask them to cease.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — I have never read an editorial in the *Weekly Times* showing such strong support for any government, let alone a Labor government. I do not have anything in front of me to refer to. It is burnt into my memory that a very conservative establishment newspaper has said that John Howard should follow the leadership of Steve Bracks and John Brumby. What more can I say in justification of this budget?

I could refer to the Ballarat *Courier*, the *Maryborough District Advertiser*, the Ararat newspaper; they go on and on. What do honourable members want as justification for how good this budget is? How good is this budget? Do not ask me; read the papers!

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. G. B. Ashman) — Order! Interjections are totally disorderly, and in the last few moments they have become out of order to the point where there has been a continuous barrage not only from the opposition benches but also the government benches. Mr McQuilten should continue without too many more interjections.

Hon. K. M. Smith — What about the *Weekly Times*?

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — The Honourable Ken Smith is asking where it is. Just look at the editorial page, Ken; that's where it is!

Hon. K. M. Smith interjected.

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. G. B. Ashman) — Order! Mr Smith is out of order. He knows the rules of the house, and I would appreciate it if he would abide by them. I would appreciate it also if all other honourable members abided by the practices that have been adopted by this house over many years and allow Mr McQuilten to continue without the barrage that is under way at the moment.

Hon. N. B. Lucas — On a point of order, Mr Acting President, the Honourable John McQuilten on a number of occasions in the last few minutes has continually referred to statements in a range of newspapers. In the absence of him quoting from them, this house is not in a position to know whether he is making it up or whether what he is saying is true. The veracity of his statements cannot be judged by this house. He is making reckless statements to this house regarding what is said in the papers, yet he is not quoting them to us. He could be making this up, Mr Acting President.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — On the point of order, Mr Acting President, I am talking about what I have read in the newspapers, and it is clearly checkable by anybody and everybody.

Hon. N. B. Lucas — Give us a quote!

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — Mr Lucas, you have had your turn.

Hon. B. C. Boardman — On the point of order, Mr Acting President — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT
(**Hon. G. B. Ashman**) — Order! There is no point of order.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT
(**Hon. G. B. Ashman**) — Order! Without the cheer squad! Mr McQuilten has been making some general comments; he has not specifically referred to particular editorials. His comments have been very generalised. If he was making a specific comment he would be required to quote the paper and cite the date of that paper. There is no point of order.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — Thank you, Mr Acting President. It is probably appropriate now to move off editorials because the opposition is clearly unhappy when I mention them. It is obvious that opposition members are concerned about the number of editorials that are in support of the Bracks–Brumby budget. They do not want me to talk about them. They do not want to know, as is their habit. They do not want to know what is going on in regional Victoria!

Hon. K. M. Smith — On a point of order, Mr Acting President, I have a copy of the *Weekly Times* and Mr McQuilten is quite right; there is a lot in the paper about the budget. One headline reads ‘Mystery fungus kills cows’. I think the cows are finding out about the budget as well!

The ACTING PRESIDENT
(**Hon. G. B. Ashman**) — Order! There is no point of order.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — I am not sure what Mr Smith was referring to, but I will move off editorials because they are clearly strongly in favour — —

Hon. N. B. Lucas — You have no evidence!

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — Read them, Mr Lucas. All I am saying is: read the editorials. They are on the public record and you do not like what is on the public record, Mr Lucas. Read them; they are all over country Victoria. You are irrelevant now; you were irrelevant three years ago; that is why we are on this side of the house!

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT
(**Hon. G. B. Ashman**) — Order! Mr McQuilten will make his remarks through the Chair.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — I am sorry, Mr Acting President.

I would now like to talk about a number of federal issues relating to this state budget. I have a note here — I normally do not use notes but I have made a note of three — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — I do not quote; I do not need to. I have three notes: one is about the Calder Freeway. What has that lot in opposition done? The opposition parties are in government federally; what have they done for the Calder? Absolutely nothing! The opposition is a sham. Where is their intellectual muscle? What about equity? What about the other electorates beyond Bendigo? What have we heard? Not a whisper about the Calder. The federal government will not fund it. It does not want to fund it because it believes it has lost Bendigo. A bit of a hint is coming through here about the federal budget; they cannot win the Bendigo seats so they are not going to fund the freeway — it is dead; they have wiped it.

Then we go to the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) — this is a good one! A \$90 million promise — what has the federal government done about that? It is not going to fund that either! Why is it not going to fund it? Well, it says there are all sorts of reasons. Tony Abbott — —

Hon. I. J. Cover — On a point of order, Mr Acting President, I know that the budget offers honourable members the opportunity to range across a number of issues, and there is plenty of scope to range far and wide in this debate, but clearly we are talking about the state budget here, and the honourable member has now strayed onto issues involving the federal budget. The honourable member is quite right in suggesting that the federal government has actually committed \$90 million to the redevelopment of the Melbourne Cricket Ground, and that is in stark contrast to the state government, which has not provided one cent for the MCG redevelopment. We would be interested to see, in talking about the state budget, if the honourable member could actually illustrate where the state government has provided funding for the MCG redevelopment.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — On the point of order, Mr Acting President, I am talking about \$90 million, which was an agreement between the federal and state

governments — it was an acknowledged agreement. Now, because of that agreement our state budget has been formulated assuming that \$90 million is going to be forthcoming. Because of the withdrawal, or apparent withdrawal, of that \$90 million, it is now relevant to our state budget.

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. G. B. Ashman) — Order! There is no point of order. The budget debate does allow for a very wide-ranging debate; it allows the canvassing of joint federal–state funding arrangements and projects. It is quite reasonable for the debate to be canvassing these issues.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — To me, the MCG issue is quite tragic because it is the second time that the federal government has told the rest of Australia that the Victorian opposition cannot win government. That is what it is saying! It will not fund the Calder because it cannot win government; it will not fund the MCG because it cannot win government; and now — I am going to number three — the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline, one of the most important issues environmentally for regional Victoria and, I have to say, for regional Australia, will not be funded. What has it done there? The Victorian government committed \$77 million — —

Hon. K. M. Smith interjected.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — You committed nothing, Mr Smith — you've got no commitment!

The Wimmera–Mallee pipeline is the third issue on which the federal government has acknowledged that this mob on the other side cannot win government — it is just not going to fund it. If anyone was really serious about trying to win government in Victoria they would fund the Calder Freeway, they would fund the MCG and they would fund the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline.

I am now going to talk about some local issues. In the last 12 days, I think, the Leader of the Opposition, Dr Denis Napthine, has been to Maryborough. I am not going to talk about Ballarat or the Macedon Ranges or other places in my area, but I have a particular interest in Maryborough. I am wondering whether a point of order is going to be taken; I am not sure — —

Hon. I. J. Cover — You could take one on yourself!

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — Well, I've had a lot of points of order tonight — I'm a little sensitive on points of order!

I should like to talk about the Bracks–Brumby budget. About a week and a half ago the Leader of the Opposition in the other place came to Maryborough. I could not believe what he was saying that I and the lower house member, the honourable member for Ripon, had been trying to do and had achieved in terms of budgetary outcomes.

I shall go through some of them. The government has been elected for some two years and has put \$2.5 million into the Avoca hospital and \$1.7 million into the Dunolly hospital, and has just announced \$8 million for the Maryborough hospital, and a new \$4.5 million police station. We announced \$4 million for an education precinct about which I will talk in a moment — a \$20 million project. That is the minor stuff. There are many other grants in the seat of Ripon and to the Central Goldfields Shire Council.

We are talking more money in the last two years than has landed in Ripon in the past 40 years. The Leader of the Opposition in the other place said, 'I'm disappointed it is not happening fast enough'. He was at the table with Jeff Kennett. What did you do? Bugger all!

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. G. B. Ashman) — Order! Mr McQuilten, your comments are unparliamentary and I ask you to withdraw some of those words.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — I withdraw. He did absolutely nothing when he was at the cabinet table. We are delivering in our electorate and all he can complain about is that we are not doing it fast enough!

I want to move on to the education precinct which I have been working on since 1984. In 1984 I brought up an idea, which did not gain much credence, because all the schools in my home town of Maryborough were in incredible need of repair. I was only a candidate and did not get the support that I needed at that time. I decided that maybe I needed to hone my views about what it should be and could be.

In 1993 I went to Canberra and was able to get the support of the federal government of the day for a pilot project in a regional town — to do something that had never been done before. It was a potpourri of funding. I gained tacit, not official, support but it was support that we might be able to get \$10 million for the concept. What happened with the Kennett government? They said, 'No', and, 'We will give you a \$900 000 gymnasium'. It was a buy-out — 'here is a \$900 000 gymnasium' — and the concept died. It came up again when I was re-elected.

Hon. I. J. Cover interjected.

Hon. J. M. McQUILTEN — Mr Cover, you do not even understand what I am talking about — you do not understand education and what we are talking about. This is about an enormous range of issues which were brought up on both sides of the house. The education precinct that I, the government, all the people of Maryborough, including those in businesses, are talking about is something that has not been done before. That is why it is so incredibly hard to achieve: it is something that has never been achieved before. It is a mix of industry, lifelong learning, childcare, primary schools, secondary schools, TAFE colleges and universities all on one site. No-one has ever done it.

It will happen in Maryborough through this budget. The media has not even run with it. This is probably the most important regional infrastructure in Victoria for a long time. Educationally it is incredibly important for young people. I must say that the Leader of the Opposition in the other place in his statements was supportive of the concept, so I congratulate him for supporting it. I do not know that he understands what it is all about, but at least he is supportive.

All of this effort has been generated by local people because they want these things to happen in Ripon, and the Leader of the Opposition comes to Maryborough and says that it is not happening fast enough. That is the most limp response, when he was around the table when we needed the police station, the hospital in Avoca and the hospital in Dunolly, which they tried to close — but we saved it. It is beyond belief, the views of the opposition tonight!

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — I am pleased on behalf of the National Party to make some comments in relation to the budget. I listened with great interest to the great passion displayed by the Honourable John McQuilten, and there are certainly a number of issues that I will pick up in my contribution, particularly issues of governments not doing anything. I hope Mr McQuilten might listen to those particular comments.

I shall briefly go through the economic status of the North Western Province, the electorate I represent with the Honourable Ron Best. Small business is rolling along and generally doing well in that particular province. However, they are under some pressure and there is no doubt had the government bitten the bullet and made a solid reduction in taxes it would have created a much-needed confidence boost to small business across North Western Province.

I move quickly to agriculture, which has a huge diversity throughout the province, and will touch on a number of issues in agriculture as I go through. There is no doubt the dairy industry is going along well at this time, and I would expect it to do so for many years to come. The pastoral industries in the province are going well, the cattle industry is strong, sheep products are coming back, lambs are good, and certainly wool is on the way back.

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. G. B. Ashman) — Order! There is far too much background noise in the chamber and it is making it extremely difficult to hear Mr Bishop. I would appreciate it if honourable members would keep the level of conversation down a few decibels.

Hon. B. W. BISHOP — The horticultural area has had excellent production this season, and I shall touch on a few of them. In the dried fruits area it is interesting that this year in the Sunraysia area we have more than doubled last year's crop, which is due to a good crop and certainly due to a lot of production going into dried fruits where previously it may have gone into the wine industry.

Stone fruits are going quite well with some good innovative marketing throughout the area. There has been a particularly good crop of table grapes in the Sunraysia area although there has been somewhat of an oversupply in the domestic market. It is a good case for a single desk to manage the supply as it overloads the domestic market because it can then be moved onto the export market. That has not quite occurred as well as it could have done. Certainly a lot of product is stored in cool stores around the area.

I would also like to comment on wine grapes throughout the wine grape growing area. I commend Mike Stone, the chief executive of the Victorian and Murray Valley Wine Grape Growers Council. He and his council have done an excellent job in a particularly difficult year in the wine grape industry. There have been extremely good crops and supply over and above the contracts that were written with the wineries and the growers. There has been real hardship for some growers in the wine grape industries. There is no doubt that wine grapes were put on the ground when the grapes did not have a home to go to. It is a very tough sorting-out period which I suspect will take two or three years to settle. I urge the industry to work cooperatively as it moves down that path.

It is excellent that the Sunraysia Rural Counselling Service operates in the area — and people involved with it have done an excellent job. Now they are writing and talking to all of the industries in the area, asking them to come forward with their views of what they would need to support their growers through particular downturns. Obviously all the industries are different and have different requirements. It is a visionary and forward-thinking move by the counselling service and I am sure they will get some excellent results from their surveys.

The grain industry has had a couple of good seasons over most of Victoria, which has been most welcome. They had a tough time in the 1990s but growers have now been able to pay off some debt and replace some of the tired machinery that was not able to be replaced during the 1990s. There have not been really good rains across the grain-growing area but certainly enough for a good deal of crop to go into the ground.

The building industry is going along well in North Western Province. Obviously it very competitive, but that typifies the building industries.

A couple of big industries are relatively new in North Western Province. One is mineral sands. It is getting a lot of media and the minister spoke about the mineral sands industry today. It is a big industry that has been carefully nurtured in the area. The people in it have worked their way slowly into the area. One mine is now operating fully and a number are about to start up. The standardisation of the rail from Mildura through to Portland is essential to gain access for mineral sands. The people in the industry wish to go into the port of Portland to utilise the deep water that is available there, and to pick up other mineral sands activity on the way down the railway line. I have made the point again and again in this house that it is absolutely essential that that line be upgraded so we can get the savings out of the upgrades on the lines, which could amount to \$3 to \$5 per tonne.

The other big opportunity that has emerged over the past six months or so in the Sunraysia area is through Enviromission Ltd which is looking to build a solar power unit in the area which has been costed at almost \$700 million and will have the capacity to power 200 000 homes. The company is finally about to settle on a site where it would like it to be built. It needs strong support from the state government. It may well be built in New South Wales at Tapio Station adjacent to Mildura, but if it is Victoria will share in the employment opportunities that will flow from such a huge construction and that will continue to flow when it is built. I urge the government to take positive steps in

relation to the solar power unit proposed to be built near Mildura.

There has been some criticism of the government in relation to its views on alternative electricity generation. It seems to have a total fix on wind power. It should be looking at all areas of electricity generation including wind and solar power and what we utilise today in many aspects of that power generation.

I thought about what the state budget has done for North Western Province. Most people in my electorate see it as a high-taxing budget with minimal relief for most businesses in the area. Most see it as an election budget aimed at the suburban metropolitan area. That is where the votes are. It certainly has not been aimed at the regional and rural areas.

On the other hand I congratulate the government on its funding of the second stage of the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline. It has put up \$77 million and I welcome that commitment. But let me set the record straight about Mr McQuilten's comments. The northern Mallee pipeline is almost complete — seven stages have been finished. It is a great joint effort between the commonwealth, the state government and the communities in that area. It is ridiculous to suggest that the federal government is stepping away from the issue.

Again I congratulate the government on its commitment which follows the practices of previous governments. However, the government played politics with the commonwealth government at every turn on this issue and that is not fair in relation to this great project that we in the Wimmera–Mallee area have an opportunity to share in. The government has played the game right out and the National Party and I object to the way the government played politics in this important process. Everyone was advised about the \$3.5 million that was to be put up by the state and federal governments, and the federal government advised that the money was there. It was okay. It was there for the detailed planning of this particular pipeline.

I am sure that the staged funding over 10 years will be available from the federal government provided that all of the design techniques are met and adhered to. I suspect that is what the state government will do even though they have played politics quite hard on this. The commonwealth government is quite entitled after it has put up \$3.5 million to say, 'We will see what is really needed out of this particular project'. It is quite sensible. What will the state government say if it comes out at more than \$77 million? Will they kick the tin then? I would like to get the answers out of the ministers then

and see how the politics get played in that particular situation. It could be more. Let us see what the Victorian government does if it costs more at the end of the planning process that we are looking forward to starting quite soon.

This is an extremely good project. I congratulate the steering committee for getting together. They had a tough task, but they did a wonderful job in convincing everyone that this was a good project. They put an enormous amount of professional effort into that and I congratulate the steering committee, particularly the chairman, Cr Stewart Petering. He did a marvellous job — never flinched and never took his eye off the ball.

It is also good that other groups, such as the Pipe Right Group, raised some very valid concerns about the process running up to getting the \$7 million to go through this final planning process. This particular group was concerned as to how environmental and recreation water would be treated as the pipeline process proceeded. They were very concerned about the future of the lakes and waterways in their area and also the cost of reticulating the stock and domestic water throughout the farms that it is proposed to pipe with this new process. All of those issues will be able to go into the final planning stage. They are good issues and they are issues that certainly need to be worked through.

When we talk about politics, I must chide the Victorian Farmers Federation a bit for its criticism of the commonwealth government. I suppose it is fair to say that members of that organisation were doing their job, but it would have been a little bit easier to wait for a day or two to see the real figures or the commitments that came from the federal government rather than jumping to conclusions and thinking that the money was not available.

In relation to that, I would like to congratulate very much the honourable member for Wimmera who has done a marvellous job with his federal colleague, the honourable member for Mallee, John Forrest, who has done a great job of convincing the commonwealth government of the worth of this project. They have left no stone unturned. They have led a deputation to Canberra to ensure everything was well known about this great project. They were instrumental in getting John Anderson and Mark Vaile down to Hamilton where members of the National Party had a meeting with them to ensure that they were fully briefed very early in the day in relation to that particular project. So everyone, including particularly those two gentlemen, has worked closely with both governments, and

particularly the steering committee, to ensure the resources were available for each stage of this excellent project.

I was intrigued by the Honourable John McQuilten's remarks when he was critical of suggestions that the government had been slow to put into place some of its views. Let me take you to the courthouse at Mildura, announced three budgets ago — a \$9 million project that has just started. I reckon it has just started because we kept the pressure on, so that is not what I would call a really quick result.

We have the old Mildura hospital site. If my memory serves me correctly it is about 17 acres and it is in a prime position. It is our understanding that the Sunraysia Community Health Centre would share some of that land. Certainly, Princes Court Homes, the aged care organisation — a very good organisation — will get some of the land as well. What do we do with the rest, we might ask the government. Will the Mildura Rural City Council be offered enough money from the government to be tempted to shift their offices down there? Is it a done deal? We do not know. We do hope that information comes forth. We would like to know about the heritage listings on the hospital to ensure that the community can partake in a consultative process and know all the details in relation to those particular areas. The reason I raise that is because it is costing an absolute fortune for the security surveillance of the old hospital site. So I would urge the government to make some crisp decisions, get on with the job and tidy up the decisions so these things can be done and done more quickly than they have been done in the past.

Let me take you to another slow start, we might say. I have talked about the standardisation and upgrading of the Mildura railway line. The government committed \$96 million to the standardisation process across Victoria. That is fine, but the fact of the matter is it said it would have it finished this year on the Mildura line. Now it has drifted out to the middle of 2003. That is not quite fair because a number of our businesses have invested in infrastructure believing that the much-publicised finalisation of this standardisation would have occurred in 2002. Now we find it is drifting out. Again, I make the point that they must upgrade the line at the same time. If we are to get the freight savings by heavier axle loading and higher wagon speed, that line must be upgraded as well as standardised. I have noticed that the north-west municipalities have noted there has been a hold-up there and have expressed concern as well.

What I would like to do now is put the government on notice about the irrigation infrastructure requirements in

upgrades throughout the Mildura area — the Sunraysia Rural Water Authority and the First Mildura Irrigation Trust. Those of us who represent that area were delighted when we heard there was a study going on which encompasses all of the relevant bodies which will look at the future needs for that area in relation to the infrastructure for irrigation. We wanted these answers some time ago. A good example is the Robinvale system which we believe is under risk because of its fragile state. Obviously there is some frustration in the area. I quote from the *Sunraysia Daily* of 24 May where the Robinvale irrigators are reported as being frustrated. An article states that they have:

... expressed frustration with Sunraysia Rural Water Authority which they claim has gagged grower input and withdrawn access to grower consultation on major decisions in regard to their irrigation district.

Robinvale spokesman Nick Muraca said in Mildura yesterday frustration had now led to the resignation of the Robinvale Water Users Committee chairman Darren Wilson.

...

Mr Muraca said the committee had expressed its concerns about lack of consultation to SRWA about a year ago.

...

Mr Muraca said the committee's biggest disappointment was that it was being excluded from talks about the badly needed upgrade of the Robinvale irrigation infrastructure.

'We are not even allowed to lobby for any infrastructure upgrade, but the SRWA don't seem to be doing that either'.

The Sunraysia Rural Water Authority is lobbying hard and is on the job, but that gives you some idea about the frustration of the people. They are good operators in the irrigation area but they are extremely concerned about the poor situation in relation to their irrigation infrastructure.

The government needs to do a couple of things very promptly. Firstly, they have a spare spot on the Sunraysia Rural Water Authority Board. That spot has been freed up by the resignation of Mr Ross Lake. Ross Lake has done a magnificent job in the community. He has been on I think 17 organisations throughout that area and has served each of them particularly well. He runs a very large fuel distribution business. I thank him for his community efforts over a number of years, and I really look forward to him coming back and continuing the good work he has done in the past. But Mr Lake's resignation from the Sunraysia Rural Water Authority Board has created an opportunity, and I call on the government to appoint a Robinvale person to that board. They missed their chance when they allocated positions on the board before. There are a number of good operators there, and I do not believe they would

be parochial at all. At least they would know the real issues of Robinvale which must in fact be addressed.

Might I step to the Deakin project. That is another budgetary issue for the state government. The Deakin project has the wrong title. It should never have been called a project. The Deakin philosophy, when it started, was — and I think still is — very clear: that you plan for the new and you look after the old. But it has been swallowed up by fear and innuendo and misinformation. The existing irrigators are expressing real concern for their future. That is fair enough. They are concerned that they could end up with the old tired system which is very much in need of an upgrade when the new and highly efficient developments power ahead and may well leave the tired old irrigation system behind.

I do not think they have any reason for fear or argument. It is great to have the debate in the area and it is good to get it out and have all the views expressed, but at the end of the day it is pretty simple: you want to plan well for the new development and ensure that the social and environmental planning issues are all covered. The market issues will resolve themselves. Early in Deakin's life when the views were expressed on that, people were talking about having 85 per cent of the new development in wine grapes. I am quite sure that that percentage would not be considered now. It would be half or less than that, I suspect, in those new developments. Of course, those new developments will slow down now since the heat has gone out of the market and there will be a much more measured view taken in respect of the new development. People are looking at new products — garlic, asparagus and various other horticultural products that can be grown in the good soil and water in that area.

The real issue is the old infrastructures there. Some say it is okay, but I do not accept that and neither does anyone who has thought about it much. We must get the results of the study that is under way and follow the precedent that South Australia and New South Wales have used for upgrading their irrigation infrastructure. They have used some very innovative financial systems to deliver world-class irrigation systems to the growers. South Australia used what is commonly known as the 40:40:20 system, where 40 per cent of the funds came from the federal government, 40 per cent from the state government and the other 20 per cent from the water authority in South Australia or the irrigators themselves. New South Wales used a different system but in the end the result was the same: the growers ended up owning and operating a very good system that had been upgraded. There is no point simply shifting the system over to the growers prior to it being

upgraded; they would probably never recover from that and that is not the way to do it, but the precedent is clearly there in South Australia and New South Wales to be studied and used.

There is nowhere near the renewal financial resource in the authorities to manage the full infrastructure upgrades that are required today. That is nobody's fault because the renewals were not part of the financial scene in the water authorities years ago. I suspect it is only in the last eight or nine years that those renewals have been put in place and the money is slowly building up, but you are probably looking at 100 years back when the renewals should have been in place. It is no-one's fault; that is where governments need to step in and utilise their horsepower to bring this irrigation infrastructure up to standard, and then, as they did in South Australia and New South Wales, move it over to grower ownership, which is the best way to go.

I again put the government on notice for a number of other issues related to the Sunraysia area, but I will conclude on one particular issue — the Nichols Point Primary School. I have spoken before in the house about this and asked when the new school there would be built. This process started off at least three years ago, which was when I requested a demographic study to ensure that the Sunraysia education system could cope with the future growth of the area. In April 2001 I asked the then Minister for Education when the new school would be built. The minister responded to me at that time that a preferred option had been agreed and that the acting regional director of the Loddon Campaspe Mallee region and the department's officers were preparing a submission to acquire land adjacent to the school site. This school is a really good school and has always had a good council, good principals and staff, and it is now severely overcrowded. While the government fiddles around deciding where and when the new school can be built and dithers with the figures, the students and staff are suffering under this pressure.

This is not the only school; there are other schools there on the thin line of overcrowding as well around the other areas of Mildura which, as is obviously well known to this house, is growing at a rapid rate. These school communities need funding to upgrade, refurbish and build new facilities such as Nichols Point Primary School in an effort to cope with the increased enrolment each year. The government has waxed lyrical about plummeting class sizes, increased staff and the wonderful facilities it has funded. I suggest the government take a look outside metropolitan Melbourne if it is looking for comparisons in relation to this issue. The Sunraysia community is booming. It is going ahead with a huge population increase and the

establishment of industry such as mineral sand. Exports are good and the city itself and its population are embracing the new move towards a promising future.

However, it is infrastructure projects such as decent schools that are not overcrowded and are adequately staffed that we need at the minute. The needs of Nichols Point Primary School were raised even before this government took office almost three years ago. I refer the house to a couple of paragraphs in the school profile:

Enrolment patterns at Nichols Point Primary School have shown a marked increase during the 1990s. Numbers have increased from 148 pupils in 1990 to 286 in 2000.

At the moment the school has 276 students, with the principal forced not to accept students who wish to enrol at this point in time.

I continue reading the school profile:

This has placed a great strain on facilities at the school. The school occupies only 0.911 of a hectare and is the smallest school site in Sunraysia. Accident data indicates that the size of the site has a significant impact on student safety ...

As stated before the Nichols Point Primary School occupies a site that is much too small for its student population. Negotiations are currently under way with the Department of Education to purchase land adjacent to the school to help expand the site. Future plans include the redevelopment of the school to cater to the higher numbers of students expected at the school in the future. It is expected that pressure will only increase on enrolments as a new housing subdivision has recently been opened in the Kings Billabong area with provision for 100 houses.

That is good news. I now refer to a media release issued by the honourable member for Mildura in the other place. When I asked questions about what was going on with the school, the honourable member for Mildura said in his media release dated 6 April 2001:

The first step has been taken to begin the process of establishing a new primary school at Nichols Point.

Member for Mildura Russell Savage today responded to claims by National Party MP Barry Bishop that the school was bursting at the seams, but the Victorian government was dragging its heels on a solution.

Mr Savage said the Department of Education, Employment and Training advised him in March it would support a proposal to acquire land adjacent to the school.

'This was the proposal put by the Nichols Point Primary School council, and this has now been endorsed by the department as the preferred option'.

'I understand the school is satisfied with the department's support of the land acquisition, and that this is seen as a definite first step in the right direction'.

Mr Savage said the government was aware of the overcrowding difficulties at the school and was responsive to the campaign to have the school facilities expanded and upgraded.

That is all good stuff, and that was more than a year ago. Surprise, surprise, when the budget papers were tabled Nichols Point Primary School was not on the list, a party to the land adjacent to the school which we understood the government was moving to purchase called me and asked what stage the process was at. I had to advise them that I did not know and that I had asked a question in Parliament but did not get an answer. I asked it again and I still have no idea. The people concerned then informed me that to the best of their knowledge no formal approach has been made at all to them and they want to move on in relation to the land. I am now making some inquiries on their behalf. I want to know where this issue and supposed quick action is going. This good school, good school council, good principal and staff and excellent students have been fiddled around for years by this government. Is this another courthouse in Mildura where three budgets later they start? Is this another example of the standardisation that looks as though it will drag badly? Is this another example of the passenger train? I wonder when that will come back. We will wait with bated breath. It will drag on and on.

I congratulate the Honourable Elaine Carbines, who showed some real interest in this issue. She requested information from me and I have forwarded the details to her. I thank her very much for her interest. In response to the Honourable John McQuilten's query about what the opposition and the National Party are on about, that is an excellent example of the slowness of the government to respond. That sets the record straight. The government is fortunate it has had good returns in relation to its revenue streams, which I understand are up 27 per cent. Gambling revenue is up, stamp duty is up and other growth revenue streams are still going well.

As we see it, this budget is gearing up for an early election, perhaps at the end of the year or next March at the latest. I do not think there is much in it for North Western Province, but I make the point that opportunities have been lost rather than gained with this budget. I conclude by again putting the government on notice that if it is still around the next time round, the big issues of irrigation infrastructure upgrades are right there and they must be positively addressed in the future.

Hon. D. G. HADDEN (Ballarat) — It gives me great pleasure to speak in support of the Bracks government's third budget. This budget is all about

Growing Victoria and sound financial management. It is important to note that this budget is investing in our future; it is about jobs and a stronger and caring community. It delivers record investment in education and innovation and it puts the proceeds of Victoria's strong economic performance over the past two years and the Growing Victoria Together plan to work.

I quote a line from the Premier, the Honourable Steve Bracks, during a conference speech in which he states:

Let me put it in very simple terms: for every day we have been in government, we have employed 3 extra nurses, 3 extra teachers, 1 extra police officer and invested \$3 million in schools, hospitals, community safety, transport and other essential infrastructure.

While it is important for local members like me to talk about particular budget initiatives for our electorates, it is also important to mention statewide investments that the state is making in education, innovation, transport, health and the business sector. The Treasurer noted in his budget speech in the other place a strong list of the budget initiatives, which included responsible and sound financial management, a growing economy, investing for our future with stronger communities, and promoting sustainable development and protecting the environment for the future of all Victorians, as well as building stronger and caring communities.

On a global point, this government is employing an extra 925 teachers over and above the 3000 teachers and staff the government has put back into the Victorian school system. It has allocated \$216 million for the construction and modernisation of Victorian schools and TAFE colleges and \$31 million to expand Victoria's free school bus service.

The budget also provides for a further 700 nurses to be put back into the system, which makes a total of 3700 new nurses recruited by the government in the important health care sector.

The budget also delivers \$114 million to preserving and protecting our rivers and waterways. The Linking Victoria section of the budget sees the government investing in roads and public transport to a total of \$806 million with the upgrading of public transport and roads across the state. That includes the very important Scoresby freeway, with a state contribution of \$445 million, and \$55 million for public transport in that corridor.

In relation to Ballarat Province, I shall go through the local initiatives that the budget has delivered: \$1.789 million for capital works upgrade for the Ararat Primary School; \$4 million for stage 1 of the Maryborough educational precinct; and \$77 million for

the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline, which will see approximately 18 000 kilometres of pipeline constructed. There is an allocation of \$1.4 million for the Ararat ambulance station, which has to be shared with health care; \$3 million for stage 2 of the Stawell District Hospital; a share of \$5 million for upgrades to the Beaufort and Smythesdale police stations; \$8 million allocation to the Maryborough and district health service aged care facility, which includes the Dunolly and Maryborough campuses; \$118 860 for a monitoring system and electronic beds for the Stawell regional health service; \$93 500 to the Maryborough District Health Service for bed replacement and accident and emergency equipment; \$60 700 for the Beaufort and Skipton Health Service; and most importantly, \$147 000 to an innovation project called Supporting Vulnerable Families to be auspiced by the Central Goldfields Shire.

Building and ground safety works funding has been allocated to three preschool kindergartens in Ararat: the Carey Street kindergarten with \$10 910; \$8000 to the Jack and Jill kindergarten; and \$2800 to the St Andrews kindergarten. As well, \$64 000 was allocated to the Corangamite regional library and \$94 000 to the Central Highlands regional library.

In the Ballarat region there has been allocated from this third Bracks government budget a share of \$5 million for an upgrade of the Gordon police station; \$1.426 million to the Napoleons Primary School for capital works; and \$944 000 to Buninyong Primary School for capital works. There is \$4.2 million for the relocation to Mount Helen of the Ballarat technology park and the State Revenue Office; and \$790 000 is allocated for the Supporting Vulnerable Families program as part of the Department of Human Services allocation for community services to Ballarat and district communities.

There is \$263 000 to the Ballarat Health Services for a suite of endoscope equipment; \$190 000 for increased bus services to Ballarat Transit; \$140,000 for increased bus services to the Ballarat and Buninyong areas; \$10 400 for Buninyong preschool for building and ground safety works; \$6500 for building and ground safety works to the Ballarat Fidelity Club kindergarten. \$5400 to Mount Clear kindergarten for ground and building safety works; \$4000 for York Street kindergarten; \$94 000 for the Central Highlands regional library; and \$15 000 for the Macedon Ranges Shire library. PINARC Support Services is an amazing organisation with very dedicated people who support physically and intellectually disabled children and young people in the Ballarat district, and it will receive \$7600.

There is also \$220 000 for the Tait and Morgan streets intersection, Sebastopol, and \$5000 for counselling services provided by Ballarat Lifeline, for which I have a great admiration and respect having served for 10 years as a volunteer counsellor for telephone crisis calls up until the mid-1990s. Lifeline Ballarat is an amazing organisation that is exactly that — it provides a lifeline for that region. As well, the budget will provide \$29 000 for amenities for the Mount Helen preschool; \$5300 to the Sebastopol kindergarten for building and ground safety works; \$17 700 for Midlands kindergarten amenities; and \$1400 for Wendouree preschool for its building and ground safety works.

The Kyneton to Faraday section of the Calder Highway will see \$70 million allocated by this budget. The house has heard, and no doubt will continue to hear, how important the Calder Highway is. It is a road of national importance and a vital transport and tourist link between Melbourne and Bendigo. That allocation of \$70 million will go towards the duplication of the Calder Highway by 2006. The government has also included in its budget initiatives \$25 million to complete the Karlsruhe section of the Calder Highway, which equates to Victoria's 50 per cent contribution to this important project.

As well, this budget will see \$676 000 allocated for capital works to the Coburn Primary School in the Melton area; \$4.5 million for a new building at the Gourlay Road Primary School in Melton East; \$19 000 for the Melton central preschool building and ground safety works; \$15 400 for the Melton Uniting kindergarten building and ground safety works; \$16 000 for the Wallace and District kindergarten for building and ground safety works; and \$280 000 for increased bus services in the Bacchus Marsh, Sydenham and Melton areas.

As well there has been a very generous allocation of a little over \$0.5 million to the Moorabool shire for the upgrade of local pools at Bacchus Marsh and Ballan under the government's Better Pools program. This government has changed the funding ratio of the program to allow regional and rural areas and shires a better opportunity to access government funding. Indeed, in this instance they have, and I commend the government and the Moorabool shire for its commitment and efforts in obtaining that funding for country people. I know only too well the importance of a local pool to a small township; it probably equates to the local football club. It is the pivotal area where people meet, and they are very possessive and parochial towards their local pools, and rightly so too.

Last week I had the opportunity of spending a very busy day with the Minister for Sport and Recreation in my electorate. That day started at 10 o'clock in the morning at Creswick to announce a \$40 000 funding allocation for four outdoor netball courts at the Doug Lindsay park recreation reserve at Creswick. That completes stage 2 of that project. As well, \$6270 was allocated for the resurfacing of the netball and tennis court at Newlyn community recreation reserve so that those courts will have an all-weather surface. Also, \$42 000 was allocated to and contributed by the state government for stages 1 and 2 of the Daylesford skate park project. Late in the afternoon we were back in Ballarat for the announcement of \$17 000 towards a 12-metre extension of the existing boat shed on Lake Wendouree for the Ballarat canoe club.

Those state government contributions were matched by community contributions. Probably more important is the physical input and exuberance of those local communities to the particular sporting facilities in their region, and how possessive they are of their sporting achievements in their districts. I commend each of those communities — Creswick, Newlyn, Daylesford and Ballarat — for their ongoing commitment to playing an active role in their communities in the important area of sport.

Another boost in the state budget was an extra \$28.3 million to preschools across the state. That included upgrades to more than 530 preschools throughout the state and new initiatives to help children with disabilities and special learning needs.

Recently I had the opportunity of supporting to a successful conclusion an integration aide for a young boy, the son of a family in my electorate. Three years ago he had a terrible accident when he was kicked in the head by a horse which was owned by his parents and which left him terribly disabled. This young boy is achieving within his limitations with the assistance of an integration aide at his school in a small community south of Ballarat. When I was faced with those heart-rending facts it was brought home to me loudly and clearly that children with disabilities and special needs need attention, and they are getting it under this budget and the Bracks government.

The Kirby preschool review undertaken by this government revealed that the previous Kennett government had cut funding to preschools by around 20 per cent, increased fees to parents by 120 per cent, and imposed an enormous organisational and financial burden on parents. This government's grants, ranging from \$1000 to \$180 000 at a total cost of \$5 million, will fund upgrades to 534 kindergartens across the

state. The budget will also deliver intensive support to 5000 children — which equates to approximately 8 per cent of preschool children — with a disability or special learning needs.

Another area of great interest to me is education. Last Thursday, during Education Week, I had the opportunity of attending a special dinner hosted by Ballarat High School to celebrate and showcase post-compulsory pathways in education and training in the Ballarat district. The aim of the dinner was to make the broader community aware of the importance of providing a range of post-compulsory pathways for young people in the age group 15 years to 19 years. I learnt all about the Victorian certificate of applied learning and was told how it began in term 1 of this year under this government and how the pilot projects have progressed in Ballarat at Damascus College and Sebastopol Secondary College. Those schools are part of 22 pilots across the state. The government has allocated \$48 million over the next four years to roll out the VCAL program across secondary and TAFE colleges around the state to ensure there will be around 220 sites in 2003.

That dinner event was held at the Bell Tower Inn in Ballarat and was developed and organised by secondary school students who are undertaking certificate III in vocational education and training (VET) hospitality and certificate II in VET office administration at Ballarat High School. The skills and knowledge developed through the running of the dinner contributed to their overall graded assessment in the Victorian certificate of education VET. In fact, the students were being assessed as they served us with our meals and attended us during the evening. The meal for 200-odd guests was cooked in the kitchen at the Bell Tower Inn. It was a tremendous effort by those young people and showed the strong partnership between the schools and industry in the Ballarat area, especially the huge support given to this project by the Bell Tower Inn in Ballarat. I thank them personally.

The third Bracks budget was received in the Ballarat area with acclaim. The Ballarat *Courier* of 9 May had nothing but praise for the initiatives for increased bus services in Ballarat, the gains for preschoolers, and the funding aid of \$790 000 for the vulnerable families program — and Child and Family Services Ballarat was very pleased with that budget announcement.

There was acclaim also in the Ballarat *Courier* of 8 May under the heading 'Widespread applause':

Teachers and welfare workers joined with unions and employers in applauding the Victorian government's latest budget ...

...

Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI) chief executive officer Neil Coulson said fiscal responsibility was what employers were looking for in the budget and it was what they got.

Treasurer John Brumby said his budget, with its \$522 million surplus, as financially responsible, foreshadowed continuing surpluses in coming years. VECCI was particularly pleased with the payroll tax cuts and Mr Coulson said he hoped further cuts were on the way.

The editorial in the *Courier* of 8 May also praised the third Bracks government budget. Under the heading 'Budget weds spending with fiscal caution' it noted the new police stations in the area and it also noted that by balancing spending with prudence the government had achieved its goal.

Another mention in the *Courier* was in an article in the 'Farmers weekly' section, which was written by young Luke Mullane. He had nothing but praise and reported:

Regional and rural Victoria got its fair slice of the budget pie on Tuesday with farm industry leaders reacting positively to its contents.

Mention was made of the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline project and the allocation of \$77 million over 10 years to that project; the fox tail bounty; and of course the \$101 million for the upgrade of the Royal Agricultural Society's showgrounds. That is a tremendous effort on behalf of the government because the Royal Melbourne Show brings the country to the city — it is an enduring link between the city and the country for the 10 days of each year in September. I commend the budget for 2002–03 to the house.

Hon. G. B. ASHMAN (Koonung) — There was some confusion as to whether Mr Atkinson was going to take the call or whether I was; maybe we could do a duet. I do not know that it has been done before, but it might be original. We both have something similar to say in relation to Koonung Province.

The budget could have provided a great deal of vision; it could have boosted confidence; it could have supported infrastructure programs; it could have supported a number of maintenance programs; and it could have supported a number of new initiatives. It really has missed the target on all counts. Instead it has gone off on a misguided spending splurge that is not particularly well targeted.

The government had a total operating expense last financial year of \$24.2 billion. In that amount it had a blow-out of \$1285 million, which was all unplanned and unbudgeted expenses. No business could operate

with that level of blow-out; no organisation can sustain that level of error within its budgeting process.

But what kept this government alive was the windfall taxation of \$1541 million: a windfall that has come from stamp duty, land tax and gaming revenue. Without these additional revenues, which are all windfall — and many of them are cyclical windfalls — the government would have been in substantial deficit. It has paid out additional sums in wages for police, health and the public service — all significantly above the originally budgeted estimates. In terms of wages, we believe it is about \$131 million above the budgeted amount for wages this year. Superannuation is up some \$542 million, and the special power payments are up \$118 million.

The government has had major blow-outs in other projects. We acknowledge the government inherited the Docklands project and the Federation Square project from the coalition government. Both of those projects were tightly budgeted, and within budget at the time of the change of government. We have now seen significant blow-outs in the cost of the Docklands project, and certainly in relation to the Federation Square project there have been very significant blow-outs, not only in the cost but in the delivery time for that project.

This government appears to have an inability to control costs. No business can function without effective cost control. One of the key challenges for this government over the next 12 months is to develop some level of cost control: it cannot rely forever on windfall profits coming from state tax revenues. If the economy slows in any way, shape or form, this government is in trouble, and the Victorian community will be faced with even higher taxation.

We know that Victorians are now paying some \$1500 a year each more than they were under the coalition government. The \$890 million blow-out in the budget is unexplained in these papers. There is some reference to wages and to a number of minor blow-outs in superannuation, but it is substantially unexplained.

No public sector company would be permitted to present an annual report that did not explain an \$890 million discrepancy in its numbers. The problem we have in this state is not quite the size of an Enron or an HIH, but the ministers have clearly got their eyes off the ball. If they were the directors of the company, they would clearly be before the shareholders, and the shareholders would be demanding explanations from each and every one of them. Indeed, if it were a publicly listed company, the ministers as directors

would be very quickly removed. They would have lost the confidence of the board. But because of the strong revenue streams that the government is seeing at the moment they have been able to hide from the public the malaise in their financial management.

Much of what we are seeing at the moment is reminiscent of that period in the late 1980s when the government spent without consideration and relied on borrowings. In this case it is relying on windfall revenue streams to keep it out of trouble. I note from the Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry March quarter this year that Victorian businesses expect the Australian economy to grow more strongly — that is, 45 per cent of business people believe the Australian economy will grow more strongly than last year. But when the same question is posed in relation to the Victorian economy, only 30 per cent suggest that the economy will grow more strongly this year than it did last year; the rest of the employers are saying that it will be the same or worse.

That is certainly a softening of business confidence in the state. Victoria has performed particularly well over the past five years, and certainly in the latter part of the Kennett period it was the crown jewel in terms of economic performance around this country. The government has made adjustments to some of the tax levels in the state, but when they are analysed they are superficial. The government has adjusted stamp duty but, nevertheless, stamp duty on business transactions for a business buying premises or relocating is still 5.5 per cent on the transfer. That adds to the cost of operating that business and impacts on jobs.

There are also additional Workcover premiums and minor adjustments to payroll tax. We acknowledge that altering rates and lifting the threshold is a plus, but it is not a plus when you take into account the growth in wages. Certainly what will now follow through into the government coffers is significantly more revenue as a direct result of payroll tax and land tax in this state.

Land tax is an insidious tax. The threshold on land tax has been lifted from \$125 000 to \$150 000, but if anyone conducts any type of survey of land values in the state over the past couple of years they will quickly come to realise that a \$25 000 increase in the threshold is more than eaten up by the increase in land values. It might be argued by the government that that is a profit to the property owner, but the reality is that it is not, it is a profit that cannot be realised. Much of this land tax is in property that is not traded on a regular basis. Indeed, the land tax is frequently picked up by the tenants of properties who have absolutely no control over those costs.

As I indicated, the payroll tax rate has been adjusted from 5.5 per cent back to 5.35 per cent and has been brought forward 12 months by the government from its original proposal. The threshold has gone from \$515 000 to \$550 000, but that alteration has done little more than accommodate the most recent wage rises and does not take into account wage increases that might occur over the next 12 months. Once again the government will reap greater financial benefit from payroll tax this coming year than it did the previous year.

As I have indicated, stamp duty over the past 12 months has been an absolute windfall for the government. We are all well aware of the property market, and most analysts would now agree that it is substantially overheated, but the growth in housing prices has pushed up the stamp duty value, and that additional stamp duty take has more than taken up the first home-owners grant. A rate of 6 per cent stamp duty on housing for everything over and above \$115 000 is outrageous! I understand that the average stamp duty paid on properties throughout Melbourne is now \$14 650, which leaves \$350 if you qualify for the \$15 000 first home owners grant. That is now reduced to \$10 000, or \$7000 if it is an existing property. You are still picking up a substantial part of that cost as a new property owner.

Stamp duty impacts across suburbs. There are certainly some variations, but the greater impact appears to be in those suburbs where people are buying their first homes. They are not transferring or upgrading their properties, and it is impacting on those people who can least afford to carry the cost. It is impacting on these people who are establishing families and setting up their lifestyles. They are the ones we should be trying to assist. The exemption that exists for properties below \$115 000 is an absolute nonsense! I defy anybody to find housing in Melbourne for \$115 000. You would be lucky to find a rabbit warren for \$115 000! Indeed, in most regional centres or modest-size country towns you would not find a property for that sort of money.

If the government were fair dinkum about supporting young people and new families, it would be looking at significantly increasing the threshold at which stamp duty is first paid. If it were increased to, say, \$175 000, that would be a clear demonstration by the government of being fair dinkum about supporting young families.

Stamp duty on motor vehicles is projected to be up significantly in the coming year, and is all part of the windfall to the government. It is spending at this higher level. There appears to be no anticipation that there could be a slowing in the economy, but the government

will continue to spend at the highest possible rate. One can only speculate that if the economy does slow the government will then go into deficit budgeting and go into borrowing, and when the coalition or Liberal government is returned we will again be faced with the disasters of 1992.

I turn to a couple of other grassroots issues. I commend the government for the employment of 800 new police but put to it that that is barely replacing those who are leaving the force. Indeed, in terms of crime prevention, there appears to have been no reduction in the crime rate across the state when all crime is taken into account. One might argue that these additional 800 police are more involved in traffic control than policing and could be revenue-raisers when we look at the additional activity with speed cameras and the number of police vehicles that appear to be on the road just for traffic control.

Without going into the specific details, a number of matters have been raised with me in recent weeks where police response times to an assault with a motor vehicle, a burglary in progress and drug dealing allegedly in progress have been totally inadequate. In the first case of an assault with a motor vehicle, the police response time was 6 hours and 15 minutes. That was within the central business district (CBD), and it is not acceptable. I was told that a traffic vehicle was operating within the CBD at the time but that it was tied up with road safety issues. Surely there is no more important an incident for officers to attend than an assault with a motor vehicle. It is not appropriate for the police to be out booking people for speeding or for minor traffic misdemeanours when an assault with a motor vehicle is taking place.

It took 2 hours and 20 minutes before a vehicle arrived on the scene of the drugs issue, and of course the offenders were well and truly away from the area. In the case of the burglary that was in progress out in Knox, it was 3 hours and 25 minutes before police arrived on the scene. Once again the felons were well and truly on their way. It strikes me that the excessive policing of our roads is not delivering the outcome that is desirable to the community. The community wants a reduction in the crime rate and an allocation of resources that will adequately respond to the requirements of the police.

At this early stage with effectively a zero tolerance on speed there is no evidence coming to the fore that suggests that it is producing the outcome that the government suggests that it will. Indeed, it is having the opposite effect in that it is creating a public resentment of police. I am advised by my local CIB officers that

when they attend a crime scene today they meet resistance from people there; they are not as cooperative with police as they once were.

The government continues to gain from gaming revenue. This year it is budgeting for a little over \$1.3 billion, notwithstanding the rhetoric about reducing dependence on gaming and bringing some of the gaming issues to the fore and dealing with some of the problems generated from gaming.

At a more local level, the budget is quite disappointing in that it does not produce a great number of local projects. When I look at the document *Growing the Whole State*, relating to the Victorian budget 2001–02, only nine projects are listed across Koonung Province. They are listed as being new service initiatives, but a number of them are not new. They are funding ongoing projects, or funding what most of us would call cyclical maintenance in a number of areas, and I will give a couple of examples. The Eastern Freeway extension is not new; it has been announced and has been on the record for a long time, but that is listed as a new initiative. The government talks about expansion of the Angliss Health Service and Maroondah Hospital. Once again that was announced some time ago; there is nothing new about the plans. Indeed, this is probably the fifth or sixth time they have been announced.

There is to be a modernisation of the library at the Mitcham Primary School. That is only a minor thing. One would have thought that that was just a routine upgrade, nothing particularly special. Certainly it is not a new initiative to paint the building and put in a new floor or roof. I can go through a number of other schools, including Heany Park Primary School and Lysterfield Primary School. The government talks about modernising facilities. They are not new initiatives they are what would be classed as routine maintenance. This is a scam.

Hon. J. M. Madden interjected.

Hon. G. B. ASHMAN — Well, Minister, we certainly did not. Indeed, if the minister understood the overcrowding that exists at Heany Park and Lysterfield primary schools, he would know the government is putting an extra five or six classrooms into each of those schools and making some provision to accommodate those kids in decent conditions. If the government was committed it would be prepared to make sure that each of those schools met what the government says is to be the average class size, because both of those schools have class sizes well above what the government says the average should be. This is a

new area; it is developing very rapidly. We need more resources out there.

If I can continue on in that same theme, if the residential development of the Waverley golf course proceeds there will be an additional 750 homes there, and that will require a new primary school to service that particular site. If the government does not get moving fairly quickly and secure a site for a new primary school out there, there will not be a site available. There is currently a site available on the corner of Gearon Avenue and Wellington Road. But on my latest information the government has not even looked at it, notwithstanding that it has been told on a number of occasions of the potential problems that it will have in finding a site if it does not secure this very quickly.

I have mentioned the Eastern Freeway; \$71 million is allocated for that in the budget. At the current rate of spending that means we are five years away from having that freeway completed. We know it is already behind schedule. We know that tenders for the long tunnel — and I understand the government is now committing itself to the long tunnel — have come in well over budget. The government might like to explain how it is going to fund that over-budget cost, and indeed why it is now going to take us five years to get to completion.

There is another feasibility study on the tram extension to Knox. I remind the government that a former honourable member for Wantirna, Carolyn Hirsh, in 1987 stood at the tram stop at the corner of Burwood Highway and Middleborough Road and announced that the tram would go to Knox in the term of the next government. This government is now saying the tramline will go as far as Vermont South some time in the next few years, after it has done another feasibility study. As local members we are not convinced that that is the best way to go with the tramline. We are not convinced that the patronage is there and that it is a cost-effective way of doing it. We would argue that an upgrade of the existing bus service might meet the demand today rather than fiddling around with another inquiry.

We have no funding for the Knox hospital. What we have is a patch-up program across the Angliss Health Services, the Maroondah Hospital, the Peter James Centre and the Box Hill Hospital. The residents of the eastern suburbs — and at the moment there are some 30 000 residents who travel to or near the central business district for medical services each year — deserve to get local treatment, and a tertiary hospital in

Knox would achieve that for them. It is what they deserve.

This government is ignoring the east as it always has done, and we will continue to protest until funding is provided to projects in the east. The Scoresby freeway has been on the drawing board since the 1960s. The government was dragged kicking and screaming into support for that project, but only after the federal government applied a great deal of pressure. This government is still procrastinating about matching the federal money. The purchase of the land for this project commenced back in the 1970s and, as I understand it, it is now almost all in government control. There is absolutely no reason to fiddle around. The project should be proceeded with forthwith. There have been a series of studies on it, and each of them is very supportive of the project.

We have shortfalls at Knox Community Health Service. It is a new service, but it is not meeting the demands of the area, which requires additional services in podiatry, dentistry and a number of other health areas. Once again the government should be prepared to commit another couple of million dollars to those services to provide a reasonable outcome for the people of the east.

In terms of road upgrades, there is nothing mentioned in this budget for roads across Knox or across Monash, in that part of Koonung, or across Whitehorse. There would be 20 projects that I could name without even attempting to go into any real detail.

There is no mention of the third railway line to service the Belgrave–Lilydale line. There is no decision in relation to the light rail to Rowville, or indeed a heavy rail; nor is there any mention of an increased bus service or public transport service to that area.

This budget has failed the people of the east. We believe that the nearly 1 million people who live in that eastern corridor deserve a great deal better regardless of what this government's view is of that area. It is quite clear to us that the government has chosen to abandon the east, and we demand from it a commitment to provide equal resources to the east.

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — In many ways this is a bit like a Chinese takeaway food budget. It is very satisfying on the first consumption, but a little later you start to look at some of the elements of it or assess your level of satisfaction with the budget and you find that it is left wanting, because this budget in many ways has many things to commend it. It is a populist budget. It contains a number of initiatives that certainly I would regard as valuable in terms of

initiatives within the community. I can say that fairly enthusiastically because this budget in many areas continues a number of projects that were initiated, at least in the planning stages, sometimes further into conceptual stages, and in some cases even to actual construction stages of projects that were started by the Kennett government. Clearly the government in this budget, as in the past couple of budgets, has also been able to build on the legacy of the Kennett government's economic management of this state.

The government has been able to take initiatives in some areas that I believe we would have taken had we been in government, given that we had reined in many of the financial extravagances of former Labor governments. So in many ways, as I said, this budget is perhaps a little difficult to criticise. It is a bit like a motherhood sort of budget or an apple pie budget. There are a lot of good things in this budget, but the fundamental issues of it for me are that budgets are only a tool. At the end of the day a budget is a tool whereby you implement government policy. When you look at some of the things that are in this budget, and many members of the opposition on this side have touched on these sorts of issues in the debate thus far, you find that really the budget is very dependent on increasing taxes in a range of areas — some where the government ought to show some embarrassment, given its wailings about particular areas of revenue and taxation income when it was in opposition. But it now depends on those areas.

In fact it has benefited greatly from the windfall gains of those areas of this budget and has used them to underpin overspending in the short term. More importantly, given that there have been some windfall profits in a number of taxation areas, what is of concern to me is the fact that the government has not used the opportunity of those funds to look toward the future and to invest much more in the future. Certainly it has invested in or allocated funds for a number of capital works projects, some of which are valuable projects for the community, and as my colleague the Honourable Gerald Ashman touched on, the Scoresby freeway is of particular significance to the eastern suburbs.

It is so interesting to see that the government has discovered the merits of that project when in fact all the members of my party have been arguing for that project for more than five years. When this government came to office it was vehemently opposed to that project and in fact opposed it in the election campaign that led to its election in 1999 and it has only subsequently discovered that the project has merit and economic benefit to the state of Victoria. Now it comes along and champions this project.

It was caught out financially, too, because it did not expect to have to allocate funds in this budget because it challenged the federal government fully expecting that the federal government would not commit to this project and therefore that it would not have to put its money on the table. But the federal government did indeed commit to the Scoresby freeway project at the urging of Liberal members of Parliament, both state and federal and this government has now had to put its money into the project as well. Clearly the government has met that commitment in the sense of making the financial allocation but, as my colleague the Honourable Gerald Ashman has intimated in his address tonight, what we find so often with the projects that are put in budgets and government announcements is that there is a very long delay in their actual implementation.

How many times have we heard about the Spencer Street railway station redevelopment? The Eastern Freeway project is now well beyond its timetable. There is a range of other projects including the government's much-vaunted fast rail projects which are well behind the types of schedules they had set for the start of construction of those projects and their delivery to the people to whom they were promised.

Our concern about the Scoresby freeway is that whilst there is a notional allocation of money to that project we are not at all convinced that the government yet has the very clear intention of commitment to that project that we would expect as members of Parliament in that area and which its residents demand. It will not be until we see the bulldozers on site starting that project in a genuine and real way — not simply out there for a publicity shot for the Premier of the day or the Minister for Transport of the day but actually starting to get that project under way — that we can start to say, 'Yes, this line item in the budget is a genuine commitment of the Labor government to an infrastructure project'.

In the context of this budget there has been some investment in capital projects and infrastructure of this state. But there has been less than I would have liked to see given the state of Victoria's finances at this time. Indeed, as we on this side of the house have indicated on a number of occasions, there has been a significant windfall in taxation revenue in several areas, particularly in stamp duties, conveyancing duties and land tax — even payroll tax — where there were supposed to have been concessions to the business community but the revenue take goes up. Certainly that has been so with gambling taxes — which a couple of other honourable members have touched on in their addresses and I do not wish to canvass areas that have already been discussed — and certainly with fines and

charges, particularly in regard to traffic policing. With that sort of money coming in, it would have been worth while, as I said, recognising that the budget is a tool rather than a policy in itself. In other words, the budget simply helps you implement your policy.

This budget might well have shown a lot more vision and looked at some other new projects, because most of the projects in this budget are ‘something borrowed, something blue’ and certainly ‘something old’, in the context that most of these projects are in fact Kennett government projects which this government is simply finally coming to realise the advantage and benefits of to Victorians. It is saying, ‘Yes, okay, perhaps we should proceed with those projects as well’.

There are many other projects necessary in this state from an infrastructure point of view that this government has not tackled and that I believe it should. There are also some social infrastructure issues in terms of some of the facilities that we need and Victorians expect to have available to them that this government has not necessarily shown the same commitment to funding.

It is interesting that the present government has criticised the Liberal Party over its approach to health funding. It is also interesting to look at the work the Liberal government did in the health area because it invested a great deal in new infrastructure in hospitals to bring their facilities up to a standard where they could deliver medicine with the facilities and technology available in that field today. Many of the hospitals in Victoria were built in the 1950s or before and in fact now, thanks to a lot of investment by the Liberal Kennett government, we have seen those health facilities substantially upgraded. Indeed, had we proceeded into office in 1999 — had we not been derailed by the Independents — the people of Victoria would have seen further investment in hospital facilities.

For instance, the Berwick hospital, in which my colleague the Honourable Neil Lucas has a great interest and of which he has been a champion for some years, is still languishing as a project under this government — a project that ought to have been delivered to the people of the fastest growing residential corridor in Australia. It needs that hospital and yet this government has not achieved that piece of infrastructure which is so vital to the community.

As my colleague the Honourable Gerald Ashman in Koonung Province has commented tonight in this debate, the Knox hospital is in exactly the same boat. That is a project that would have been proceeding now

had we been returned to government in 1999 and yet it is a project that this government does not even have on its drawing board. It does not even believe it is warranted in that part of Melbourne. It is a vital project for the people of the eastern suburbs. It is a project that will not impinge on the health services provided by the Maroondah Hospital, the William Angliss Hospital or indeed the Dandenong and Box Hill hospitals. It is a project that is justified in its own right in terms of delivering tertiary hospital services to the eastern suburbs, and yet it is a project that fails to interest this government — a vital infrastructure project.

We would have hoped the government may have turned its attention to this project in the budget. We also hoped the government would turn its attention to the Eastern Freeway extension. As a member of Parliament representing the eastern suburbs I noted that the honourable member for Mitcham in the other place issued a brochure extolling the virtues of the latest budget of the state government. I am interested, as are the residents of Mitcham, to understand where the showgrounds will be built in Mitcham. Of all projects outlined in the brochure, the one that caught my eye as being the most interesting and exciting was the \$100 million development of the showgrounds. I would have thought that was not in Mitcham but, nevertheless, perhaps the people living near the Blackburn Lake can look forward to a particularly unique project in the not-too-distant future being announced by the government.

Apart from the showgrounds project that took my attention in the brochure, the Eastern Freeway extension was mentioned as an ongoing commitment of the government for which I, my political colleagues and the residents of that area are grateful. While everything else was costed, that one project had an extraordinary space next to it in the dollar column. We already know that the government is over budget on this project; we already know that the government has failed to establish what it is going to do. It has failed to let the tenders on time to have the tunnel developed. My colleague the Honourable Gerard Ashman has received an assurance from the Minister for Transport that the government is committed to continuing with the tunnel on the Eastern Freeway, but the residents of my area want to know when it will be built and how it will be funded. The budget provision is inadequate for that project to be built in the short term and we are therefore concerned about the time frame involved.

There is also concern in terms of public transport issues. At the last election the government promised a third railway line between Blackburn and Mitcham as part of the Belgrave–Lilydale line. As yet, no progress

has been made, and as far as I can determine no funding has been allocated in the budget. Indeed, the government has also entertained the idea of and constantly mentioned in the press and in discussions with the City of Whitehorse councillors the fact that it is prepared to look at a proposal to underground the Belgrave-Lilydale railway line from just west of Middleborough Road through to east of Heatherdale Road, virtually coming into Ringwood.

This proposal was put by the City of Whitehorse, and it has had engineers examine the project as part of a road circulation solution and the elimination of a number of congested and even dangerous level crossings in the eastern suburbs. On a number of occasions the government has said, 'Yes, we have looked at that and have been doing some studies on it'. The government has yet to produce to me or to my colleagues when we have asked for it in this place any evidence that it has undertaken any feasibility study on that project. Indeed, there is no funding for the project in the budget.

There is funding of the project announced at the last election for the extension of the tramline from East Burwood. As my colleague the Honourable Gerard Ashman says, the project is to proceed only to Springvale Road and not into Knox as was promised. I asked in this place for details in this place of the feasibility studies, the patronage figures and cost estimates the government might have obtained for extending that project further. I indicated local members were concerned about how much subsidy there might be for the project and whether this was the highest priority project in the eastern suburbs corridor. Anyone living in the corridor will gladly tell the government if anyone actually came to talk to them — my colleagues and I are happy to convene such meetings to enable ministers to listen to our constituents — that the real concern about public transport is the lack of a north–south connection. Yet the government persists with this project, which goes back to the Kimer days. We have concerns about it because frankly we have not been shown any evidence to suggest it is a viable project and in the best interests of the people in our community.

I have raised this issue with the minister in this place and have not been given the courtesy of a reply to the query; something I am not surprised about because I do not believe he has the evidence. Certainly, on every occasion when I have asked about this issue — about four or five times in this place — the minister has failed to give me any evidence that any work has been done. Without the courtesy of any reply on this occasion, the minister rocketed out a press release on Tuesday, 21 May, which suggested that the Liberal Party was

totally opposed to the project. The minister quoted me out of context. I am relaxed about that, and even flattered about it, because he described me as a senior Liberal and he is probably the only person who would!

Hon. W. I. Smith interjected.

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON — That is probably true; it is age. With regard to the project the minister took me out of context, but he has not shown the project has any viability for the local area. I say to the minister and the government that what we need to be doing, rather than point scoring, is looking at what is best for the community in the long term. This is where I think the budget has failed. It fails to be visionary and to look to the future in the context of what will provide for the citizens of that area.

I raised a number of projects that I would like to see. One such project I have raised in the past is the railway line, or at the very least a light tramline running down the middle of the Scoresby freeway from Ringwood to Dandenong. That would provide a north–south public transport fixed rail route that would meet a number of activity centres that people are trying to get to and would provide a connection between two major heavy railway lines that I think would function much better if there were some connectivity in the public transport sector.

One of the reasons I am concerned about the Knox tramline is not whether it is a good project — I could be convinced if the minister has the figures — but whether it is the best use of the money to be spent in the eastern suburbs, given that all my constituents are saying they want a north–south transport system. A better project would be to put the tramline down Blackburn Road from the Blackburn railway station to Monash University. That would link up with the Glen Waverley railway line and provide a linkage with the existing East Burwood tramline that goes to Deakin University and ultimately into the city — if you have three days to spend — and to a range of key public facilities along Blackburn Road in that corridor, including business activities, residential corridors and major civic facilities such as hospitals, Monash University and arguably Deakin University on another trunk route.

That project would make a lot of sense and is something we should be talking about in the context of the eastern suburbs. If honourable members representing the eastern suburbs were to discuss this issue they might debate whether Blackburn Road is the right place to put such a tramline, but these are the issues that we ought to be discussing and that we ought to be investing in for the future.

My parliamentary colleague has also touched on road funding issues apart from the Scoresby and the Eastern freeways, and I totally agree with him, particularly on the lack of major road works provided for the City of Knox in this budget. That might change the way the government plays with the budget and has discussions with Vicroads and local government, but at this stage we have real concerns about the funding for major road projects in the area.

We also have some concerns about black spot funding. One project which I am assured has been funded by the government is a traffic signal installation at the junction of Cook Road and Cochrane Street with Whitehorse Road. It is a very dangerous area, and the Honourable Gerald Ashman and I have lobbied for some sort of treatment there. It is an area where there have been a lot of accidents — it is a particularly dangerous area and the residents are very concerned to see some sort of traffic installation there. It seems that everyone is happy with the idea and the government has accepted that it ought to be a project funded by the black spot program. The government might even have approved the funding, and yet there is no announcement of the funding and certainly no work on the ground. There constantly seems to be this gap between announcements and when things happen. This is a government that seems to dillydally on projects that are of great importance to the community.

In regard to schools in my area, I am pleased to see funding that is taking forward schools like Mitcham Primary School and Laburnum Primary School, both projects that were strongly supported by the Honourable Gerald Ashman, Liberal Party candidates in the area and me. Laburnum Primary School is a particularly interesting example because at the 1999 election the Liberal Party promised to provide the funding in the budget cycle immediately following the election to complete that school. The honourable member for Mitcham in another place jumped up and down and said the Labor Party would do the same. I dare say on that basis he was able to secure enough votes to get across the line at the last election, because it was a seat that was decided on a handful of votes. Yet when it came to meeting the funding commitment made before the election, the Labor government was found wanting. I am pleased to see that the project has now been funded, and the school community will also be pleased. It is a good school community and it will do well with the school. It is a large school and it will do well but, again, it is a project that has taken some time to deliver.

On Friday I will attend the opening, following the rebuilding after the fire, of Blackburn Lake Primary

School. Some honourable members who have knowledge of the school might be surprised at that, because the Blackburn Lake Primary School was burnt down in a fire prior to the 1999 election. It is now May 2002. Over an extended period the school community was told, ‘Oh, no. It will take time to rebuild the school because we have to go through all these programs’. I even got a letter from the then Minister for Education that said, and I paraphrase, that the reason the school was taking so long to build was because the Liberal Party did not budget for it. We are pretty clever, but we did not anticipate a fire and therefore did not include in the budget funding to rebuild Blackburn Lake Primary School. Over successive governments the practice has been that if a school is damaged by fire you get in and replace the facilities as quickly as possible. Yet it took over two years for the school to be rebuilt under this government.

I am also pleased that Glendale Primary School received funding after some very hard work from parents at that school. The parents at Antonio Park Primary School are in despair as they continue to be frustrated by government disinterest in their need for an upgrade to their school. It is another growing school in the electorate of Mitcham and of Koonung Province and one that the government does not have much interest in.

I do not want to cover ground that other honourable members have spoken about or no doubt will cover in the debate. However, I indicate that for residents moving into Koonung the government’s stamp duty policy and the rip-off that exists as a result of stamp duty levels in this state are a significant impediment to many young people, particularly those who are moving into and starting out their lives in Koonung Province after buying new properties.

We have many people who are buying in the Mitcham–Blackburn area, encouraged by its new proximity to the city as a result of the freeway development undertaken by the Kennett government. At the other end of the province of Koonung, in areas such as Rowville and Lysterfield, many people are moving into new homes and being hit with heavy stamp duty costs. Along with the rest of the Victorian community, these families are also being hit by \$1500 per person per year higher costs under this government compared to the time the Kennett government went out of office. The concern is that costs are about to go up again as local government looks to strike its rates at levels well above what we would expect would be prudent in this day and age. I would hope that the Minister for Local Government and the state government might cast an eye over some

of the local government budgets to make sure that they do not add imposts that are too difficult for families in particular to bear.

The historic judgment of governments in terms of their budgets and projects is very much about what they provide as an investment in the future. A lot of people might criticise what the Kennett government achieved in many areas, and I have heard many of the familiar catchcries during this debate and at different times in the place, but there is no doubt that the Kennett government made significant investment in infrastructure and the future of this state. I wish the current government would show the same interest in infrastructure for the future.

The Eastern Freeway project is proceeding at the eastern end. I dare say if the Kennett government had been re-elected we would also have been looking at the western end. We would have been looking at opportunities to open up the freeway and public transport systems to give greater accessibility to people throughout Victoria. It is important that the government continue to look at some of those sorts of projects as well.

Labor governments, both at state and municipal level, do not have a great history of investing in infrastructure. I certainly hope this government will continue to show interest in infrastructure because we need it to support business investment into the future and to support people's style of living and so forth. We face some real challenges in the not-too-distant future: the ageing of our population, the population explosion, and the demands of much of that population to settle in the Melbourne area rather than to look at regional Victoria, with all the problems that creates in terms of the expansion of suburbs and the demand for new facilities. Infrastructure is already built in middle and inner suburbs. There are some significant challenges there for the community and obviously for the government in meeting those sorts of demands.

It is important that this government start to look more at the future and at those sorts of issues, rather than simply coming up with populist positions that enable ministers such as the Minister for Sport and Recreation to race off here, there and everywhere giving out cheques and being happy about that, as he indicated at question time today. The government is not thinking about where that investment ought to be for the long-term benefit of Victorians; rather it is using the opportunity to butter up an electorate ahead of a state election. There is no doubt this budget is well primed for an election.

The last point I wish to make in the context of this debate, bearing in mind the time, is that this government prides itself on its business credentials, which is rather interesting because when we talk to people in the business community they are wary of this government. They do not believe it has learnt all its lessons. They do not believe this government's policies are necessarily addressing their needs.

Even where the government actually happens to get it right, the business community is aghast because along comes the government on the very next day and hits it over the head with something else that is absolutely stupid in trying to maintain and attract new investment to this state. I am encouraged to see a \$298 million investment in an innovation package, including research and development funding, but this government needs to be mindful of things such as the industrial manslaughter legislation, which will come before this house shortly, and its attitudes on Workcover and payroll costs.

The government made a lot of play about its business statement, but when you look at it you see the concessions are negligible. It was great public relations but contained no substance in terms of providing any material benefit to businesses to encourage them to get on and do their work, apart from areas such as export opportunities. I concede there were some programs that were continued — I say 'continued' because a lot of that business statement was not new stuff but a continuation of programs from the Kennett government years, and indeed some years before the Kennett government — such as export programs and so forth, and yes, they are of some benefit to business. There were a number of other things, such as payroll tax concessions, which really, if you did the sums, amounted to all smoke and mirrors with no material benefit to the business community at all.

In that context the government has to realise that the business community expects the government to deliver. It expects the government to honour its commitments. It is not interested in the smoke and mirrors stuff. Certainly in the context of continuing to attract investment to Australia and to the Victorian economy, we need to ensure that we continue to provide a total basket of policies that are beneficial to businesses, and not simply play around at the edges with incentive schemes and then come along with other policies that provide penalties to that same business community.

As I said, the budget has a lot to commend it. It contains some worthwhile initiatives. The government is extraordinarily fortunate that its increased spending has been covered by substantial increases in revenue,

particularly stamp duty and gambling taxes. As some of my colleagues on this side of the house have indicated, the government cannot expect to continue to receive the sorts of benefit or bounty of stamp duty revenue in particular. I notice the budget in fact projects a reduction in that area. A number of chickens will come home to roost, particularly in funding recurrent spending, which is growing rapidly under this government, if there is any reduction in any of those funds that at this point have simply been a bonus to the government.

The government needs to do better. In the context of my seat of Koonung there are a number of projects the government ought to have been addressing and ought to address in a time frame which is far more realistic than it has been prepared to do this time.

Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash) — I am pleased to speak on the 2002–03 budget. I start my contribution by quoting the Treasurer from page 3 of the booklet titled *Investing For Our Future*, which accompanied the budget papers:

The 2002–03 budget invests for our future. It invests in more jobs and stronger communities — with record investment in education and innovation driving new opportunities for all Victorians.

I dispute that comment. This is not so much a budget for all Victorians as a budget for an election. I will prove that. The budget papers deal with rural and regional areas and the outer eastern suburbs and ignore any funding for my seat of Monash Province, which is an inner suburban seat. Most of the allocations are to rural and regional Victoria: not that I have any problem with that, but it is a pity that it is at a cost to Monash Province.

They are all areas that are pitched towards the next election. During his contribution today Mr Best mentioned that we would have an election later this year. We are not the only ones who think this. Ewin Hannan reports in the *Age* of 8 May:

Labor's third budget represents an undisguised pitch at the suburban voters who stuck with Jeff Kennett at the last election. It is the biggest acknowledgment yet that the government knows it can't rely on the regions to secure a second term.

While rural and regional areas are tackled in the budget, Labor's focus has noticeably turned to winning over Melbourne's eastern and outer suburbs.

This is a blatant push at political pork barrelling, and it is intrinsic throughout the budget papers.

Since he brought it down a couple of weeks ago the Treasurer, Mr Brumby, has been spruiking this budget and talking about Victoria's growth right throughout the state. There are several flaws in this budget, and the papers are in fact there to disguise the reality. It is a clear indication that this government has begun to believe in the smoke and mirrors it is using; indeed, it is beginning to believe its own spin — a very dangerous pastime. I think that we will see what comes home to roost in this budget as it unfolds.

Last week the federal Treasurer, Peter Costello, brought down his seventh budget — an excellent document. In that budget he announced that the Australian average growth rate will be 3.75 per cent — which I must say he is to be commended for. In fact, Australia is seen to be one of the strongest sustainable growth economies in the whole of the Western World. The Victorian Treasurer is talking right throughout Victoria about how well Victoria is doing. He is speaking about a 3.5 per cent growth rate — but that is two percentage points below what the federal Treasurer is talking about for the national growth rate. This is nothing to be boasting about. Our growth rate is below that of the national average yet the Treasurer is talking it up as if it is something to be proud of. The ramifications and long-term implications of this are actually very serious and will impact on various sectors into the future on the very issues the government talks about — health, education, community services and, indeed, transport.

The most concerning aspect of this Bracks–Brumby budget is its lack of vision. It is boring and introverted. I would like to quote from an excellent article by the honourable member for Box Hill, the shadow Treasurer in the other place. He says in the *Age* on 8 May:

Nothing is being done to stop the erosion of our prosperity and competitiveness.

I think that encapsulates what is wrong with this budget. He goes on to say:

As in the 1980s, Labor paints a picture of a vibrant economy and a financially responsible Labor government. As in the 1980s, the reality is Labor living off tax windfalls as the good times roll, while the state's economic fundamentals run down.

This is what is underlying this budget. It has been outlined by many of the previous speakers on the Liberal side of this chamber, and it is encapsulated in the summary in the *Age* by the honourable member for Box Hill.

I would like to comment on how difficult these budget papers are to decipher. I refer to a comment made by the Honourable Bill Baxter last week when he said how difficult they were to read and wade through. Indeed,

earlier this evening the Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips spoke about the promise the Bracks government made about parallel reporting. There is no parallel reporting in this; it is extremely difficult to read and very difficult to wade through, and we are not the only ones who think this. Tim Colebatch in the *Age*, again on 8 May, says:

One final criticism: despite some improvements this year, the budget papers still exclude basic information such as historic data on revenues from specific taxes, and spending in broad areas such as hospitals or primary schools. It is time they were more daring and less prudent.

Lack of vision, boring and, indeed, something not to be repeated.

I will get back to the problem with Monash Province. What has this budget done for Monash? Very little. Can I remind the chamber that Monash Province takes in the lower house seats of Albert Park, Caulfield, Prahran and Malvern. I will just run through some of the issues that influence the people who live in Monash. According to the 1996 statistics, there were a lower number of home owners and a lower number of unemployed in Monash Province than the Victorian average. In terms of population movement, Monash Province was 54 per cent above the average. By income it is no. 7 in the state, which is in fact very good. But the age group is about no. 3 on the list of provinces, and the average age is 35. There is not much in this budget for the 35-year-olds, I can assure you.

As I mentioned before, we are unlikely to see a reduction in unemployment. Given that it is a diversified electorate, many aspects of the electorate have been left out of the budget.

I have a newspaper article that talks about the thrust of the schools, and I believe my colleague the Honourable Peter Katsambanis will talk about schools and go into greater detail, but only one school in Monash Province seems to get any sort of funding in a capital sense, and that is the primary school in Middle Park. I am thrilled that the Middle Park Primary School has received funding, and I shall talk about that school. It was established in 1887 and by 1903 the brick infants school building adjacent to the wooden main building was opened. In 1915 the double-storey main building was completed after removal of the original structure. The school's central school function ceased in 1968. Structurally, little change has occurred on site, apart from the placement of portable and relocatable buildings in recent years to augment accommodation capacity.

I am pleased to see that it has been given about \$1 million, but I must say that the Middle Park Primary School is just one of many primary schools that could fit exactly the same criteria. We have a lot of older style schools. They look very handsome buildings, and I commend the architects who built them in the first place because they have served many Victorian students well, but they are old and need significant work. It is a pity that the only one that was singled out was in Albert Park, and Albert Park is the only part of my electorate represented by a lower house Labor member, the Minister for Health, who obtained the funding. It is a pity that he did not work a little harder to get funds for other schools, because we did not see very much at all.

The schools issue was also commented on in various commentaries on the budget, and Genevieve Lally in the *Herald Sun* of 8 May reports:

South-eastern suburbs have won the lion's share of funding in a massive budget boost for transport, hospitals and schools.

She also goes on to say that targeting schools is great for votes in the outer eastern area. An article in the *Age* by Ewin Hannan says that the school's infrastructure funding into education and health in the outer areas is once again a ploy for votes for later in the year, and reports:

The budget commits an extra \$216 million to education infrastructure, with the funds to be spent on improvement to 110 schools and TAFE institutes, including eight new schools.

As I have just pointed out, Monash Province only gets funding for one of those 110 schools. There has been an increase in the outer suburbs. What has the budget done for families in Monash Province? Absolutely nothing. Families in the province are the big losers out of this budget. They are now paying at least \$1500 more in taxes per family per year, not only in stamp duty but also in motor vehicle taxes and insurance taxes.

Land tax, for example, has increased by 66 per cent, insurance tax by 49 per cent, and motor vehicle taxes by 17.4 per cent. I must comment on this insidious motorcycle tax which will affect so many people. We saw an effective rally outside Parliament, and I am certain we have not seen the end of such demonstrations. Police fines are up 240 per cent, an enormous increase. I shall speak later about policing within Monash Province. That 240 per cent is not being hypothecated towards Monash Province. Gambling taxes for families and for people who enjoy casual gambling in Monash Province are up by 31 per cent, which is a huge increase.

I want to talk about stamp duty in specific detail. In Monash Province we have a diversified area. Budget paper 3, page 393, table 3.4 refers to stamp duty on land transfers. For properties valued at between \$115 001 and \$870 000, stamp duty payable is \$2560 plus 6 per cent of the value in excess of \$115 000.

I did some calculations with some help and came up with real examples of what is happening in Monash Province. I shall read them into the record because it shows how much families and the people in my province are contributing to the huge blow-out in stamp duty, which is a windfall for the Treasurer.

An *Age* advertisement for a house for sale in Orange Grove, Caulfield North–St Kilda East refers to a nice spacious and fabulous future house which will bring in the vicinity of \$700 000 to \$750 000 at auction, and stamp duty on that property will be \$37 660. In Caulfield North on the same weekend a house in Wootton Grove was advertised for sale, and the advertisement reads:

The home or the land, it's your choice.

The price guide is about \$600 000. Stamp duty on that amount is \$31 660.

I refer to another advertisement for a house for sale in Stirling Avenue, Malvern East, another part of the electorate, at between \$340 000 and \$380 000: that will bring in stamp duty of \$16 060. In Malvern East again a house costing in the vicinity of \$270 000 to \$310 000 will bring \$11 860 in stamp duty. Again in Malvern East, another house will bring in stamp duty of \$18 460. An apartment in South Yarra will bring in stamp duty of \$14 857, and another small apartment in Prahran, worth in the vicinity of \$219 000, will bring \$8800 in stamp duty.

In those six examples in the weekend after the budget, the Treasurer would have picked up \$139 457 in stamp duty from the families of Monash Province. That is unacceptable, especially when Monash Province is not getting anything back for it. This is backed up by various commentaries at the time in the newspapers, and one by Bruce Brammall in the *Herald Sun* on 8 May, which states:

Sky-high stamp duty has delivered Premier Steve Bracks a \$1.1 billion spending bonus at home buyers' expense.

I have just given an example of some of the families from Monash Province who will have to pay stamp duty to the government. The article continues:

State government budget papers confirmed rising house prices provided a \$750 million windfall this year in property stamp duty.

That is a significant amount of money.

I turn to crime. The problem of crime is disappointing once again for Monash Province when one looks at the budget papers. The government has made a great deal of noise about increasing police numbers. We have the propaganda, the spin, the photographs of police graduating at the Waverley academy and everyone saluting and marching. We hear that there will be an increase of 800 police, but what we do not hear about and do not see clearly enough in statistics is the number of police who are leaving the police force. The young police who are wooed into the force as a career are not given sufficient training. For example, when they go to an area such as St Kilda they have to deal with drug-addicted people, or, as in a true case I heard of recently, they have to break into an apartment in a high-rise building where the person who owned the apartment had been dead for three days.

These are the examples the young constables in their first experience of hands-on policing are finding very difficult. I believe we should be broadening the course to incorporate training on the ground at grassroots level because many of these young people are leaving the force. It is not only that the young officers are finding that policing is not what they expected; it is that police now have to be jailers, man cells that are overcrowded because the prisons cannot cope and collect fines. As I mentioned earlier, there is a 240 per cent increase in fines collected by the police, who are starting to become resentful of the fact that their role has changed significantly and they are not being given any back-up, and many are leaving the force.

I would like to see those details discussed more readily. In a press release the shadow Minister for Police and Emergency Services says:

Police are increasingly becoming an important resource for the government as de facto tax collectors.

He continues:

Even more disturbingly, valuable police resources are still being tied up with police being forced to act as prison warders looking after prisoners in prison cells.

He goes on to say that on 30 November 2001 the Minister for Police and Emergency Services:

... stated that the crisis in police cells was 'under control' with only 90 prisoners in police cells.

As at 10 May there were 350 prisoners being held in police cells designed to hold only 120 prisoners. Surely this is not acceptable. I praise the police in Monash Province, particularly Chris Duthie from the St Kilda police who I know does a wonderful job under difficult circumstances.

The types of crimes increasingly being seen in the City of Monash are quite disturbing. The *Stonnington Leader* talks about some of the issues. It has a Neighbourhood Watch page every week and on 29 April some of the examples of crime were given:

Break-in, Prahran.

Prahran detectives have appealed to the public for assistance after the theft of between 40 or 50 bottles of wine worth about \$10 000 from a house in Commercial Road, Prahran.

It also noted a burglary in Prahran where more than \$10 000 worth of musical equipment was stolen. These are the types of burglaries that are happening.

An article by Glenn Morley in the *Stonnington Leader* entitled 'Lock up at home or pay the price' states:

Malvern police are embarking on a campaign to cut the rate of house burglaries in the eastern half of Stonnington.

The move follows concerns about the consistently high rate of houses being robbed in the region, ranging from two to 12 properties a day.

In the week from Monday, 15 April, Malvern detectives investigated 27 house burglaries.

I was most interested to read in the paper the other day about youth crime soaring. In an article in the *Herald Sun* of 26 May, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services is quoted as saying that the figures in a recently released report are the best in a decade. I am very disappointed that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services thinks that the figures are acceptable. The article states that:

Drug offences, burglaries, robberies, rapes and car thefts have fallen ...

That is all very well. But if we look at how that translates in Monash Province we once again see in the budget papers a dearth of additional policing and more resources for police. We need a far greater number of police. The report outlines that robbery in Port Phillip was up by 19 per cent and in Stonnington by 17 per cent. Car thefts in Glen Eira were up by 37 per cent and in Stonnington by 16 per cent. Drug trafficking in Port Phillip was up by 66 per cent.

It is all very well to hear about additional police and police stations in the outer eastern suburbs. Honourable

members heard a very passionate speech about Maryborough from Mr McQuilten but that is not Monash Province. I have given an indication tonight about how difficult it is in Monash Province and it should be looked at.

Very quickly because I am concerned about the time, transport has been much talked about tonight, particularly the \$22 million being spent on the Narre Warren–Cranbourne road and the \$70 million on the Calder Highway. But none of that money is going into Monash Province. Roads are collapsing and there is a whole range of other problems. The City of Port Phillip has been very vocal about traffic, but nothing is being done to address its issues. I would like to know where the funding is in the budget for Williamstown Road to alleviate the problems associated with the trucks going through to Webb Dock. The roads and traffic are a disgrace and Monash Province has been given no money to deal with it.

The Public Transport Users Group are hardly great friends of the Liberal Party but an article in the *Age* of 8 May states:

Public Transport Users Association secretary Vaughan Williams described budget priorities as 'unbalanced' and public transport measures as 'piecemeal'.

Rail, Tram and Bus Union state secretary Trevor Dobbyn said the public transport initiatives were disproportionately small compared to road funding.

As I outlined before, both young and old people use public transport in Monash Province and they will be disappointed to learn that it has not been enhanced.

I have spoken about the stamp duty issues in Monash Province. There is certainly a windfall from the sale of a property in Monash Province but it also has an enormous number of homeless people and the budget does absolutely nothing for them. The government continues to make a great deal about how it will address the issue of homelessness. The City of Port Phillip has the infrastructure of the Sacred Heart Mission and the Salvation Army drop-in centres and Prahran has the Prahran Mission and homeless people congregate to use their facilities. Argyle Street Housing, Hanover Street, the Salvation Army and the Sacred Heart Mission are all within Monash Province and deal with homeless people.

In its 2002–03 budget the Bracks government has cut by 3000 the number of people receiving the household establishment fund. This is extremely serious because once families cannot afford to live together, they drift into homelessness and end up in Monash Province looking for the excellent support given by those

agencies. The real homeless are the losers in the budget. It gives \$2.2 million a year to support the homeless. It is hard to calculate how many homeless people there are because a lot of people do not like to acknowledge their situation and there are a lot of undetected homeless people throughout Victoria, but as far as can be counted there are 17 800 homeless people.

Therefore, given that the budget is \$2.2 million per year, each one of those 17 800 homeless people will receive only \$123.60. This is less than one week's rent in a caravan park — hardly a budget that is going to deal with the homeless. I expect that as a result of this budget there will be an increase in the number of homeless people in Monash Province.

The environment is another great concern. I will not go into great detail of the budget, but indeed people are very concerned about the environment.

In summary, I would like to say that the people of Victoria deserve more.

Hon. W. R. Baxter interjected.

Hon. ANDREA COOTE — Thank you very much indeed, Mr Baxter. I will go on about the environment! I will talk about marine parks. I do have to say about marine parks that I was extremely disappointed to see the lack of funding for marine parks. How on earth this government believes it is going to manage these parks, I cannot imagine. There is not sufficient funding for the terrestrial parks; we have noxious weeds and feral animals. There is certainly not enough funding, and indeed it is very disappointing to see a lack of funding for marine parks.

A survey done recently by the Victorian National Parks Association looked at people who had environmental concerns, and found that Monash Province has an enormous number of people who are very concerned about the environment and environmental issues — second only to the people of East Yarra.

However, in summary, the people of Victoria deserve more. This budget is based on additional fines, additional taxes and really and truly is a great disappointment. There is no excitement, there is no vision for the future, and there is nothing to attract people to Victoria. Indeed, there is nothing for the people of Monash Province.

Debate adjourned for Hon. M. A. BIRRELL (East Yarra) on motion of Hon. Bill Forwood.

Debate adjourned until next day.

ENERGY LEGISLATION (FURTHER MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

Read first time on motion of Hon. C. C. BROAD (Minister for Energy and Resources).

MAGISTRATES' COURT (KOORI COURT) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

Read first time for Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) on motion of Hon. M. M. Gould.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Education Services) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Berwick hospital

Hon. N. B. LUCAS (Eumemmerring) — I wish to raise the matter of the new Berwick hospital with the Leader of the Government for the Minister for Health in the other place. The new Berwick hospital still has not been built, not a brick laid — to the chagrin of the local community, nothing has happened, except we have had a lot of promises: it was to be opened in 2002, now it is promised in 2004. But the news that has come out now is that the hospital itself is going to be downgraded in terms of what it will provide. Instead of having a full emergency department, it is going to have an emergency department only up to a certain level of emergency; serious emergencies will have to go somewhere else. So what is going to happen if somebody is seriously injured or has a very serious health problem and they roll up at the emergency department of the new Berwick hospital? They are going to be told, 'Sorry, you can't come in here'. What that means is a trip to a hospital with a full emergency department, the closest of which is at Dandenong. So it seems to me that we need a heliport at the new Berwick hospital!

I wish to raise with the minister the fact that people who are critically injured or have some other critical health problem really need to get quickly to the emergency department that is appropriate for their health problem.

If the emergency service at Berwick is going to be a downgraded, lower level service we will have to get these people quickly to the nearest hospital in Dandenong, or indeed to the city hospital emergency service departments — and that will obviously be through a helicopter service, with a heliport at the new hospital.

I have attended community meetings talking about the new hospital in Berwick and I have looked at the literature. I have not observed or heard of a heliport being provided, so I simply ask the minister to advise whether a heliport has been planned for the new Berwick hospital and, if not, would he please take action to ensure the provision of such a facility?

CELAS Youth Network

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA (Melbourne West) — My question is to the Minister for Education Services. In my electorate of Melbourne West the CELAS Youth Network has developed two projects that I believe meet the criteria for and deserve funding under the intergenerational mentoring project for the arts, or impart, which is a joint initiative that has been developed through the Department of Human Services, the positive ageing unit and the Office of Youth Affairs, and also has some assistance from Arts Victoria.

Impart has been developed to encourage older and more established artists in the community to work with younger emerging artists on art projects that focus on a mentoring relationship. The first of the CELAS projects will link an artist and teacher, Ms Vicki Clarke, with a young Spanish-speaking student to explore painting techniques.

The second project would link a singer and teacher, Renzo Bonicelli, with four young Spanish-speaking singers to learn vocal techniques and also to explore Latin music as well as Latin music culture, which they could then perform to the wider community.

I ask the minister to give these projects funding under Impart as I believe that they will be of benefit not only to the Spanish-speaking community but to the wider community generally.

Greyhound racing: industry code of practice

Hon. R. A. BEST (North Western) — The issue I wish to raise with the Leader of the Government tonight is for the attention of the Minister for Racing. It relates to an industry code of practice being written and potentially implemented by the Bureau of Animal Welfare.

The purpose of the code is to specify minimum standards for the accommodation, management and care that is appropriate for the physical and behavioural needs of greyhounds. The reason I raise this issue with the Minister for Racing is because of the commercial considerations and positive investment activity for the greyhound racing industry. Participants in the greyhound industry obtained the impression that certain areas of concern they had would be addressed prior to the release of the draft document for public comment. On 9 May this draft was released, much to the surprise of the industry.

There are major areas of concern. One is the size of racing kennels that are being proposed and others are the conditions of the sale of pups and issues such as the number of attendants required to assist in larger establishments, the materials used in the construction of kennels, the minimum standards for greyhound pen sizes at various stages of their life cycle, as well as issues relating to greyhound establishments.

Also there are issues relating to not distinguishing between the recognised life-cycle stages of the greyhounds. While we accept that there needs to be appropriate care and welfare for greyhounds, I am particularly concerned that there is a lack of understanding of the industry. One size does not fit all. In many cases greyhounds are better fed than the family members to which the greyhounds belong. These are not only pets but in some cases are considered to be the meal ticket.

On behalf of Diedre Lomas, who approached me along with representatives from the Bendigo greyhound racing industry, I call on the minister to apply a real dollop of commonsense to the suggestions of the Bureau of Animal Welfare, and I ask the Minister for Racing to hold urgent discussions with the Minister for Agriculture so that he can explain the difference between the sale of dogs as pets and those for racing and ensure that realistic measures are put in place to reflect the special circumstances of the greyhound racing industry.

Ministers: adjournment responses

Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash) — My question tonight is about lack of answers to my adjournment questions. Since the ministers are no longer here — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Your question is to which minister?

Hon. ANDREA COOTE — It is to several ministers. I am going to read them all out because it is

about questions that have been asked to which I still have had no answers. I have written to these ministers and have not had anything back. I think it shows that we really have no ministers in this house. They cannot take the questions back to their colleagues and we do not get any answers either. It is highly unsatisfactory.

On 20 March I asked a question of the Minister for Sport and Recreation for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services about police in Monash Province; on 26 March I asked a question of the Minister for Education Services for the Minister for Tourism on the *Polly Woodside*; on 27 March I asked a question of the Minister for Sport and Recreation for the Minister for Tourism about Heritage Victoria permit fees; on 19 April I asked of the Minister for Small Business for the Minister for Health about solarium and skin cancer risk; on 23 April I asked of the Minister for Small Business for the Minister for Planning about Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal appeals; and on 24 April I asked of the Minister for Education Services for the Premier about the Coode Island chemical storage. I have had no answers to any of these questions and I want to know when honourable members will get questions answered from this process.

Gas: heater maintenance

Hon. E. C. CARBINES (Geelong) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources about an issue arising from an article on page 11 of today's *Geelong Advertiser* entitled 'Gas heater threat to city homes' which states:

Poorly maintained gas heaters pose a health risk in thousands of Geelong homes.

Natural gas and LPG heaters have contributed to 9 of the 15 deaths in Victoria over the past four years and as winter approaches experts are urging locals to have their heaters serviced.

The article then reports a local Geelong gas technician as saying that:

... broken fans and cracks in the unit housing the pilot flame were two of the most common problems and could result in fumes or even fires.

He further said:

... most heaters had a shelf life of 20 to 24 years and it was vital to keep them well looked after.

He is further quoted as saying:

... anyone with a heater built in the 1970s should have it looked at this winter to prevent any problems.

Accordingly I ask the minister what steps the government has taken to ensure that gas consumers are aware of health and safety risks associated with old and poorly maintained gas heaters.

Rail: Charlton crossing

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — My question is directed to the Minister for Education Services for the attention of the Minister for Transport in the other place. I raise this issue on behalf of the Buloke Shire Council which has expressed concern about the operation of the railway crossing on the Calder Highway in Charlton. This crossing is on the northern side of Charlton and obviously carries a substantial amount of traffic. The council is aware of the safety and noise issue of this crossing and acknowledges the prolonged sounding of the crossing signal bells during the early hours of the morning.

However, the council is most concerned, given the neglected status of the operations at this crossing, that it will be only a matter of time before a second fatality occurs at this site. Members of the Buloke Shire Council believe this crossing warrants the urgent provision of a pedestrian crossing particularly as there are many homes on the northern side of the line within walking distance of the town centre. Can the minister give his assurance that funds will be made available to provide a much-needed, safe pedestrian crossing without delay?

Child care: regulations

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — I raise a matter with the Minister for Education Services for the Minister for Community Services in another place. My concern is to do with the children's services regulations of 1998. I have had considerable representation from parents, community houses and other organisations within my electorate about problems with the children's services regulations that prescribe the number of staff and staff ratios associated with children in child care. Honourable members will be aware that this issue has been discussed before and indeed provisions were made in the past, giving community houses some exemptions from these regulations in regard to child care. The regulations are now being reviewed and are likely to be toughened up.

The neighbourhood houses believe that is unfair because of the unique circumstances of their setting for child care. They are significant providers of child care, but they are providing it in settings that are obviously integrated rather than stand-alone centres. I would argue, and certainly they would argue, that their staff

ratios are therefore appropriate to the needs of the community houses. They are concerned that if they have to meet the requirements of the regulations and put on extra staff either they will have to close their child-care centres and have fewer people attending the neighbourhood houses or they will need to increase staff markedly at a substantial and unfair cost to parents.

Obviously a percentage of mothers at the community houses are doing courses at those houses. If there is a problem with too many children on a particular day there is always somebody else to lend a hand. Given the setting and that it is only occasional child care, it is appropriate that they have some continuing exemption. On behalf of the people who have made representations to me — and I am happy to make available some of the letters from the community houses, if required — I ask the minister to look at the provisions and try to continue some sort of exemption for neighbourhood houses.

Maribyrnong: aquatic centre

Hon. S. M. NGUYEN (Melbourne West) — The matter I raise is for the attention of the Minister for Sport and Recreation. I congratulate the minister and the Bracks government on its announcement that it will fund the Maribyrnong regional aquatic facility. Will the minister inform me as to his expectation on the conditions required by the City of Maribyrnong to ensure the community is consulted by the local council and that an equitable access policy is a major consideration of the future management of the new facility?

Water: authorities financial ratios

Hon. R. M. HALLAM (Western) — I ask the Minister for Education Services to direct a matter to the attention of the Minister for Environment and Conservation in the other place. I refer to a circular issued last February by the director of water sector services as the delegate for the minister, which outlines the specific information to be included by water authorities in their business plans and their financial statements. This includes a number of financial ratios. These ratios appear to be quite reasonable and pertinent, but with one interesting exception. Under the line item 'long-term financial viability' it states that the benchmark is '30 per cent to not more than 60 per cent'. My question relates to the 30 per cent gearing specified.

I want to know why a minimum is included in the directions, unless the government is expecting the authorities to get back into debt to that level or, what is

worse in my view, that it directs them to do so. I have a whole range of associated questions that I would want to raise in that context. I begin by seeking clarification as to why the bottom line benchmark is stipulated in the circular and why a 30 per cent minimum debt level is nominated.

Monash Medical Centre

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Eumemmerring) — I ask the Minister for Education Services to draw a matter to the attention of the Minister for Health in the other place. It follows the comments made by the Honourable Neil Lucas about the need for the provision of health services for the people of Eumemmerring Province.

Recently I had cause to deal with a constituent matter that related to the provision of radiotherapy services in my electorate. My particular constituent was seeking to get radiotherapy for his father, who was suffering from cancer. Unfortunately he experienced significant delays in gaining access to radiotherapy and it took some time to sort out the situation. While investigating the situation further it became apparent to me that Monash Medical Centre, which services my electorate, was ill equipped at that stage to provide the level of service required. I understand at the time it was treating about 1500 patients annually with radiotherapy whereas it had equipment to treat about 1000. It was working beyond its capacity and was stretched to the limit.

That situation was further exacerbated by the failure of the government to provide funding in last year's budget for two radiotherapy machines expected to be installed at the centre. As at the end of last year the two machines had still not been provided. From a reading of this year's budget there is still no funding for the additional two radiotherapy machines to go into the centre.

The Minister for Health has announced the opening of two radiotherapy centres in rural and regional Victoria in the last six to nine months. However, that does not serve the needs of my constituents. It is clear that the facilities that exist are inadequate for the demands on the services. I seek the minister's assistance to ensure funding is provided so that Monash Medical Centre can get the additional two radiotherapy machines it needs to service the needs of the people in south-east Melbourne.

Somerville Rise Primary School

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern) — I seek the assistance of the Minister for Education and training

in the other place, through the Minister for Education Services, on an issue that I have raised in this place regarding the safety of many hundreds of young students who during the course of the school year attend the Somerville Rise Primary School. This is a longstanding problem.

The school has more than 500 young students. Each school day the parents have to drop the children off and pick them up. Blacks Camp Road is the main road in Somerville on which the school is based. The lack of adequate parking space and the lack of safe drop-off and pick-up zones is a true health and safety issue. There is a significant amount of land immediately next to the school, which is the subject of and the possible place for the siting of a future secondary college. It is unquestionably a difficult situation.

Many parents have received parking tickets issued by the council, resulting in fines and other penalties. At this time of the year in particular, with a dark environment and rain, there is a real and obvious safety problem. The matter has not been addressed by either the council or the government. Sadly it is inevitable that we will have a tragedy there. I ask the government to take this issue seriously before we have a tragedy. The Somerville Rise Primary School parking and pick-up problem is a major issue in the community and will not go away. I seek the government's assistance for young people who deserve better.

Garfield Primary School

Hon. K. M. SMITH (South Eastern) — I direct a matter to the attention of the Minister for Education Services. Recently I had the great pleasure of visiting Garfield Primary School. In discussions with the people at the school, and as I wandered around the school, I saw the rather large satellite dish that had been installed by the department a number of years ago. I think the former education minister, Don Hayward, was originally the minister responsible for the updated system of information distribution to our schools.

When I asked them how much value they were getting from the system I was informed that the satellite dish was not working and that nobody in the town had expertise to fix it. The school did not have the money to fix it as it had other priorities; they had more important issues than the satellite dish. I take it that a number of programs are still being sent out on the satellite to the students. I understand personal development programs are able to be taken by teachers to save them having to travel many kilometres during school hours. I believe those programs are also transmitted by satellite.

I ask the minister to dip into her bottomless pit of money in education services to see if she can do something to assist this small school that is set in a beautiful location with great people — parents, kids and teachers — who contribute a great deal to their community. I ask the minister to do something about getting one of the experts she probably has somewhere in the department who does that type of work to go to Garfield, look at the satellite dish and see if it can be repaired so they can take advantage of what was a good system when it was put in place.

Responses

Hon. M. M. GOULD (Minister for Education Services) — The Honourable Neil Lucas raised a matter for the Minister for Health with respect to the Berwick hospital and a helipad. I will pass that on to the minister and ask him to respond in the usual manner.

The Honourable Kaye Darveniza raised a matter with me about funding for the CELAS youth network. I am happy to advise her of two projects she has referred to. One concerns Ms Clarke, who has over 30 years experience as a painter and a teacher at Victorian certificate of education level. A grant will be forwarded to her for 12 months for collaboration with CELAS. That grant will assist in paying studio and equipment costs in the Narre Warren area and amounts to \$3092. She also raised the issue of another project for linking another teacher, Renzo Bonicelli, with four young singers of Spanish-speaking background to learn vocal techniques and explore Latin American music cultures. I am happy to advise her that that project has been successful and will receive a grant of \$4072.

The Honourable Ron Best raised a matter for the Minister for Racing with respect to the greyhound industry. I will pass that on to the minister to respond in the usual manner.

The Honourable Andrea Coote raised a question with respect to answers to questions on notice. She would be aware that the government has been answering questions; I believe about 40-odd answers were tabled today. All of her concerns are with ministers in another place, and I can assure her that government members in this house are encouraging our colleagues in the other place to respond to those.

The Honourable Elaine Carbines raised a matter for the Minister for Energy and Resources with respect to informing residents, especially in her electorate but also generally, about the necessity of servicing gas heaters that are over 20 years old. I will pass that on to her to respond.

The Honourable Barry Bishop raised a matter for the Minister for Transport about the Charlton railway crossing. I will pass that on to the minister for him to respond.

The Honourable Bruce Atkinson raised a matter for the Minister for Community Services about the review of children's services regulations and about neighbourhood houses in particular. I will pass that on to the minister for her to respond in the usual manner.

The Honourable Sang Nguyen raised a matter for the Minister for Sport and Recreation with respect to the announcement of the Maribyrnong regional aquatic facility and seeking consultation with the community. I will pass that on to the minister to respond in the usual manner.

The Honourable Roger Hallam raised a matter for the Minister for Environment and Conservation with respect to water authorities and a circular that was sent out. I will pass that on to the minister and ask her to respond in the usual manner.

The Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips raised a matter for the Minister for Health regarding radiotherapy services in his electorate. I will pass that on to the minister to respond.

The Honourable Ron Bowden raised a matter about the parking space issues at the Somerville Rise Primary School, which is attended by 500 students. Part of that issue relates to road crossings, which are the responsibility of the Minister for Transport. I will pass that on to him and ask him to respond in the usual manner.

The Honourable Ken Smith raised a matter about the Garfield Primary School and the satellite dish that is not working. The government has given money to schools through the bridging the digital divide initiative, but he commented on the satellite dish not working and there not being people in the area who have the expertise to fix it. I will look into that and respond to him with respect to that issue.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 11.46 p.m.

