

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION**

**20 May 2003
(extract from Book 8)**

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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Tuesday, 20 May 2003

The **PRESIDENT** (Hon. M. M. Gould) took the chair at 2.02 p.m. and read the prayer.

ROYAL ASSENT

Message advising royal assent to:

13 May

Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability Act
Commonwealth Games Arrangements (Amendment) Act
Country Fire Authority (Volunteer Protection and Community Safety) Act
Federal Awards (Uniform System) Act
Major Events (Crowd Management) Act
Melbourne Cricket Ground (Amendment) Act
Murray-Darling Basin (Amendment) Act
Outworkers (Improved Protection) Act
Port Services (Port of Melbourne Reform) Act
Seafood Safety Act
Southern and Eastern Integrated Transport Authority Act
University Acts (Amendment) Act
Vocational Education and Training (TAFE Qualifications) Act

20 May

Firearms (Trafficking and Handgun Control) Act

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Local government: charges

Hon. R. DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Local Government. Local councils have voted in favour of inbuilt annual price rises on dozens of fees and fines and have said that they will lobby the state government to legislate the changes. My question is: will the minister support the Victorian ratepayers being hit with annual increases in council collected fees and fines just as the government has slugged every Victorian by indexing car registration, speeding fines and hundreds of other fees and charges?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) — As I am sure members opposite know fully well, fees and fines set by local government by-laws are matters for local government to determine. As I have explained to the house on numerous occasions, unlike the former Kennett government, this government is not in the business of dictating to local government in relation to

rates, and it is certainly not in the business of rate capping.

Some fees and fines are set by state government regulation but collected and retained by local government. For those types of fees and fines the procedure is that local government applies to the responsible minister to vary fee levels. I am not aware that there has been any such application in relation to any fees or charges. If as a result of decisions taken by local government there are such applications through local government representatives, then those applications will be considered on their merits. But I am not aware that any such applications have been made at this point.

In relation to the overall question of responsibility, clearly, elected local government representatives are accountable to their local communities in the same way that the state government is responsible for decisions which are made in relation to fees and charges, and that is how it should be. So at this point there is no matter before the state government to consider. The overwhelming number of fees and charges collected by local government are as a result of by-laws, which are matters purely for local government to determine.

Insurance: reform

Hon. J. H. EREN (Geelong) — I refer my question to the Minister for Finance. Will the minister advise the house of the insurance reforms announced today and explain how they balance the rights of people injured through negligence and the needs of businesses, individuals and community groups to have access to insurance?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I thank Mr Eren for his question and his ongoing interest in what has been a very significant and serious issue in Victoria — the affordability and availability of insurance. As I have previously advised this house, in my 15 months as minister, the Department of Treasury and Finance has dealt with individual groups and organisations that have come forward with insurance issues on more than 400 occasions. So the government has been conscious of this as a problem. It is also conscious that it needs to take action to help these groups and business in general on the insurance issue. The government has very carefully and cautiously watched what is happening in the community and in other jurisdictions. It has engaged with its own community so that it would get the balance and the decisions right.

Today the government has announced further insurance reform — a threshold for general damages and changes to the statute of limitations. These reforms balance the rights of people to have access to the courts to sue for personal injuries and the need for access to affordable insurance. The reforms will encourage new providers into the insurance market in Victoria and ease some of the cost pressures which to a large extent have led to these increases in premiums. The Premier will introduce legislation in this parliamentary sitting for a threshold on general damages.

General damages, which are sometimes called damages for pain and suffering, will not be awarded unless an injury has been assessed at greater than 5 per cent impairment. In all cases complainants will still be able to sue for economic loss, including loss of wages and all medical expenses. So in all cases claimants will still have access to the courts for the tort of negligence. The assessment will be made according to the American Medical Association guidelines that are already used by the Transport Accident Commission and Workcover in this state. The reforms will provide greater certainty for providers of professional indemnity, medical indemnity and public liability insurance. This is good news for business, community groups, professions and for Victoria.

Currently small claims are often met directly by small businesses, professions and community groups as insurance companies gradually increase the amount that a policyholder has to pay before insurance can come in to help. Our threshold will result in reductions in claim costs for insurers, and this reduction should be reflected in premium costs. We believe this will lead to increased availability of public liability insurance, an important thing in Victoria as a result of the threshold.

The Premier has also announced today changes to the statute of limitations. This is something I hope Mr David Davis will applaud the government for. The period for adults making claims for personal injuries will be reduced from six years to three years from the date of discoverability. The limitation period for minors — that is, people aged under 18 years — will be six years from the date of discoverability of the injury. This will encourage claims to be made earlier and provide greater certainty for defendants and insurers. These reforms will apply to all people who sustain injury after today, but if a person was injured before today but has not yet brought proceedings to court, the existing law will continue to apply provided that proceedings commence before 1 October this year.

The government believes these reforms will make Victoria a more attractive market for insurers to operate

in. They strike an important balance built on other measures which are already in place to help ease the current difficulties in obtaining insurance. Mr David Davis, like a bull in a china shop, criticises the government for what he says is being slow on this. I would say to Mr David Davis that insurance affects people's lives; changing the tort law affects people's lives; any government that went like a bull in a china shop, going through willy-nilly on the latest whim, would deserve to be condemned. This government has acted responsibly, cautiously and in response to the needs of Victoria in a prudent way that balances human responsibilities and economic reality.

Commonwealth Games: funding

Hon. D. KOCH (Western) — My question without notice is for the Minister for Commonwealth Games. Has the state government made a formal submission to the federal government for Commonwealth Games funding?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Commonwealth Games) — I thank the member for his interest and I thank him for his question as well. The member would be aware that the government of Victoria is looking for extensive support from the federal government in relation to the Commonwealth Games. We are working very closely with it in this matter including as recently as the Three Years Celebration which was attended by the Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips from the other side of the chamber, who will appreciate the level of in-principle support that the federal government has lent or is lending to the Commonwealth Games.

But the proof will be in the pudding as to how much it is prepared to deliver to the games, and we look forward to seeing a contribution that is at least pro rata of that made to the Olympic Games in Sydney. No doubt there will be significant arm wrestling on what that figure is likely to be. We have agreement in principle from the minister. At a recent meeting the federal Minister for Arts and Sport, Dr Rod Kemp, agreed in principle to funding the Commonwealth Games, but as I have mentioned, no doubt there will be extensive discussion and arm wrestling over what the quantity of that support is to be.

I look forward to that taking place, but in terms of any submission we are working closely at an officer level to make sure that the commonwealth obtains the value that it seeks from its level of investment in the Commonwealth Games here in Victoria.

Supplementary question

Hon. D. KOCH (Western) — Did the Premier mislead the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee with his submission that the Minister for Commonwealth Games sent a one-page, four-paragraph letter on 28 February to Senator Kemp which makes no funding request? Did this constitute a formal submission to the federal government?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Commonwealth Games) — We have had significant correspondence with the federal minister about these issues. He has given in-principle support to the level of contribution, and I know that the submissions we have made to the federal government have been cautiously supportive of what we seek. My understanding of what that submission is seen to be from the point of view of the federal minister's position is that the federal government is in favour of the notion of supporting the Commonwealth Games at a ministerial level and an officer level. I suggest that you might seek to ask the federal minister what he deems to be — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister's time has expired.

Public liability: government assistance

Mr SMITH (Chelsea) — My question is for the Minister for Finance. Will the minister advise the house how the Bracks government has equipped groups in the community to cope with the crisis in liability insurance which occurred after the collapse of HIH and prior to today's announcement?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I thank Mr Smith for his question and his ongoing interest in finding solutions to problems with insurance on a hands-on basis particularly in his own constituency. Prior to today's decisive action by the Bracks government in relation to insurance reform, we as a government have provided specifically targeted assistance on public liability insurance issues in a range of circumstances. Earlier in answer to a question in the house I referred to 400 of them. For instance, the government has provided a rescue package for heritage and tourist rail operators extending until 30 December 2003. Without this government assistance heritage and tourist rail operators such as the Seymour railway heritage centre, which my good friend Mr Mitchell and his friend in the other place the honourable member for Seymour, Mr Ben Hardman, have worked very hard for, would have ceased.

In addition, the Victorian government has worked with Bicycle Victoria to assist the implementation and development of insurance arrangements for bicycle user groups in this state. Senior Treasury officials have attended an information session run by Bicycle Victoria and have provided assistance with the current status and implications of legislation as well as giving advice and answering questions. They also had discussions that enabled them to liaise in a lot of areas, to help to get insurance and to put the risk mitigation processes in place.

A number of people have written to me regarding insurance issues facing waste transfer stations, which are an important recycling issue in a number of members' electorates. At my request the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) officers consulted with a large number of stakeholders including the Waste Management Association of Australia, the Waste Management Association of Victoria, Ecorecycle Victoria, the Municipal Association of Victoria, the Shire of Yarra Ranges and Jardine Lloyd Thompson. A number of my colleagues, including Mr Mitchell and Ms Buckingham and others, have been seeking action on these areas over a period of time.

The issue is being investigated at both the national and state levels. We ensured that all relevant groups worked together to progress a comprehensive industry package to assist. As was raised in the house recently, we have also extended the Victorian Tourism Operators Association scheme, which provides indemnity for high-risk adventure tourism activities for which commercial cover was unavailable. DTF has been working closely with the VTOA and other relevant groups to develop options for medium to long-term solutions.

In addition, the government has provided through DTF a range of assistance, such as referrals to specialist insurance brokers and technical advice to a number of groups. The types of groups assisted in this way make an impressive list. They include fun runs, wildlife parks, Kiwanis, Scots of Victoria, the Russian Women's Association, Heartbeat Victoria, the Bacchus Marsh Motocross Club, the Maryborough Carers Support Group, the Gippsland Guardrail and Safety Platforms, walking clubs, the Southern Hot Rod Club, the Chios Brotherhood of Melbourne, the Stratford Fitness Club, the Cobden Angling Club, the Melbourne Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Cooperative, the Dandenong Benevolent Society — a great institution chaired by Jan Wilson, my predecessor as the member for Dandenong North, who continues in retirement to do this wonderful community work —

and several other community festivals, including the Thorpdale Potato Festival.

The honourable member for Narracan in the other place, Ian Maxfield, has been at me ever since I have been in Parliament about the Thorpdale Potato Festival. He took me to Thorpdale where I met with the committee and undertook to go there this year, but unfortunately I was on government business in Swan Hill that day. But I have undertaken that next March I will be at the Thorpdale Potato Festival. When I was a student I competed in events carrying bags of potatoes. I loaded potatoes in Thorpdale — although I probably would not be able to carry bags of potatoes anymore — and I am sure Mr Hall and Mr Phil Davis will join me at the potato festival next year, along with the honourable member for Narracan in another place, Ian Maxfield.

We will enter the bag-carrying race and participate in what is a grand community festival that has not been able to function because of the lack of insurance. But through the packages announced today and the action taken by the government over the past two years we are confident we will be able to assist groups like the Thorpdale Potato Festival to continue operating.

As I said, to date we have assisted more than the 400 groups with our second substantive legislative package to deal with insurance in this state. I invite all members to come to the Thorpdale Potato Festival next year and have a good time.

Public liability: government assistance

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — My question directed to the Minister for Sport and Recreation also concerns public liability insurance, but this time for organisations that have been funded to deliver government sport and recreation programs, in particular organisations like regional sports assemblies and older adult recreation networks. Although the Minister for Finance mentioned something like 400, he did not specifically mention the fact that these organisations have also been subjected to some assistance by the government to arrange a public liability insurance scheme. Post 30 June the current scheme expires. What plans has the Minister for Sport and Recreation to further assist organisations like regional sports assemblies and the older adult recreation networks to extend the fine work they do in their communities?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I thank the member and welcome his interest in issues of regional sports assemblies and the older adult recreation networks. Members of the house

may not be aware that those organisations provide strategic work particularly in rural communities to try to increase participation or facilitate the needs of sporting organisations especially from the point of view of regional sports assemblies and older adults by trying to get them more engaged and more active in their own community organisations.

I understand the way their insurance schemes operate is that because they provide services on behalf of and in partnership with government they are covered by the same insurance by which the department is covered, which is through the Victorian Managed Insurance Authority.

That insurance will continue to exist up until 30 June. I also understand that funding arrangements and agreements with those organisations are in the process of or about to enter into negotiations to further advance funding for those organisations well into the future. Once those agreements are finalised — I expect they will be finalised over the next few weeks, certainly before 30 June — the insurance for those organisations will continue as it has to this day. They can feel confident that they will not find any difficulty in relation to insurance, because their insurance arrangements will be as they have been up until 30 June.

To indicate how supportive we are of these organisations, we have also indicated that we are contributing an additional \$150 000 a year to the regional sports assemblies. We are looking forward to seeing those assemblies and the older adults recreation networks work strategically so that we can see increased levels of participation and physical activity across the broader community, particularly in regional Victoria where they have a significant focus.

In recent years the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation has supported these organisations, and that has been evidenced by having these providers deliver the participation and community sport and recreation scheme. I appreciate that there are members from both sides of the chamber on the board of Vichealth, and I congratulate Vichealth for its continued support for the regional sports assemblies, in particular to see that we provide additional opportunities and support to facilitate increased participation levels in sport and recreation and physical activity at a community level, especially in regional Victoria.

Bendigo: tornado damage

Hon. J. G. HILTON (Western Port) — I refer my question to the Minister for Energy Industries. Can the

minister report to the house on the restoration of power to the citizens of Greater Bendigo following the tornado on Sunday, 18 May?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Energy Industries) — At approximately 6.00 p.m. on Sunday, 18 May, a tornado tore across Bendigo's northern suburbs causing damage to homes and businesses. It also hit Powercor Australia's Eaglehawk zone substation, resulting in the loss of electricity supply to 18 000 addresses in northern Bendigo. Both of the 66 kilovolt feeders into the zone substation were covered in debris, including trees and roofing iron, and there was widespread damage to five of the zone substation's eight 22 kilovolt feeders.

The tornado also brought down power lines in scenes described by some residents as 'total devastation' and affected power supplies across a wide area including Bendigo, Eaglehawk, Epsom, White Hills, Bagshot, Elmore, Goornong, Huntly, Bridgewater, Calivil, Dinglee, Inglewood, Newbridge, Raywood, Serpentine, Woodvale, Marong, Maiden Gulley, Long Gulley, California Gulley and Myers Flat. I mention all of those places so that members get a feel for just how widespread the devastation was.

Despite the devastation and difficult conditions, electricity supply began to be restored at 7.30 p.m., and by midnight on Sunday more than 16 000 customers had their electricity supply restored. This achievement was due to Powercor's crews and contractors, who came from as far afield as Charlton and Shepparton, the teamwork of Victoria's emergency services, and of course the assistance of the local council. I understand that the remaining customers were restored to supply gradually throughout the day on Monday, 19 May.

While there is still a huge clean-up task ahead, I congratulate the staff involved in the restoration of electricity supply. It really was a team effort. I join my ministerial colleagues the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Minister for Community Services in acknowledging the magnificent job of Victoria's emergency services personnel, in particular in clearing a way for power to be restored to all of those homes and businesses.

Finally I want the house to note that under the regulatory framework established by the Bracks government the distribution businesses have incentives built into their licence conditions, and those incentives are that they act quickly to restore supply to customers. Again it indicates that those incentives are working effectively for the people of Victoria.

The combination of these regulatory incentives and the requirements of legislation, which is overseen by the office of the Chief Electrical Inspector, have ensured on this occasion the safe return of supply, and they are clearly working to produce the best outcomes for the people of Victoria and for consumers of electricity.

Questions interrupted.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

The PRESIDENT — Order! Before I call the next speaker I wish to acknowledge in the gallery the Honourable H. G. Sirisena, MP, Chief Minister of the Southern Province of Sri Lanka, and welcome him to our chamber.

Questions resumed.

State insurance office: government policy

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern) — My question is to the Minister for Finance, John Lenders. At the state Labor conference last weekend, after the punch-up, the national secretary of the Australian Workers Union, Mr Bill Shorten, called on the state government to consider setting up a state-run insurance office, and I ask: has the government given any consideration to establishing a state-run insurance office as advocated by Mr Shorten?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I thank Mr Bowden for his question. While I actually sat through two full days of the Labor Party conference, studiously watching the policy debate, I obviously missed the part of the conference Mr Bowden saw, in the form of a resolution to set up a state insurance office. I am surprised at that because I was paying some attention to the conference and particularly to issues regarding insurance.

However, all I can say to Mr Bowden is that there was a state insurance office in this state, which was sold off some time ago. I will not go back down that path because we are trying to look to the future rather than dwelling on the past, but the best way for us as a state to deal with issues of insurance is for us to, at various times, examine every option available.

One of the issues for state insurance offices, which is a peril for government, is that unless government has the policy parameters right in the insurance industry a state insurance office just does not miraculously fix problems that may be there. A state insurance office just deals with insurance like any other insurer will, obviously with a lot of positive aspects as we have seen

in some areas where the state has a very serious role, such as transport accident and workers compensation.

Certainly the concept of setting up a state insurance office as a way of dealing with every insurance problem is not detailed public policy because some of the issues that the government has addressed today — statute of limitations thresholds and those types of issues — are not fixed by simply having a state insurance office. They are crucial issues that need to be addressed in the legislative sense, and that is what the government is doing.

On the particular issue of whether a state insurance office is on the agenda, if it was debated at the Labor Party state conference I certainly missed it. I would be intrigued, Mr Bowden, as to where you were watching the Labor Party state conference from, because we have quite strong standards on who comes into our conference — we have very strong standards on who we let in! On a serious note, this issue is not on the government's agenda.

Supplementary question

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern) — The minister's reply will no doubt have come as a surprise to his Labor colleagues in this house as they have been briefed at a party meeting on the public liability insurance crisis, and one of the options canvassed by the government was the establishment of a state insurance office.

Will the minister advise the house what options he is pursuing to address the insurance crisis if he is ruling out the insurance office proposal canvassed of the government and promoted by Mr Shorten?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — Again I am most intrigued by the meetings Mr Bowden has been attending because let me assure you, President, and as my colleagues here would know, I have been at most of the briefings of government party members on issues of public liability insurance for the last 15 months and I have paid attention to them.

If Mr Bowden wishes to cross over to this side of the floor and join us, there are plenty of seats we will make available — we will squeeze up and make room, because we are an inclusive party. We also admire Mr Bowden's skill in winning a preselection against the forces of Mr Kennett during the last coalition government.

On the issue of a state insurance office, as I have said to the house, obviously any government looking at issues in insurance should consider all options. However, that

is not an option that has remained on the agenda for this government as we come to conclusion in some of these very serious issues.

Insurance: reform

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA (Melbourne West) — I refer my question to the Minister for Small Business. As the minister would be well aware, small business has experienced a major problem with insurance. Does the Bracks government have any strategies in place to assist some small businesses in insurance matters?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Small Business) — I thank the member for her question. Insurance has been one of the most frequently raised issues and topics that small business has brought to my attention in recent times. I know that the honourable member has had similar experiences with small businesses in her electorate.

Whilst the government has already acted on insurance issues and legislated on a number of measures, more needs to be done. A survey done in conjunction with industry associations and the Victorian Tourism Operators Association showed that tourism operators had experienced an average increase in insurance premiums of 200 per cent, with one operator receiving an increase of 1251 per cent. Now they face the challenge of having access to any insurance. We have to remember that most tourism operators are small businesses, and the cost of insurance or inability to get it has put them in the awful position of having to make decisions as to whether they attempt to operate without appropriate cover.

The problems that have arisen because of public liability insurance and the hike in premium costs are not of the state government's making, but they highlight the need for further government action.

The Premier's announcement today will help protect the rights of all Victorians to have access to adequate insurance cover. We do not have the power to force companies to lower their premiums and Australia, without any local underwriters, is at the mercy of the international markets.

However, we can reform our laws to meet the current circumstances we are faced with while still maintaining the right for legal recourse. It is important to get the balance right between the rights of people injured through negligence and the needs of businesses, individuals and community groups to have access to insurance.

The government's latest reform package provides assistance to small business through the placement of a threshold on general damages. It is intended that thresholds will reduce the number of small claims thereby cutting costs. Currently small claims are often met directly by small businesses, professionals and community groups as insurance companies have gradually increased the amount a policyholder has to pay before insurance cuts in.

The reforms announced by the Premier today will help small business gain access to affordable public liability insurance whilst protecting the rights of individuals, and they go on the back of reforms already introduced by the Bracks government to ensure a vibrant small business community.

Commonwealth Games: funding

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Eumemmerring) — My question is directed to the Minister for Commonwealth Games. I refer to the minister's answer to the question regarding the funding submission to the commonwealth for the games. I refer also to the Premier's appearance at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing last Tuesday where the Premier tabled what he said was the formal submission to the commonwealth government for funding for the Commonwealth Games.

The document the Premier tabled was a one-page letter dated 28 February from the Minister for Commonwealth Games to federal minister Kemp consisting of no more than five paragraphs and not making a formal request for funding.

Given the apparent inconsistency between what the Minister for Commonwealth Games said earlier this afternoon and what the Premier said at the estimates hearing last week, I ask: did the minister mislead the house or did the Premier mislead the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Commonwealth Games) — I welcome the member's interest in the issue because I look forward to the opposition supporting this government when we eagerly look for support from the federal government for the Commonwealth Games. I look forward to the Honourable Gordon Rich-Phillips using his connections and links to the federal minister to make sure that the money that should be forthcoming to Melbourne in 2006 and the money that should be forthcoming to the Victorian initiative for the 2006 games will be forthcoming. I look forward to seeing members of the opposition work tirelessly, as we will as a government,

to make sure the money is forthcoming and to use their links with the federal government to make sure there is no shortfall in the money that comes to this state for the Commonwealth Games.

They can play semantics with whatever they like in relation to this, but what I would like to put to the members of the opposition is that we hope they are as supportive of the Commonwealth Games into the future as they have been in the past and that they are supportive in lobbying their federal colleagues to make sure that money is forthcoming, because this is an opportunity to actually do something for Victorians. We look forward to them supporting us, supporting Victorian taxpayers and supporting the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games by making sure the money is forthcoming by lobbying their colleagues as strongly as we have and we will in the future.

Hon. Andrew Brideson — On a point of order, President, the minister has now been attempting to answer the question for a couple of minutes. He has not addressed the specific question that was asked of him by the honourable member. He is now debating the question and I ask you to direct the minister to answer the specific question asked of him.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister was straying from answering the question, so I draw him back to the question at hand.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — I have finished answering the question.

Supplementary question

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Eumemmerring) — Will the minister confirm to the house that the one-page letter dated 28 February 2003 from the Minister for the Commonwealth Games to the federal Minister for the Arts and Sport constitutes the state government's formal submission for funding for the Commonwealth Games?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Commonwealth Games) — I welcome the member's question. It is a submission — whether it is a formal submission or not is probably up to the federal minister's definition of a submission. The state government has a very good working relationship with the federal minister. He has given us in-principle support at meetings we have had with him, but no doubt we will squabble about the figures.

I look forward to the opposition's making sure that the minister makes a contribution that is pro rata with the contribution the federal government gave to the Sydney

Olympics, because anything less would be a kick in the guts to Victorians! Given the history of the opposition when it was in government when it was pretty good at kicking the state and taxpayers in the guts, I am sure it would not want to be seen to be doing that again.

Insurance: reform

Hon. R. G. MITCHELL (Central Highlands) — I refer my question to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, and I ask the minister to advise the house what action the Bracks government has taken to assist sport and recreation organisations deal with the insurance crisis.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I welcome the member’s question and his interest in this issue in particular. First of all I would like to congratulate the Minister for Finance for the significant initiatives he has outlined today in relation to insurance issues. Those initiatives complement what this government has been doing for some time within respective portfolios in relation to insurance issues across the board.

The government appreciates that a number of sport and recreation organisations have been severely affected by the current problems with public liability insurance, and Sport and Recreation Victoria — my department — has worked closely with the Department of Treasury and Finance to assist a number of sport and recreation organisations to deal with those insurance issues. We have been able to provide strategic advice to Vicsport in particular and to the Outdoor Recreation Centre to help address the current crisis.

The sport and recreation organisations that have been directly assisted by this government to obtain public liability insurance cover include pony clubs through the Pony Club Association of Victoria and major equestrian centres and riding schools through the Australian Horse Riding Centres. In addition I understand a number of businesses, particularly trail-riding businesses and adventure tourism operators, have been assisted through the Victorian Tourism Operators Association, and the Werribee Park National Equestrian Centre has received assistance.

Assistance has also been provided to Vicsport to ensure that it can facilitate, develop and deliver an insurance education program for state sporting associations, develop and coordinate the delivery of risk-management workshops for sport and recreation clubs as part of a larger project financed by the government and coordinated by the Municipal Association of Victoria, and provide advice to sport and

recreation organisations seeking appropriate and affordable insurance.

This package of legislation also complements a number of other measures that have been introduced over the course of previous months and years, including the provision of waivers and the protection of volunteers and Good Samaritans from being sued.

This government believes that active participation in sport and recreation is an important element of building strong, healthy and cohesive communities. We have seen in the 2003–04 budget the provision of \$57 million over four years for a range of initiatives that will make sport and recreation more accessible to the community, including \$11 million over four years to strengthen sporting organisations throughout Victoria. A portion of this allocation includes funding to help sporting clubs and organisations deal with insurance issues.

The Bracks government is getting on with the job of continuing to assist sport and recreation organisations to deal with insurance issues so that they may continue to provide sport and recreation opportunities for all Victorians.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I have answers to the following questions on notice: 81, 166, 183, 185, 186, 213–18, 309, 318, 319, 346, 347, 351, 352, 387 and 389.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Drought: government assistance

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — I raise a matter in relation to drought in Victoria, in particular in eastern Victoria. I acknowledge that on 9 May the Minister for Agriculture in the other place declared the shires of East Gippsland and Wellington to be in drought. However, I have cause to raise in the Parliament the concern of my constituents and the farming community in general about the discriminatory way in which it appears drought declaration operates.

Given that dairy farmers in the Macalister irrigation district have a significantly reduced operating parameter this year with aggregate farm surpluses down from \$45 million to a loss of \$40 million and individual farmers down in the order of \$200 000 with negative

positions, I am concerned that the minister immediately clarify whether or not those irrigators will be eligible for drought assistance.

This is of some urgency because there is extreme anxiety among the members of the community as the drought continues. I simply raise the matter for the attention of the house and the minister in the other place to show that this is an important issue to Gippsland.

Justice Hubert Frederico

Ms HADDEN (Ballarat) — On 2 May I had the very great pleasure of being a guest of the Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia, the Honourable Justice Alistair Nicholson, at a reception to honour the retirement of the Honourable Justice Hubert Rofeno Frederico, who retired after 27 years on the bench of the Family Court.

Justice Frederico was the son of the late County Court judge, Judge Frederico, and was appointed to the Family Court of Australia in Victoria in 1976 by the then chief justice, Elizabeth Evatt. For some 25 years, Freddie, as he is affectionately known to his family, many friends and associates, was also the judge administrator of the Family Court, southern region, which included Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia. Freddie, a keen sportsperson and Collingwood fan, was awarded the Australian sports medal 2000, and he had a long association with Ballarat and rowing on Lake Wendouree.

I am certain that there are many who will miss Freddie's fair, just, compassionate and courteous approach to practitioners, witnesses and litigants who appeared before him and especially on his Family Court circuits to Ballarat.

Freddie was a firm believer in justice not only being seen to be done but being done. Freddie's presence in the Family Court will be greatly missed. So, thank you Freddie, and I pass on to you my sincerest best wishes and good health on your well-earned retirement.

Somerville Village: speed limits

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern) — My statement today is to express some concern about the average speed limit through the Somerville Village shopping centre. The Somerville Village traders association has written to me asking for assistance.

The Somerville East shopping centre on Eramosa Road East is the area of concern. It has a 60-kilometre-an-hour speed zone in a built-up area which has a lot of traffic. Somerville Primary School is

also in the general area. Twice a day several hundred children are in a confined area where there are a lot of shoppers and cars in a relatively high-speed zone.

Recently the Somerville Village traders association wrote to me asking for assistance to see if the area around the Somerville East shopping centre and the Somerville Primary School could have its speed zone lowered to 50 kilometre an hour. This might enhance safety for the shopping centre and the hundreds of young students who go to Somerville Primary School.

Geelong: netball tournament

Hon. J. H. EREN (Geelong) — I recently had the privilege of attending the central west zone netball tournament in my electorate at the Corio Leisure Time Centre in Norlane West, and I was pleasantly surprised at the size of the crowds at the event. When we talk about big sporting events we normally think of the football or the basketball, but this tournament had a lot of people there. Just to give the house some idea here are some statistics. There were 540 players from 54 teams, ranging from under 13 to the open competition, and 54 umpires and 54 coaches, not including the volunteers, parents, friends and other spectators. It was a huge event.

It is a pity the event did not get the coverage in the local media it deserved. Either way it was a great event, with two teams in my electorate doing particularly well: Bellarine 2 won the under-15 competition, and Bellarine 1 was runner-up in the under-17s.

I had the privilege of handing out medallions to the Corio Netball Association life members following the tournament, and they in turn handed out the trophies to the winners of the competition. I congratulate the organisers, the Corio Netball Association including Netball Victoria and in particular, Gail Baulch, Colin Murray, Lisa Carrey, Noeline Grey and Diane Balaburova.

Bushfires: timber salvage

Hon. E. G. STONEY (Central Highlands) — Members of the house will recall that on several occasions I have drawn attention to the urgent need for immediate decisions and actions to salvage timber killed in the bushfires. On a trip in March to Gippsland the Honourable Philip Davis and I were told by the industry that the government was not moving on the issue and the opportunity could be lost to salvage the timber due to the short time frame of 18 months. Surprise surprise! The *Bairnsdale Advertiser* stated in blazing headlines on 16 May 'Urgent timber salvage':

Timber salvage operations in the East Gippsland forests have been brought forward because of the urgency in the need to save burnt timber, the Forestry Victoria salvage operations manager for the area, Anne Geary, said this week.

Salvage operations will continue for three years. The summer fires destroyed or severely damaged an estimated 16 000 hectares of harvestable alpine ash in East Gippsland's state forests. A further 8000 hectares was destroyed in the north east of the state.

...

'Harvesting the timber now will boost the morale of the East Gippsland community which is still recovering from the effects of the fires and the drought,' she said.

I applaud the decision but it should have been made immediately. I like to think in a large way pressure from the industry and the Liberal Party caused the government to make the right decision, slow as it was.

Global Education Network

Hon. H. E. BUCKINGHAM (Koonung) — On Friday two weeks ago I attended a most exciting launch of the Global Education Network at the Box Hill Institute of TAFE. This is an innovative program and I believe the first offered by a TAFE institute in Victoria if not Australia.

The Global Education Network will provide skills-oriented international education exchange programs in the information and communications technologies and the hospitality and tourism sectors. This is a similar situation to the higher education sector's study abroad system. A key focus of the Global Education Network partners is to provide opportunities for students based on merit not on economic situation or background.

The international partners in this program are Colorado Mountain College and SAIT, which is a leading Canadian institute based in Alberta, Canada. The Global Education Network and its corporate partners will provide a host of exchange and work opportunities that will expose students to the global market and workplace, and provide internationally recognised credentials. Ultimately the program hopes to recruit institutes from each of the six continents. This is an outstanding program and I salute Box Hill institute's continued delivery of innovative educational excellence.

Neighbourhood Watch: North Balwyn

Hon. R. DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra) — I rise to commend the Neighbourhood Watch community-based crime prevention programs, in particular the one operating in the North Balwyn area which is within the

East Yarra electorate. Like many members, I visit most of my Neighbourhood Watch community centres, and this is a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the work done in those organisations by a vast array of volunteers all seeking to provide a better and more secure environment in which to live.

Mr Bruce Maling is the coordinator for the Neighbourhood Watch program in the Balwyn North areas of BRD020 and BRD021 and has been giving his time for many years to improve the community and look after his neighbours. I have known Mr Maling for many years, and I regard him with the utmost respect in his efforts to improve the neighbourhood's communications.

Neighbourhood Watch is an effective way of reducing crime, even if people just read the newsletter or report any suspicious activity to police via the 000 number. Reporting all crimes to police also helps as they can build up a picture of what truly goes on in an area and then deploy resources to combat the situation. Neighbourhood Watch is a most effective community safety crime prevention program in Victoria.

Casey: community volunteer awards

Hon. J. G. HILTON (Western Port) — Last week I had the pleasure of attending the Casey community volunteer awards presentation. It was a truly inspiring event. There were 42 nominations across a wide range of categories including sport, innovation, youth, and community service. As is the case with presentations, there were some winners. However, I believe the true winners are all the people in the community who benefit so much from the selfless and tireless commitment of volunteers. Volunteers represent the glue which binds our society together, and without them we would be a significantly diminished society.

I commend all the volunteers, not just in Casey but throughout my electorate, who do so much for other people without a second thought as to their own benefit.

Monash University: Churchill engineering review

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — Today I call on the Minister for Education and Training to play a proactive role in addressing considerable community disquiet about the outcome of a Monash University review into engineering at its Churchill campus and, further, the need to clarify Monash University's role as a partner in the Churchill education precinct.

Yesterday's *Latrobe Valley Express* carried front page headlines, 'Monash review labelled a scam — call for uni inquiry'. Within that article the former mayor of Latrobe City Council, Tony Hanning, claimed to have evidence that the review process was flawed in that there were apparent conflicts of interest and perhaps a pre-determined outcome to that review.

The National Tertiary Education Union, the student union at Monash Gippsland, Friends of Monash Gippsland, the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union and the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union have also expressed similar concerns. A request in writing was submitted to the minister by a number of those organisations which in part requested that:

... the minister facilitate a meeting to discuss and clarify the role of Monash University as a partner to the education precinct, and as a committed member of the local Gippsland community, in light of the conduct of the process by which the decision to reduce undergraduate engineering has been made.

I support the call for the minister to meet with those local interest groups and resolve the considerable community concerns that exist in regard to this matter.

Rodney King

Mr SOMYUREK (Eumemmerring) — Last week I attended the funeral of Rodney King, a 53-year-old State Emergency Service volunteer who died while on duty. I extend my deepest sympathy to his wife Marion and his two sons, as well as to all his friends and family and other members of the Upper Yarra SES.

This was a tragedy for the communities of the Upper Yarra. During his 17 years as an SES volunteer Rodney King selflessly served the areas around Millgrove, Warburton, Wesburn and Launching Place, as well as further afield. Such commitment to community service deserves our acknowledgement and recognition in the Parliament today.

His death is also a severe blow to the SES. In the 28-year history of the SES he is the fourth member to die while carrying out his duties. It serves as a reminder to us all of the risks taken by others to ensure the safety of our entire community. In times of desperate need our emergency services personnel are always on hand to provide rescue, comfort and safety. I thank Rodney King on behalf of the community he served for his contribution, and know that he will be sorely missed.

Warrawee residential facility

Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash) — On Sunday I had the very great pleasure of attending the opening of Warrawee in Bentlyigh which is a low-care residential establishment.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — You did not go to the ALP conference?

Hon. ANDREA COOTE — My invitation was in the mail!

I commend the local mayor, Cr Dorothy Marwick, and the councillors and the executive of the City of Glen Eira on an excellent facility. I was there with my colleague the Honourable Noel Pullen, but the minister was not anywhere to be found, which was very sad — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Hon. ANDREA COOTE — He must have been at the conference!

It is an excellent facility and there are a lot of lessons for the government to learn there. It is certainly world best practice. There are wide corridors and ensuite bathrooms. It is set up in a house-type environment with 15 householders in each house. There is an excellent kitchen and staff to look after the residents. The nurses were excellent and the nurse station was light, bright and cheerful.

I encourage the minister to make the time to look at the facility because it is something that the government should be implementing across the state, particularly in rural and regional Victoria. I commend everyone involved with the opening, and I particularly thank Kit Walsh for showing me over her rooms.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member's time has expired!

Tintern Girls Grammar school and Southwood Boys Grammar School

Hon. C. D. HIRSH (Silvan) — I want to speak today about the very long-established Tintern Girls Grammar School in Ringwood East, and to commend the work of its principal, Mrs Sylvia Walton, who has also been there for many years. I also congratulate the organisation on the opening of Southwood Boys Grammar School, which opened in 1999 and now accepts students up to year 11.

There has been a need for a boys school in the area for quite some years. The competition is pretty fierce, and they do very well. Tintern has 1150 students with a strong pastoral care component, and a teaching farm with prize-winning sheep, cattle and poultry. They do very well indeed. Southwood took over the campus of the old Southwood Primary School, which was closed by the Kennett government, so the community is pleased to see a school still operating on that site rather than the units that appear on most other school sites.

The Southwood boys school has an emphasis on drama, orchestra, choirs and bands and offers a range of flexible programs to accommodate the different learning styles and capacities of its students.

Gowrie Street Primary School: Manega Koori annexe

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (North Eastern) — On Friday, 16 May, together with Aunty Mary Atkinson, an elder of the Bangarang nation, I was very honoured to assist in cutting the ribbon to open the new building occupied by Manega, the Koori annexe of the Gowrie Street Primary School at Shepparton.

In the early 1980s it was recognised that many of our local indigenous children were not fulfilling their full potential in mainstream education. Manega was established in 1984 to encourage indigenous students to stay at school and improve their literacy skills. Manega offers a curriculum better suited to the needs of these children and also includes cultural education.

This project is a joint initiative of the Goulburn Valley Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and the Gowrie Street Primary School. Now in its 20th year Manega has proved to be a tremendous success. Many of Manega's former students have gone on to complete their Victorian certificate of education and tertiary studies. For the past 19 years Manega has occupied portable classrooms in the grounds of the Gowrie Street Primary School. The relocation of the special school from the grounds of Gowrie Street to its new location in Verney Road presented an opportunity for Manega to move into the vacated facility. This new facility will allow more room for student programs and parent and elder participation.

Principal Janet Gill-Kirkman and the staff of Gowrie Street, and Manega, are to be commended for this program that is providing Koori children —

The PRESIDENT — Time!

Banyule: netball stadium

Ms MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — On 15 May 2003 I attended the official opening of the Banyule netball stadium by the Honourable Justin Madden, the Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Commonwealth Games, and the mayor of the City of Banyule, Cr Jenny Mulholland. Also in attendance were the Minister for Community Services; Mr Craig Langdon and Mr Steve Herbert from the lower house; and the Honourable Bill Forwood. The facility features four netball courts, two with state-of-the-art floors, retractable seating, meeting and exhibition space, child-minding facilities and the provision for the recycling of rainwater. The inspiration for the new facility was a study by Banyule City Council of women's sporting needs in the region.

Netball remains the highest participatory sport for women and girls in this state, with Netball Victoria having 105 000 registered members and tens of thousands more girls in school competitions. Banyule and Districts Netball Association and the Yarra Valley netball competition will share the facility with Macleod College. The project is the result of a partnership between Banyule City Council, which contributed \$3.9 million, the Bracks government, which contributed \$500 000 through Sport and Recreation Victoria, and Macleod College, which contributed \$600 000. Congratulations go to all the parties involved in making this facility an outstanding building and resource for the community.

Bendigo: tornado damage

Hon. D. K. DRUM (North Western) — In light of Sunday evening's tornado that ripped through the Eaglehawk and California Gully areas of North Bendigo, I join with the Minister for Energy Industries and congratulate the State Emergency Service and the Powercor workers, who, along with the Country Fire Authority people, came from around the state to help with the necessary clean-up and the constant work of trying to restore the power and get some normality back into the lives of the people whose homes, garages, sheds and fences had been damaged or destroyed by the wind. The 150 kilometre-an-hour winds that hit houses over a 7-kilometre stretch caused a path of destruction that could only be rivalled by the carnage in a horror movie. We are certainly very relieved that nobody was seriously injured.

Apart from commending the workers I commend the government for the prompt way in which it has announced grants of \$22 800. I am sure the people who will be receiving these grants would like to have their

appreciation conveyed to the house. Naturally there will be some real worries emerging in coming months about emergency housing, underinsurance and matters of unforeseen damage. It will be imperative that the government shows compassion and understanding when those issues raise their heads.

PETITION

Planning: Carnegie tabletop dancing venue

Hon. ANDREW BRIDESON (Waverley) presented petition from certain citizens of Victoria praying that the government take the necessary action to prevent a tabletop dancing venue at 123 Koornang Road, Carnegie from operating and amend the planning laws to ensure that tabletop dancing venues are located away from family-friendly areas (460 signatures).

Laid on table.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 3

Ms ARGONDIZZO (Templestowe) presented *Alert Digest No. 3 of 2003*, together with appendices, minority report and extract of proceedings.

Laid on table.

Ordered to be printed.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Budget Sector — Quarterly Financial Report No. 3 for the period ended 31 March 2003.

Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 — Minister's Order of 6 May 2003 giving approval to granting of a lease at Nhill Caravan Park.

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 — Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Drugs and Poisons, No. 17, Amendment No. 3, 1 May 2003 and Minister's Notice regarding the amendment, commencement and availability of the Poisons Code.

Lake Mountain Alpine Resort Management Board — Report, for the period 1 November 2001 to 31 October 2002.

Parliamentary Committees Act 1968 —

Premier's response to recommendations in Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee's report on Improving Victoria's Parliamentary Committee System.

Treasurer's response to recommendations in Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Report on the Valuation and Reporting of Cultural, Heritage and Infrastructure Assets.

Whole of Government response to recommendations in Law Reform Committee's report on the Inquiry into Oaths and Affirmations with Reference to the Multicultural Community.

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

Bendigo — Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme — Amendments C11 and C42.

Frankston Planning Scheme — Amendment C17.

Kingston Planning Scheme — Amendment C35.

La Trobe Planning Scheme — Amendment C19.

Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme — Amendment C19.

Melbourne Planning Scheme — Amendment C57.

Monash Planning Scheme — Amendment C19.

Moonee Valley Planning Scheme — Amendment C41.

Mornington Peninsula Planning Scheme — Amendment C59.

Mount Alexander Planning Scheme — Amendment C11 (Part 1).

Nillumbik Planning Scheme — Amendment C21.

Whittlesea Planning Scheme — Amendments C22.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 — Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Private Keeping of Reptiles.

Road Safety Act 1986 — Alcohol Interlock Guidelines, May 2003, pursuant to section 50AAG(2)(b) of the Act.

Rural Finance Act 1988 — Treasurer's directive of 8 May 2003 to Rural Finance Corporation.

Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament:

Agricultural and Veterinary Chemicals (Control of Use) Act 1992 — Nos. 33 and 34.

Liquor Control Reform Act 1998 — No. 35.

Road Safety Act 1986 — No. 36.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Ministers' exemption certificates under section 9(6) in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 32, 35 and 36.

Water Act 1989 — Minister's Order of 12 May 2003 declaring a water supply protection area for the Tarra River.

Proclamation of the Governor in Council fixing an operative date in respect of the following act:

Gaming Legislation (Amendment) Act 2002 — Sections 6, 7(2), 32(2), 36(4), 36(6) and 37 — 15 May 2003 (*Gazette* No. G20, 15 May 2003).

SUMMARY OFFENCES (OFFENSIVE BEHAVIOUR) BILL

Second reading

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

That the bill be now read a second time.

Second-reading speech as follows incorporated on motion of Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation):

The Summary Offences (Offensive Behaviour) Bill 2003 reflects the government's commitment to deliver more effective sanctions to specifically target the disruptive behaviour of 'sex tourists' in St Kilda.

For many years now, street prostitution has been a problem in St Kilda. At any hour of any day, street prostitution can be found in residential streets. Sex tourists — those who travel specifically to St Kilda to cruise the streets and observe, abuse and harass sex workers and residents alike — throw objects from their cars, make obscene gestures, yell abuse, litter, sideswipe parked cars and, occasionally, resort to violence. These illegal acts are reprehensible in any community, but in St Kilda they serve to compound the harms associated with street prostitution.

Street prostitution and the nuisance behaviour associated with it cause considerable distress to members of the Port Phillip community, in addition to causing significant harms to sex workers themselves. In response to community concern about street prostitution in St Kilda, in March 2001 I established the Attorney-General's Street Prostitution Advisory Group. The advisory group was chaired by the then Parliamentary Secretary for Justice and member for Richmond, Richard Wynne, MP, and contained representatives from the Liberal and National parties, Victoria Police, City of Port Phillip, local residents and traders, health, welfare and outreach workers and street sex workers.

Together, the advisory group — in consultation with the Port Phillip community — considered ways to address the unacceptable situation in the City of Port Phillip. In its final report released in June 2002, the advisory group provided the government with a range of recommendations, some of which are currently being further developed within the group. Building upon the work of the advisory group, the government, through this bill, implements one of the key recommendations arising from its final report.

That recommendation proposed the introduction of a new offence that could be enforced by an infringement notice, and addressed the offensive and nuisance behaviour of 'sex tourists'. This recommendation arose from the concerns of residents and street sex workers who face regular abuse and harassment from such people.

The bill will introduce a new offence into the Summary Offences Act 1966 that will target people who use offensive

words or gestures in a public place from a motor vehicle. The offence will only apply in 'declared areas'. These areas will be declared by the Attorney-General and must be areas where street prostitution is prevalent.

The offence is punishable by an infringement notice, or on-the-spot fine, which may only be issued by Victoria Police and will carry a penalty of \$100. However, if a person elects to challenge the charge, it will be heard in the Magistrates Court and they will face a higher maximum penalty of \$500.

The offence will be one of strict liability. This means that it will not be necessary to prove that the defendant intended that their words or gestures were offensive. The offence will be committed once the offensive words are uttered or the offensive gesture is committed. The offensive words or gestures must be used or made within the view or hearing of another person in a public place. Furthermore, their words or gestures must be likely to offend a reasonable person.

The new offence is tightly restricted so as to target a specific problem in St Kilda. It will equip Victoria Police with an effective and immediate enforcement tool to be used in policing the nuisance behaviour associated with street prostitution. The bill will reduce the harm caused to residents and street sex workers and help to provide a safer and better environment for those who work and live in St Kilda.

I commend this bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Hon. R. DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra).

Debate adjourned until next day.

SAFE DRINKING WATER BILL

Second reading

For **Mr GAVIN JENNINGS** (Minister for Aged Care), **Mr Lenders** (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Second-reading speech as follows incorporated on motion of Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance):

The Bracks Labor government is committed to improving services to all Victorians in a financially responsible manner. In particular, this government is committed to protecting and improving the quality of drinking water in Victoria.

Access to a reliable supply of good quality drinking water is fundamental to community health and wellbeing, and is essential for the development of many sustainable value-adding industries in regional Victoria, particularly the food and tourism industries.

Through this bill, this government is proposing a comprehensive, statewide regulatory framework that addresses these matters.

We believe that this bill significantly protects and enhances the quality of drinking water supplies in Victoria in a sustainable manner, therefore fulfilling a major policy

commitment of this government, as encapsulated in our Growing Victoria Together policy.

The proposal also satisfies the government's objective of creating transparent processes for service delivery.

Scope and philosophy of the bill

The regulatory framework will cover drinking water supplied by the state-owned water businesses around Victoria, principally the 3 Melbourne metropolitan water companies, the 15 regionally based urban water authorities and Melbourne Water.

The regulatory framework will also, for the first time, cover drinking water supplies that are provided at alpine resorts and supplies managed by Parks Victoria.

Rural water authorities are also covered in relation to water destined for drinking in communities around Victoria.

The bill also allows for the formal identification and regulation of water that, although not intended for drinking, is supplied in a manner that may lead to it being confused with drinking water and inadvertently consumed by the public. The bill will not apply to the supply of packaged water or water for irrigation.

The bill embraces the total water cycle philosophy through adoption of a sound and proactive catchment-to-tap approach to drinking water quality management. Further, environmental improvement is likely to result from closer coordination between water suppliers, catchment management authorities and local government.

The bill addresses concerns raised in the past by the Auditor-General and the Office of the Regulator-General that, within the existing Victorian water quality regulatory framework, responsibilities for managing risks are unclear in a number of areas. The bill provides the required clarification and also clarifies roles and responsibilities among stakeholders for the management of incidents of contamination of drinking water in Victoria.

The framework is consistent with the Council of Australian Governments national competition policy principles for institutional reform. Its implementation will also meet Victoria's commitments under the Council of Australian Governments water reform agreement.

The framework has been developed over recent years with considerable public, water industry and stakeholder consultation. There were three consultation stages during 2000, 2001 and 2002 covering the public, industry and key government stakeholders.

In summary, the legislative proposal once enacted will place Victoria in a leading position in Australia in the regulation and provision of safe drinking water supplies.

Principal objectives

The bill is designed to require water suppliers to develop and implement an integrated risk management framework for drinking water quality, comply with standards for water quality, communicate effectively with all stakeholders and publicly disclose relevant water quality information.

The proposed Safe Drinking Water Act will describe the regulatory regime and contain key obligations relating to risk management and public disclosure. Regulations to be made under the act will include necessary standards for water quality and associated monitoring requirements.

The principal objectives of this bill are to:

protect public health in Victoria in relation to drinking water supplies;

create a consistent statewide regulatory framework for drinking water quality;

establish and implement comprehensive risk management strategies for drinking water quality that covers the overall delivery chain from the catchment to consumer supplies;

give Victorians access to objective information about the quality of drinking water that they receive;

provide communities with the opportunity to establish local non-health-related standards for drinking water quality;

ensure that proposed drinking water standards are subjected to a rigorous benefit-cost analysis;

provide clarity of roles of the various parties who may be involved in the management of incidents concerning drinking water.

Key aspects of the bill

I will now turn to the key aspects of the bill.

Part 1 of the bill contains definitions and outlines the purpose and application of the act.

Part 2 of the bill obliges each water supplier to develop and implement drinking water risk management plans and systems to cover risks and hazards that may affect the quality of drinking water, from the catchment to the tap. Water storage managers will also be required to have in place and implement risk management plans. These plans will be required to be independently audited.

Part 3 of the bill obliges the water suppliers to supply drinking water that meets a set of water quality standards, generally measured at or near the point at which the drinking water is supplied to consumers. The standards will cover health-related criteria, such as microbiological and chemical safety, as well as aesthetic criteria, such as taste, odour and discolouration.

Part 3 also provides flexibility for specific local water quality standards to be established through community consultation, provided any risks to public health have been adequately addressed. The water supplier will also be required to report to consumers on the quality of water supplied and disclose instances where the quality of water may, for whatever reason or however briefly, be suspected of posing a risk to public health.

Part 3 also requires that the drinking water quality standards and the more detailed aspects of the risk management requirements will be set through regulations recommended by

the Minister for Health, after consultation with the Minister for Water, the Minister for Environment and the Treasurer.

This will ensure that standards are set in a transparent and appropriate manner, with the community benefits and costs of particular standards clearly identified. The intention is to develop standards based on the latest version of the *Australian Drinking Water Guidelines*, which is published under the auspices of the National Health and Medical Research Council, whilst ensuring that the standards are relevant to the needs of Victorians.

Part 4 of the bill sets out the powers and functions of the Secretary to the Department of Human Services in relation to drinking water quality. In particular, this will include powers to enter into undertakings with water suppliers to achieve specified requirements and powers to request information. Part 4 of the bill establishes the mechanism for the exercise of these powers.

Part 4 of the bill also grants the secretary the power to provide directions to a water supplier or a water storage manager if the secretary believes that drinking water may pose a risk to public health. Authorised officers may enter water supply premises if the secretary believes that drinking water may pose an immediate risk to public health.

The bill requires the department to report annually to the Minister for Health on the status of drinking water quality in Victoria. It also requires the minister to ensure that a copy of the report is laid before each house of Parliament.

Part 4 of the bill also sets out the mechanism by which the cost of regulating the water suppliers can be funded by the water supply industry in Victoria.

The total levy will be imposed having regard to the costs that are incurred or are likely to be incurred by the secretary to the department in relation to additional activities carried out under the new regulatory framework. The levy is estimated in total at less than \$1.5 million per annum.

The bill will complement the Food Act 1984, which contains certain relevant offences and emergency management powers. In particular, it will continue to be an offence under the Food Act for a water supplier to sell unsafe drinking water.

Part 5 of the bill empowers the Governor in Council to make the necessary regulations. This part also provides penalties for the provision of false and misleading information to the secretary or to the public.

Part 6 of the bill proposes consequential amendments to existing legislation that clarifies the regulatory requirements placed on water suppliers. The bill will repeal several water-related provisions of the Health Act 1958 and a section of the Water Act 1989 that provided a water authority with immunity from liability for any action taken in connection with the treatment of water in accordance with the Water Act or any other act.

Implementation and operation

The proposed regulatory framework allows a staged implementation of its requirements, to enable water suppliers a reasonable time to comply. The act will come into force on 1 July 2004.

In recent years the quality of drinking water in Victoria has significantly improved. Nevertheless, there is still a way to go in some areas, and undertakings from water suppliers will provide a mechanism through which the implementation of any new works required to meet the standards can be achieved in stages, while all residual risks are adequately managed.

It is anticipated that new capital and operating costs arising from the framework can be managed as part of the overall business improvement process undertaken by water suppliers in Victoria.

The Minister for Health will also initiate a review of the size and scope of the regulatory activities of the department after the initial two years of full operation, to determine the ongoing resources required to meet the new functions under the act.

Benefits to the community

The benefits to the community of the proposed framework are provided through the increasing use of risk assessment and management with regard to drinking water supplies, improved confidence and assurance in the delivery of good quality drinking water, improved emphasis on catchment-to-tap management and improved transparency of processes.

This is expected to result in a reduced frequency of incidents of contamination of drinking water and reduced severity of such incidents when they do occur.

Closing remarks

As I stated at the outset, regulatory reform of this nature and the provision of good quality drinking water can be expected to enhance the overall business competitiveness of the Victorian economy. This will facilitate sustainable and value-adding business, tourism, cleaner agriculture and quality of life opportunities in Victoria, especially in regional areas of the state.

In closing, I would like to thank the many people who have contributed to the development of this bill, in particular through the extensive public and industry consultation.

I believe that the bill strikes the right balance between quality of drinking water supplies and affordability of services.

I am confident that this legislation, and the bill which I currently put before you, enhances the quality and safety of drinking water supplies for Victorians and therefore fulfils a major policy commitment of this government.

I commend this bill to the house.

**Debate adjourned for Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra)
on motion of Hon. E. G. Stoney.**

Debate adjourned until next day.

WATER (VICTORIAN WATER TRUST ADVISORY COUNCIL) BILL

Second reading

For **Ms BROAD** (Minister for Local Government),
Mr Lenders (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Second-reading speech as follows incorporated on motion of Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance):

This bill establishes an independent advisory council, to be known as the Victorian Water Trust Advisory Council, to implement the \$320 million Victorian Water Trust. The trust is a key element of the Bracks government's commitment to securing Victoria's future water needs.

The commitment to establish a Victorian Water Trust was outlined in Labor's *Water for the Future* policy statement. The Bracks government recognises that Victoria's future growth depends on our capacity to manage our water wisely and overcome past neglect of the resource base and water infrastructure. A long-term investment strategy is a central part of this government's plan for ensuring Victoria's water resources are protected and available to sustain future generations.

The purpose of the trust is to:

- provide measured investment to meet Victoria's future needs;
- enhance the health and sustainability of Victoria's water resources, including river health
- encourage increased water recycling and reuse and efficiencies in water use across the state; and
- generate additional investment from sources other than the state government.

The government has already committed \$160 million to major initiatives to be funded through the trust over the next four financial years commencing in 2003–04.

The establishment of an independent advisory council will play an important role in ensuring that the funding arrangements for Victoria's precious water resources are sustainable and well targeted.

The independent advisory council will advise the minister on the allocation of funds for initiatives that meet the objectives of the trust.

The establishment of the advisory council will assist in the long-term planning and action necessary to sustain investment to meet Victoria's future water needs.

The advisory council will consist of between three to five members appointed by the minister. Members will have experience in the environment, finance, water infrastructure, community services or a field appropriate to the functions of the advisory council. Members of the advisory council will be appointed for a period of up to three years and may be reappointed.

Ambitious targets have been identified to protect Victoria's water resources, as outlined in Labor's *Water for the Future* policy. These will underpin the programs of the Victorian Water Trust and include:

- to increase the efficiency of irrigation systems across the state by 25 per cent by 2020 through piping open channels and other improvements and reforms;
- to reduce Melbourne's water use per capita by 15 per cent by 2010;
- to significantly improve the ecological health of Victoria's rivers by 2010 by increasing environmental flows and undertaking riverbank and other catchment management works; and
- to increase water recycling to 20 per cent by 2010 for Melbourne.

Funding for the trust will be identified each year by way of a separately identified amount provided for the trust in the appropriations legislation. Funding will not be available for projects that have been completed or are part of the normal business of existing authorities. The Bracks government is committed to providing genuine leadership in sustainable water management and will work with catchment and water authorities as well as the private sector to encourage innovation and attract investment.

Broad community discussion and awareness of Victoria's future water needs is critical, and one of the advisory council's first tasks will be to inform the community on its activities and the processes for funding these initiatives.

The Victorian Water Trust is an important part of achieving the government's commitment to enhancing the health and sustainability of Victoria's water resources, providing greater security for meeting Victoria's future water needs and encouraging greater efficiencies in water use across the state.

The advisory council will play an important role in promoting the trust and ensuring that the Victorian Water Trust is effective in achieving its objectives. The advisory council will be supported by the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

I commend the bill to the house.

**Debate adjourned on motion of Hon. E. G. STONEY
(Central Highlands).**

Debate adjourned until next day.

DANDENONG DEVELOPMENT BOARD BILL

Second reading

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

That the bill be now read a second time.

Second-reading speech as follows incorporated on motion of Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation):

This bill replaces the Dandenong Development Board Bill 2002, which lapsed when Parliament was prorogued last year.

The main purpose of the bill is to establish the Dandenong Development Board, which is a cooperative effort between the state government and City of Greater Dandenong.

Dandenong is one of the state government's nine announced metropolitan Transit Cities projects. The Transit Cities program is an important component of Melbourne 2030, as it implements a number of the initiatives stemming from the strategy.

On 12 March 2002 the Premier announced that the government would establish the Dandenong Development Board, and as part of that announcement the Premier advised that the board will have seed funding of \$1 million.

This funding allocation was confirmed in the state 2002–03 budget where \$4 million was allocated over four years to the board.

With the establishment of the board the government is honouring its commitment to setting the vision for tackling the economic, social and environmental challenges in Dandenong.

The board will be established as a body corporate with perpetual succession. The clause that establishes the board provides as part of a standard provision for such bodies that the board may acquire, hold and dispose of real and personal property. It is not intended that the board will have the power to acquire real property, and therefore no specific powers have been provided in the bill to enable this to occur. What the provision will do is to enable the board to acquire leasehold property and thereby rent an office.

The function of the board will be to promote the development of Dandenong as a key centre for employment and services in the south-east metropolitan area. The board will aim to refocus the Dandenong town centre and encourage activities which lead to the creation of an economically vibrant, safe and attractive centre.

In order to help the board to achieve its objective it will include representatives from the City of Greater Dandenong Council, the local business community, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, the Department of Infrastructure, the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development and the Urban and Regional Land Corporation.

The board will assist in the facilitation of economic, cultural and community development, and employment growth in Dandenong. The board will also make recommendations on infrastructure and other works considered necessary to stimulate development and cultural activity in Dandenong.

In order to implement the government's Transit Cities program to revitalise Dandenong, the board will assist by:

providing opportunities for increased private investment and business innovation in Dandenong

improving the overall quality of the place and encouraging sustainable development

encouraging the development of higher density housing at strategic locations near transport nodes

encouraging diversity of housing types and promotion of design innovation, while protecting residential character

focusing higher density mixed-use development around the key transport nodes

facilitating appropriate demonstration projects

building communities that offer fair access for all to services and employment opportunities

improving public transport usage and the integration of transport services and assisting in delivering 20 per cent of metropolitan trips by public transport by 2020

creating and improving pedestrian-cycling linkages with transport interchanges

reducing the pressure to develop on the urban fringe

facilitating improved safety through community building and design

improving access to services

ensuring a 'whole of government' response to development issues.

The Dandenong Development Board will actively liaise with agencies/instrumentalities such as the Department of Education and Training, hospitals, Department of Justice (Crime Prevention Victoria), police, Vicroads and Victrack so as to coordinate government expenditure and actions to achieve a safe urban design and built form and functionality for Dandenong.

As I have stated previously, the Dandenong Development Board will be facilitating the revitalisation of Dandenong. However, the government is also aware that to be truly successful the board should be doing itself out of a job. With that in mind the bill contains a sunset date for the legislation. That date is 30 June 2010.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned for Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) on motion of Hon. E. G. Stoney.

Debate adjourned until next day.

REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second reading

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Energy Industries) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Second-reading speech as follows incorporated on motion of Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Energy Industries):

It is with great pride that I introduce the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (Amendment) Bill into the house.

These amendments facilitate the fulfilment of the government's commitment to extend natural gas to the rural and regional areas of Victoria.

Since its inception in 1999 — when the Bracks government committed \$180.7 million to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) — the fund has supported 71 infrastructure projects across regional Victoria.

Through the commitment of \$128.4 million of RIDF funds we have catalysed some \$300 million of investment in economic, transport, tourism and education infrastructure across regional Victoria.

Funding for an additional five projects is expected to be announced shortly, bringing the total commitment to \$133.6 million. The balance of the fund is expected to be committed by 30 June this year.

The Regional Infrastructure Development Fund has proved to be an outstanding success for regional and rural Victoria. Groups such as the Victorian Farmers Federation have called for the fund to be replicated at the national level. Recognising the strengths of the RIDF model, the Western Australian government has established its own regional infrastructure funding program paralleling the aims and objectives of the RIDF.

At this point it is worth reflecting on some of the achievements that have relied on the fund for their success.

In Wodonga, the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund was instrumental in securing Visy's \$60 million, state-of-the-art box plant. The \$1.2 million from the fund contributed to the cost of trunk infrastructure servicing the new industrial area of the Wodonga Enterprise Business and Technology Park, leading to the creation of more than 200 jobs.

In Warrnambool, a \$3.3 million grant from the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund contributed to the first major upgrade of the popular Flagstaff Hill Maritime Museum in over 25 years. The redevelopment included a complete overhaul of the entrance gallery and the introduction of a spectacular night attraction, incorporating a high-tech sound and laser light show.

The Regional Infrastructure Development Fund was instrumental in assisting the Birchip Cropping Group complete a \$700 000 research facility to promote efficient management of crops, generate higher yields, improve farm incomes and foster the development of new markets and products.

The fund has also supported the completion of over 200 cattle underpasses across Victoria's dairy regions to improve safety for farmers and road users. Around 100 more underpasses have received approval, taking the total funding approved under this program to \$6 million, with a further \$2.5 million committed at the last election.

The \$10 million rural community infrastructure allocation has supported nearly 180 projects across rural and regional Victoria. This program has been hailed as a fantastic success by councils and local community groups, enabling them to complete a number of locally driven projects in smaller communities.

Building on this success, at the last election the government committed a further \$180 million to the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund.

Through consultation across Victoria in our first term of government, we heard that the extension of reticulated natural gas was the most important economic development issue to country Victorians. We have listened and responded.

In September 2002, we announced the establishment of Regional Development Victoria and directed that one of its key responsibilities would be the extension of natural gas to country Victoria.

In November we took our commitment a step closer, announcing that \$70 million from the renewed Regional Infrastructure Development Fund would be directed towards extending gas in rural and regional Victoria.

Now we take the next step — making legislative amendments to facilitate the program — through this bill.

The bill:

expands the purposes of the fund to include extending reticulated natural gas in regional Victoria and Melbourne's rural fringe and

updates the schedule of municipalities in regional Victoria to reflect the de-amalgamation of the Delatite shire last year.

The bill amends the act to explicitly allow the RIDF to fund natural gas extension projects in regional Victoria and the nine interface councils on Melbourne's fringe.

The Regional Infrastructure Development Committee, which makes recommendations on disbursements from the fund, will develop guidelines to ensure that only rural areas of these interface municipalities receive assistance under these provisions.

The bill also provides for the resources of the fund to be used in the development and implementation of gas extension projects.

This puts weight behind our commitment to support municipalities in the development of gas extension projects through sharing experiences and funding external expertise.

This bill delivers on one of the government's key commitments to rural and regional Victorians at the last election.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe).

Debate adjourned until next day.

**CONSTITUTION (WATER AUTHORITIES)
BILL**

Second reading

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

I note that this is a historic bill as it is the first introduced into this house under the new constitutional provisions that require a 60 per cent majority on the third-reading motion for it to pass. I could not let that go without passing.

Second-reading speech as follows incorporated on motion of Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance):

Honourable members will agree that the provision of water services, at reasonable cost, is a matter of primary importance to our community. It was for this reason that, at the last election, this government made a commitment to ensure that our water authorities remain publicly owned and directly accountable to the people of Victoria. To secure the public control of water services, an amendment to Victoria's constitution was proposed to entrench the public ownership of our water authorities.

This bill implements that commitment. The ownership of our water authorities that deliver water to Victorians will be entrenched in state ownership by amendments made to the Constitution Act 1975. Any bill that removes the responsibility for ensuring the delivery of water services from a public authority will be governed by those entrenchment mechanisms and will require a special three-fifths majority of all of the members of both the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly before it can be submitted for royal assent.

Members should also note that this bill will also need to be passed by a three-fifths majority of the members of both houses, as it seeks to amend section 18(2) of the Constitution Act as a consequence of the recently enacted Constitution (Parliamentary Reform) Act 2003.

A new part VII will be added to the constitution to require public ownership of water authorities. If a public authority has the responsibility for ensuring the delivery of a water service, that responsibility must be carried on by that authority or another public authority. This does not exclude public/private partnership arrangements whereby the private sector provides infrastructure or performs services under contract with a water authority. This bill makes it clear that a public authority may enter arrangements with the private sector for the provision of water services but cannot abdicate its ultimate responsibility for ensuring the delivery of water services under these arrangements or have that responsibility removed from it.

I am sure that all members will support the retention of water authorities for the benefit of future generations.

I commend this bill to the house.

**Debate adjourned for Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland)
on motion of Hon. E. G. Stoney.**

Debate adjourned until next day.

BUDGET PAPERS 2003–04

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That the Council take note of the budget papers, 2003–04.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — It is my pleasure to rise to speak on the budget.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — I should make the point to the Leader of the Government that under his rules I have an hour; everybody else only gets a quarter of an hour. At least he did not cut into my hour. I should start by saying that it is disappointing that I am the only person in this chamber who gets an hour to speak on the budget papers. It would be better if other members, particularly colleagues of mine who are on the opposition front benches, had the opportunity to speak for longer than the allocated quarter of an hour.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — You want all of them to speak for an hour!

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — No, that is not my point. My point is that there are better ways of dividing the time of the house than having one person speak for an hour and others for only 15 minutes. However, I turn to the budget.

This is the fourth budget of the Bracks government — and how quickly it has all deteriorated. We are now four budgets in, and what have we got? In some senses we have a typical Labor budget — this is a high-taxing, high-spending budget — but it is not typical in many other ways, and I will deal with those as I go. This budget demonstrates once and for all that the inheritance this government received when it came unexpectedly to government in 1999 has been squandered. The \$1.8 billion that had been left by the previous government has gone, and there is not much to be shown for it. How quickly it has all deteriorated!

Now as you move around the community what you get are people asking, 'Where has all the money gone?'. They try and find out where the money has gone. When they look at the budget papers they do not get it where the money has gone, nor do they get it when they look around their communities. Time and again people say, 'Where has all the money gone?'. The next thing they ask is, 'Where will it all end; aren't we back where we were before?'. They are asking, 'What happened to the

money, where do we go from here?'. They are saying, as they do, 'I know that Labor can't manage money'.

I drove into a service station the other day in Upper Heidelberg Road and on the back of my car I have a sticker that says, 'Bracks. Taxes. Lies. Labor = tolls'. I was putting petrol in my car at the time and the guy beside me said, 'Like your sticker, it's true, isn't it? Labor can't manage money'. People are saying, 'Where will it all end?' because they see taxes going up. We know from the budget papers that taxes have gone up \$3.4 billion in this state since 1999–2000, an extra \$1900 per household throughout the state.

They see their taxes going up; they see the promises being broken; and particularly they see the promise in relation to the Scoresby freeway; but there are a raft of others which I will come to later and deal with one by one. They see money being wasted, and I will deal with the waste of money in more detail later in my contribution. They see deals being done with their Labor mates, particularly on wages, and later in my contribution I will deal with the issue of wages growth in some detail because that is some of where the money has gone. But they do not see outcomes, the benefits of the funds that they inherited, nor anything from the massive amounts of taxes that have come in since Labor came into government. Promises broken, money being wasted, deals being done, and not much to show for it.

One example goes to the question of disability services. Much more can be said about this, but this email is a simple story, and states the following about residential places for the disabled:

The disability services division budget for 2003–04 shows a callous indifference to the needs of people waiting for services.

In this budget there is no increase in the number of residential places. Yet there are over 3000 people registered as waiting for a residential place with more than 1000 of these classified as urgent.

On current estimates, over the three years 30 June 2001 to 30 June 2004, the government will have increased the number of residential places by 91.

From 4979 to 5070. The email further states:

In the same period expenditure will have increased about 20 per cent, from \$370.2 million to \$441.5 million. This increase of \$71 million is accompanied by a very small increase in service capacity of 91 extra places over three years. It is no wonder that families are in despair, knowing that increases in the dollars in the disability services budget has not meant commensurate increase in service provision.

Those words came to me from a person who spends a lot of her time with a disabled child. The email goes on:

An alternative to a residential place is in home and outreach support. There are over 1100 people registered as waiting for support, with nearly 800 classified as urgent.

The government's response to this desperate need is to provide for 100 more places in Homefirst support. It is no wonder that Victorian families caring for their loved ones at home feel abandoned by this government.

We have a situation where the money is coming in, but the outcomes are not there for people to see. The email finishes by saying:

It is a very grim and hopeless situation.

High taxes, high spending, a state at the brink. As my colleague the honourable member for Box Hill said in his contribution in the other chamber recently, 'If things are like this now when the economy is strong, what will happen when things start to deteriorate?'.

Members would be aware that Moody's produced a recent analysis for May 2003 of the state of Victoria and went through some of the credit strengths, giving credit, I might add, for the privatisation program of the previous government and also strong financial support provided by the commonwealth government. But it says under the heading 'Credit challenges':

Victoria's credit challenges include:

potential for slowing revenues and expenditure pressures likely to require greater spending restraint.

In my contribution I will deal at some length with the issue of greater spending restraint. Mr Baxter and I sat through the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearings last week and know that the government has decided it will take \$141 million in savings. We know the government is having difficulty in being honest about where those savings will come, although I point out to honourable members that if they look at the budget papers, savings are due to start full year on 1 July this year. Somehow or other in the next five or six weeks the government will have to identify all those things. We asked a number of the ministers questions like, 'If the full-year amount is \$31 million in savings that will come from the health area, which programs will it come from and where will the funds be found?'. In response the Minister for Health said, 'We are talking to stakeholders'. We asked which stakeholders, and she would not tell us. Why the great concern? The government says it will save \$141 million on top of the \$130 million it says it will save from the productivity dividend. Why is that? Because already it has blown the budget; already the funds have gone; already people in

Victoria are legitimately asking the question, ‘How did it deteriorate so quickly; where has all the money gone; where will it all end up; and what have we seen for the funds that have been spent?’.

I thought Terry McCrann put it well in an article in the *Herald Sun* of Wednesday, 7 May, under the heading ‘Home boom saves bacon’. He is making the point that if it was not for the \$512 million over budget that came in through property windfall taxes, this budget this year would be in deficit again. He said:

This budget formally charges ‘the party’ — the government. Next year’s will likely prove it’s ‘guilty’.

He is starting off — he charges the party, next year the government will be found guilty. We are back to the Guilty Party, to which I will return throughout my contribution. I will demonstrate to the Minister for Energy Industries and others that what we have is a return to the bad old Labor: high taxing; high spending; cannot control the wages growth; waste of money; and no outcomes. What have we got? Disaster looming around the corner. Terry McCrann said:

If so, the really big worry is that there’s no Jeff Kennett — and even more, the fiscally retentive Alan Stockdale — waiting in the wings to pull us back from financial meltdown.

Terry McCrann’s words were, ‘We’re heading for financial meltdown’. He continued:

One number captures the dreadful state of our finances, and which worked to keep Messrs Bracks and Brumby, temporarily, out of financial jail.

The property boom dumped an extra \$510 million more than expected into the state coffers.

But for that, the budget would have plunged at least \$350 million into the red.

As I will demonstrate later in my contribution, for each year the government has been in office it has spent above its budget. It has no capacity to keep to the budget that is allocated to it by the Parliament. This is not money that goes on new programs, as has been amply demonstrated elsewhere, this is money that is absolutely wasted.

McCrann continued:

Worse, we’ve got to teetering on the edge of Joan Kimer-style red ink, despite a much more general and more sustained surge in state revenue.

He goes on:

... Bracks and Brumby have had a staggering \$5 billion more to spend this year than Kennett and Stockdale thought they would ...

And still they have spent all that money and more, and there is nothing to show for it.

If you go to the country and ask the people where the fast rail link is, they will say, ‘We think it is coming, but we don’t know when’. And if you talk to them about, for example, rail standardisation, they will say, ‘It was promised, but we don’t know when’. And if you go to my electorate, to the Banyule community health centre, the people will say, ‘We were promised \$11 million but we don’t know when’. In other words, \$5 billion more, and what have we got to see for it? Not a lot.

Terry McCrann’s article also states that the budget numbers show precisely why a toll has to go on the Scoresby freeway — there is no way future budgets could handle the \$2 billion spent.

Moody’s Investors Service says there is potential for slowing revenues and expenditure pressures. Terry McCrann comes out and says, ‘Home boom saves bacon’, but talks about the great worry that will come from the downturn when we have no-one to pull us back from financial meltdown — and that is his expression.

Then one can turn to an article headed ‘Wages blow-out may squander the Kennett inheritance’ in the *Australian* by Alan Wood, the economics editor, which states:

Militant Victorian unions are dragging their state downhill.

We can go into the issue of the unions in some detail but I think people understand this. One of the things the government cannot do is govern for all Victorians — it is partial to its friends. Members have heard me say before that this government is a political wing of the trade union movement. The trade union movement came first and the Labor Party came second. There is no doubt at all that militant unions, as he says, are dragging their state downhill. He also said here:

Steve Bracks and Brumby have been warning of a tough budget; public sector unions have been warned against pay claims; motorists face a jump in registration charges, which will also be indexed from now on; and all the talk is of spending cuts to preserve a budget surplus of at least the \$100 million the government has committed itself to as a talisman of its fiscal responsibility.

The article goes on to say:

In its 1999–2000 budget the Victorian Treasury forecast that in 2002–03 state government revenue would total \$21 billion. The mid-term budget review in February this year showed a revenue forecast of \$25 billion — a \$4 billion windfall. Add them together and you have a \$5.7 billion gift to the Bracks government.

Where has the money gone? It is a question Brumby doesn't like — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Are you going to do your own speech or just read?

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — I am pointing out to you, Mr Theophanous, that as well as myself, there is, for example, the guy in the service station who said to me, 'They can't manage money'.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — When you showed him the Liberal Party sticker!

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — No, he saw it on the back of the car — Bracks. Taxes. Lies. Labor = tolls. Spontaneously he said to me — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — On a point of order, President, the honourable member keeps referring to a sticker as being something that is being put around, but he refuses to identify what the sticker is from. I suspect the sticker has a sign on the bottom which makes it clear that it is a Liberal Party sticker, in which case he should identify that it is a Liberal Party sticker so that the house is clear about where it came from.

Hon. Philip Davis interjected.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — On the point of order, President, I pick up the interjection from my colleague the Leader of the Opposition, who says it looks like a Labor Party sticker because it does look very much like part of the Labor Party logo from the last campaign! It does not have anything across the bottom, so in that sense it is not authorised.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — It is not authorised?

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — This one is not. The only words it has on it are: Bracks. Taxes. Lies. Labor = tolls.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — What about the thing on the side?

The PRESIDENT — Order! Are you speaking further on the point of order, Mr Forwood?

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — I do not think there is a point of order. It is a sticker on the back of my car.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister has raised a point of order as to a document, in this case a sticker, that the honourable member is referring to. I asked him to source it. He has stated to the house that it is not sourced; it is not authorised by anybody and he has read out the full extent of all the words on the

sticker so the house is aware of its origins, or in this case the lack of origins — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Hang on! President, I take offence at that!

The PRESIDENT — Order! While I am on my feet I ask the minister to desist from speaking. With respect to the point of order, the member has identified the full content of the sticker to the house and has noted that it is not authorised by anybody, and so he has made it clear as to all words that are on that sticker. That satisfies the member's original point of order.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Thank you. I am reluctant to do this, but by way of interjection the minister accused me of lying, and I ask him to withdraw it.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — I did not.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — You did. I heard it.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — I didn't do it. What do you want me to do? Apologise for what I didn't do?

Hon. Philip Davis — Apologise! You know the rule!

The PRESIDENT — Order! I, unfortunately, did not hear it because I was on my feet trying to give a ruling, but there were interjections going on. The honourable member takes offence at words uttered by the minister. And you are asking him to withdraw, Mr Forwood, is that right?

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Yes.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member has taken offence and asks the minister to withdraw.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — President, I do not believe I did say anything about the member lying. I did say that if it is from the Liberal Party then that would be a lie. But I did not say anything about the member himself lying. I do believe that document comes from the Liberal Party.

Hon. Philip Davis — Are you going to withdraw?

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — And incidentally, I withdraw.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — I thank the minister for his gracious withdrawal! I do not think the issue of where the sticker comes from is relevant to the debate.

What is relevant to the debate is the reaction of the people who believe the sentiments behind it are true, and that is why the government is so sensitive.

It is why the minister and the Treasurer, and the Premier in particular, are very sensitive to the accusation of where the money has gone and what we have to show for it. Yes, we are high taxing and high spending, but what have we got to show for it? Where has all the money gone?

Mr Theophanous, as a philosophy student, would know of Georg Hegel, who was a 19th century philosopher. What he said in his *Philosophy of History* was:

What experience of history teaches is this — that people and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it.

This was later picked up by George Bernard Shaw in *The Revolutionists Handbook*, and the preface to *Heartbreak House*, and it is now more commonly known as ‘Those who don’t learn from history are condemned to repeat it’.

One of the problems for the Labor Party is that out there among the ordinary people of Victoria they think we are on the brink. They think history is about to repeat itself. They think the behaviour of the Labor Party in government, in the 1980s and early 1990s, is about to come back.

Craig Wilson said to me recently, after a discussion we were having about the tolling on the Scoresby issue:

This government has peaked, and I think it is on the way down.

That is just his opinion and he is only one person, but the theme that runs through is that this government is out there squandering funds. Can a leopard change its spots? Does this Labor Party have the capacity to be different to previous governments? On the evidence found in the budget papers and in the evidence of the last few days one would have to say no.

John Cain, in his book *John Cain’s Years*, made two points, which I wish to share with the house.

Hon. Philip Davis — This is our bible.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — A highly marked bible. At page 270 he said:

The cabinet process built around properly prepared submissions circulated in accordance with appropriate time lines fell into disarray. The government lost the capacity to take on and decide hard issues ... Ministers regarded the wishes and demands of the interest groups and/or the public sector unions in their portfolio as more important than good

management and good government. Many did not want to say no to anything asked of them. The perceived wishes of the factions on appointments and resource priorities were dominant, and the government became the object of varying demands of the factions.

I was constantly accused of being too concerned about ‘good government’.

We are beginning to see the same issues rise again. One could certainly look at the insurance example. The premiers of Queensland and New South Wales were capable of dealing with the issue. Not here in Victoria! Do you know what is happening in Victoria? No-one has told us officially yet — the Minister for Energy Industries knows because it went through cabinet yesterday — this house is not sitting next week.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Excuse me, did you see the two full-page ads by the plaintiff lawyers?

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — I did. I saw them.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Does that look like we’re caving in?

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Absolutely it does!

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. J. G. Hilton) — Order! Through the Chair, please.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — There is no doubt that Labor members are under so much pressure and they have got it so badly wrong that the dates, which have been in our diaries for months, have been changed. We are not sitting next week because a bill that was to be introduced in the Assembly needs to go through in two weeks. This is an example of what Mr Cain was saying about the inability to make the hard decisions. At page 286 he said:

The corollary of this kind of mentality is continuing factional warfare. In this mood the factions continue to be feral and to fight about everything ...

He goes on about some of the things and continues further:

Extreme policy positions can be pursued to curry favour with some group in or on the fringe of the party because of some perceived factional benefit in doing so.

What did we see on the weekend? Again we saw this sort of problem. I only need to refer the house to page 2 of the *Australian* of 19 May:

A federal frontbencher said he left yesterday’s conference depressed after the morning was spent talking about a brawl between delegates rather than debating policy.

He said the Victorian branch was now in the same destructive state as in the 1970s —

I would say 1980s and 1990s —

when federal intervention was required to rescue it.

‘It’s growing like a cancer’, he said. ‘The organisational branch of the Victorian party is completely dysfunctional’.

So we have the budget brought to this place today by a party that, by description of one of its own frontbenchers, is completely dysfunctional. We do not have a government capable of taking the hard decisions. We do not have a government capable of articulating a vision for the future. We do not have a government capable of managing the finances of the state. As you walk around Victoria today people are saying, ‘Where’s the money gone? What have we got to show for it?’.

If you need any further examples you can turn to today’s Crikey.com.au, which goes into some detail about the role played by cabinet ministers in the Bracks government. It says:

In the debates themselves, cynically led by right boss — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — On a point of order, Acting President, I want to draw your attention to the fact that the member is going to proceed to quote from a source known as Crikey.com. This is a source where people anonymously — —

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Delia Delegate.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Well, anonymously, are able to put any kind of scurrilous accusations about any person or persons without being able to be pursued in any way, shape or form. It is open to any member of the public, as I understand it, to put those comments on to the Net. For all I know, the honourable member is going to quote from the source that has made its contribution to Crikey.com and that contribution could in fact be Bill Forwood! No-one knows who has made that contribution.

This house went through a very difficult period in the late 1990s and it was decided during that time that a code of conduct would be brought into this house. That code of conduct was institutionalised — —

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — You would not dare pursue this?

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Mr Forwood might want to laugh, but that code of practice was introduced into this house and accepted by the house and a number of rulings were subsequently made by the President in

relation to that code. The code was along the lines that if a member obtains a document from an unknown source that contains allegations the member may raise the matter in the house but in a way that does not name any individual. If this code of practice is going to be followed by this house people will not get up and simply make comments based on emails or based on what may or may not have been written into Crikey.com.

Let me give you another example, Acting President, so you clearly understand this. Anyone can anonymously paste information onto the Net.

Hon. Philip Davis — You have not made your point of order yet.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — The point of order is that under the code of conduct that has been established in this house — and I will quote from a ruling on the code of conduct from the then President:

If a member obtains a document from an unknown source ...

Now, if the member is able to identify who exactly wrote this information and sent it in to Crikey.com, it might be a different story, but he is unable to do that, so it is an unknown source under that definition and, if so, you should rule him out in the sense that he should not proceed to name any individuals contained in that unknown and unnamed source of allegations.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — On the point of order, Acting President, there is a long-held tradition in journalism in this country that the editor takes responsibility for articles, particularly in newspapers, and all the electronic media. This document is publicly available on the web through Crikey.com, a very well-known Internet site.

Hon. Philip Davis — And entertaining.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Yes, entertaining. This site has all sorts of stuff on it and, as I said by interjection to Mr Theophanous, if they get it wrong they are sued. The author has just paid \$25 000 to Nick Bolkus for something that he said that was wrong, so he takes responsibility for it. I have sourced this document absolutely. I did not write this document. This document is a public document off the Web and we should not allow this house to be put in a position where, because of the sensitivities of some members, documents on the public record are not able to be used in this place.

The ACTING PRESIDENT
(**Hon. J. G. Hilton**) — Order! The member has

referred to Crikey.com. He has made reference only to the source at the present time; he has not made any specific quotations from Crikey.com. Until he does, I do not think there is a point of order.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — I wonder what you are so sensitive about because — —

Hon. Philip Davis — You know what's coming, do you, Theo?

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — He does. I showed it to him. It does describe Mr Theophanous as an alleged branch stacker.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — On a point of order, President, I want to refer you to standing order 9.17, which indicates:

No member will use offensive or unbecoming words in reference to any other member of either house.

Also standing order 9.18 states:

All imputations of improper motives and all personal reflections on members will be considered highly disorderly.

I put it to you, President, that the sleazy attempt by the Honourable Bill Forwood to try to quote from a document which is unnamed and unsourced is highly disorderly, and I ask you to rule him out of order and to ask him to withdraw and apologise.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister has referred to standing orders 9.17 and 9.18. He has taken offence at the words the honourable member has quoted to the house. I ask the honourable member to withdraw under standing order 9.18, which states that:

... imputations of improper motives and all personal reflections on members will be considered highly disorderly.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — On the point of order, President, it needs to be objectively offensive. Since when have the words 'alleged branch stacker' been objectively offensive? I would have thought that in the Labor Party the words 'alleged branch stacker' were a badge of flaming honour. I think it is extraordinary that he can come in now with such a display of petulance and say that the words 'alleged branch stacker' cannot be used in this Parliament.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I have ruled on the point of order. Where members in the past have uttered such words they have been asked to withdraw and they have done so. The member has indicated he takes offence, and I ask the Honourable Bill Forwood to withdraw.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — I withdraw. I am very sorry about the extraordinary sensitivity of the minister to the events that took place at his own state council.

The point I am making to this Parliament in the debate on the budget is that this state is in trouble because of the antics of these people, like the punch-up at the brawl at the state council. You do not need me to tell you that Mr Theophanous, along with some of his colleagues, was in it up to his eyebrows.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — On a point of order, President, this is totally inappropriate. The honourable member has made a direct accusation in relation to me, saying that I was involved somehow in the brawl — what he has called the brawl, which I do not believe was anything like that, but he has suggested that I was involved in that. I take offence at that and I would also ask you, President, in giving your ruling to indicate to the member that if he has a substantive matter that he wishes to put to the house in relation to my behaviour in any forum then he should do so by substantive motion and should not be attempting by way of sleazy mechanisms to come in here and make unsubstantiated allegations against members.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The Honourable Bill Forwood made accusations against the member to which he objects, which were not accurate, and I ask the member — —

Hon. E. G. Stoney — How do we know?

The PRESIDENT — Order! Because I was there. I ask the honourable member to withdraw.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — I withdraw. I am glad there were some eye witnesses to the brawl. But I do make the point that he has been known to be involved in the odd scuffle in the chamber.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I was there also, so I ask the member to come back to the budget, please.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — I am. Let me make this point about the budget — this is really important: the issue that confronts the state at the moment is that we are on the brink and one of the reasons we are on the brink is because of the behaviour of the government and part of the behaviour of the government comes from senior cabinet members. I am quoting a document. The story is on the front page of the *Australian*, but I am quoting a document that not only mentions Mr Theophanous in name but also mentions the chief of staff to the Minister for Finance, Roland Lindell. It mentions Mr Theophanous again in reference to a speech he gave. It mentions Mr Larocca, who

works for small business minister, Marsha Thomson. It mentions a Mr Tom Cargill, who works for Senator Robert Ray. I refer to the quote in the *Australian* where it says:

‘The organisational branch of the Victorian party is completely dysfunctional.’

This is about the budget. We have a situation in Victoria where the government is in factional warfare — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Let me just read a few more quotes from Delia Delegate on Crikey.com, who happens, like the President, to have been there. I do not need to go into the details of what Mr Roach did to Mr Abbouche, or the role played by Mr Shorten. The point that I am making is that the people of Victoria are entitled to know that the behaviour of the government is the same as that of the government in the late 1980s and 1990s. I come back to the point — President, you were not in the chamber at the time — that I am saying the question is: does a leopard change its spots? If you read the budget, the answer is: no. What have we got? We have high taxes, we have high spending, we have wastage, we have wages blow-outs — we have nothing to show for it. And why? Because of the rabble that is running the state.

An Honourable Member — Move on.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Absolutely. If you want to have some examples of why a leopard cannot change its spots, I refer you to this document: *Economic and Financial Management under Labor*, by Theo Theophanous, MP, February 1994.

We can go to this year’s budget and talk about the funny-money deals because the government is involved in them. If you are looking for funny-money deals you do not need to go much further than the Spencer Street deal — where the government took \$66 million, would you believe, up front — or the payment from National Express which it took up front and put into revenue, wrongly classified. You can look at some of the funny-money deals in the pre-election period when the government raided, as it did in the past, the Transport Accident Commission, when it raided the gas and water authorities and when it took \$115 million of roads expense and fortuitously reclassified it as capital, adding another \$115 million to the reported surplus. The government is now reversing those decisions.

Mr Theophanous would remember better than most the days when next year’s revenue was pulled into this year

and when this year’s expenses were pushed out to the following year.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — So quote me!

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — I am going to quote Mr Theophanous at length. At page 8 his document states:

The deterioration of the current account could not be addressed by Labor at the time without appropriate union/government enterprise agreements and greatly increased revenue. As these options seemed largely closed, Labor took the only other route available to it — it borrowed, not to build infrastructure or public assets, but to pay for the recurrent costs of delivering services. The current account deficit thus reached record levels and affected Victoria’s credit rating ...

He has put it on the record.

What I am saying to the chamber is that we are heading back the same way. We are on the brink. If you look at the current budget papers you will see that the borrowings for this year are double what they were budgeted for last year.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — That’s why I’m here, Bill — to make sure we don’t!

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Mr Theophanous says he is here to make sure it does not happen but Mr Theophanous is the person who refuses to allow this chamber to hear the sordid story of the weekend brawl which he would not deny — I hope — he was present at and which he discussed with people who were there.

Let me go on to refer to shifts in the capital account. I have just mentioned the shifting of \$115 million from one account to the other. Mr Theophanous said in his document:

Not only was the ... government caught in a fiscal policy wedge which made higher deficits and increased debt inevitable, it was also forced to adopt some inappropriate strategies because of it.

What are we doing now? We are back with the inappropriate strategies.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Yes, we are. Mr Theophanous knows that, and if he wants any evidence or proof of it, why not go to the Ombudsman’s summary of the report on the investigation into allegations of a conspiracy between the then Department of Natural Resources and Environment and the Department of Justice? Mr Theophanous’s words were ‘forced to adopt some

inappropriate strategies'. If ever there was living proof of an inappropriate strategy it is this document tabled in this house two weeks ago. What does it say? It says:

The 'projectising' of the survey function was little more than a scheme to panel beat an existing statutory function into a different shape so as to meet the section 76 criteria.

What does that actually mean? It means this: at the moment there are \$450 million of taxpayers' funds in trust accounts in Consumer Affairs Victoria. The government wanted to get some money, so what did it do? It concocted a scheme — it called it a round robin scheme, by its only language. The idea was that the government would make up projects to get grants from these trust funds instead of using the appropriation which comes to the Parliament, which we are debating today. What a funny-money scheme is that!

The Ombudsman's report goes on to say:

It was a condition that the 'projectising' would only be for three years after which the funding of the survey function by way of appropriation would resume.

In other words, 'Let's just raid the money out of the trust funds and use it inappropriately, and then we'll go back to the old system after that'.

I make the following point, and I make it very seriously, about what the two ministers said when asked their views about this. The Ombudsman says:

In due course I received responses from both. Although neither answered the questions that had been posed, each acknowledged having been in attendance at the presentations given in regard to —

the initiative.

Page 7 of the report shows that if it were not for Deloitte's this story would never have come out. It states in reference to the investigator:

His insistence on obtaining information finally resulted in his being told of the intention to 'projectise the existing functions of the survey office' and of the proposal to replace appropriation money with funding from the Estate Agents Guarantee Fund. He stated that he informed Land Victoria that DTT —

Deloitte's —

would not put its name to something that was not a project.

Well, good on 'em, because this is a funny-money deal, and that is the direction this government is heading in. If you want more proof of it, what about last year's Parliament appropriation bill?

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Aren't you going to quote me anymore?

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — I have got more. As Mr Theophanous would know, the Parliament appropriation bill brought to this place last year was false. What sort of executive brings to this Parliament a bill — particularly a bill dealing with funds — knowing it to be false? I will deal with that in real detail when we debate the Parliament appropriation bill.

Mr Theophanous, having talked about how the government was forced to adopt inappropriate strategies, went on to talk about interest swaps and short-term borrowings:

The above action was compounded by some highly questionable financial transactions including certain types of interest swaps.

He went on to say that they were used —

... to acquire up-front payments in lieu of interest.

In one example \$35 million was appropriated, probably unlawfully ...

Then he went on to point out that when he was chairman of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee he was the person who brought this to notice — and I give him full credit for that. But the issue is that we are now back with the government doing the same thing. As you track your way through the budget papers you will discover that this sort of funny-money stuff is coming back again.

During the estimates hearing the other day there was a brief exchange with Tony Arnel from the Building Commission who was there with the Minister for Planning. Some millions of dollars are in the Building Commission for its use — that is how it funds itself, as it does not get an appropriation line. But it will be interesting to see — I will keep my eye on this — if the government decides, 'Oh, there are a couple of million in the Building Commission. Let's see if we can lay our hands on that'.

That is the sort of behaviour that has come back and it is compounded by the behaviour that we see around the government such as the fracas that took place on the weekend.

Hon. J. M. Madden — That was a blue.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — A blue, thank you. I pick up the words of the minister, who just said it was not a fracas, it was a blue.

Mr Theophanous wrote this document which raised the issue of funny-money deals, and he is right. They are back, and we should all be really concerned about it. This is not an appropriate way to run the state, and we

now have a situation where the behaviour that was so prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s is back with us. Why would things be any different?

I go back to my question: does a leopard change its spots? No, of course it does not. Why doesn't it? The Premier used to be a ministerial adviser; the Deputy Premier, Mr Thwaites, used to be a ministerial adviser; the Minister for Local Government and Minister for Housing was chief of staff to Joan Kirner for six or seven years; and Mr Gavin Jennings, Deputy Leader of the Government in this house, was on Joan Kirner's staff as well. Do leopards change their spots? No, of course they do not. They used to be advisers, and now they are in the cabinet and they are behaving the same way. The people of Victoria want to know where the money has gone and what the government has to show for it. The answer is: not a lot!

I wish to make a couple of points. I refer honourable members to table 7.3 on page 133 of budget paper 2.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Have you finished with me, Bill?

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — You leave. I'll go back.

The table is titled 'Labor's financial statement 2002 asset investment funding approved for commencement in 2003–04'. We know the toll came in because the government could not fund it, and we know that caused huge angst internally in the Labor Party.

What we now have on pages 133, 134 and 135 is a whole list of projects that have been promised but not funded. What sort of government does that? Why are we now in the situation where, for example, in the Department of Education and Training, under Labor's financial statement, facilities for excellence is promised \$80 million but only \$10 million has been allocated; for the building better schools — new schools program, an amount of \$180 million was promised, but only \$90 million has been allocated. The school replacement program was promised \$20 million, but only \$5 million has been funded. The government promised \$30 million for the community facilities fund, but a measly \$0.5 million is to be spent in the year 2003–04.

You can go then to the Department of Human Services and go through the programs one by one. Let me do this one in total: the total promised was \$255.5 million; the total allocated was \$112.4 million — exactly half. Look at the Department of Sustainability and Environment: \$80 million was due to be spent on particular programs that are partly funded, and \$52 million has been

allocated. Go to table 7.4 and what do you get? You get the ones that are not funded at all.

The government went to the people of Victoria with a series of promises, and it cannot meet them. We now have a list of projects that cannot be funded, including a whole bunch of black spot programs that have been cancelled. The Minister for Transport was on the record as saying that:

'Black spot treatments have proven to be a highly cost-effective way of reducing casualty crashes, and I look forward to the positive results of the program.'

Excuse me? Cancelled! You can go to the community business employment program — cancelled!

Look at table 7.4 headed 'Labor's financial statement 2002 asset investment funding to be considered in future budgets' to see more cancellations. They include the whole of the classroom replacement program, \$50 million, and the schoolyard blitz program, \$10 million. Go to the Department of Human Services where the Royal Women's Hospital redevelopment program of \$190 million and the Northern Hospital allocation of \$23 million have been cancelled. Go down the list and there are more — the elective surgery centre of excellence at the Alfred hospital, \$60 million; aged care facilities — Grace Mackellar, \$50 million; and the community health centre upgrades, \$26 million — I mentioned that earlier because \$11 million of that was due for the Banyule community health centre in the electorate I have the honour to represent.

So what do we have? There is cancellation after cancellation! The Department of Sustainability and Environment's Victorian Water Trust funding, comprising the Goulburn and Broken rivers upgrading of irrigation systems allocation of \$40 million has been cancelled.

Let me make the point that it is not just about the fact that these programs have vanished and are not being funded at all but that part of the waste of this government was on advertisements. We know there has been extraordinary waste in the past. Before the election the government must have spent \$50 million or \$60 million — an outrageous amount of funds — on all sorts of self-promoting advertisements. The other day the government took out an advertisement which criticised the federal government for not funding something. Let me point out the hypocrisy of this government. This list, which goes on for a page and a half and totals \$638 million — that is, over half \$1 billion — plus those that I mentioned before which are half funded or less than half funded equals \$1.385 billion. Yet this government criticises the

federal government for not funding part of the Wimmera-Mallee pipeline!

I say to the government, 'You have \$77 million in the forward estimates. Go and spend it! Get up in the country and save some water! The government can save 83 000 megalitres of water! Why don't you start saving some of the money now! You don't have to wait for the federal government. Why wait for the federal government? Go and spend your own money'. To its credit there is \$77 million in the forward estimates, and the government should spend it. It should go and save some water. What a good idea.

I wish to make a couple of points about wages blow-outs. We know there has not been a lot to show for the money that has been spent by this government over and above its budget. This government has blown its spending every year since it came to office. In 1999-2000 it overspent by \$1.1 billion. In 2000-01 it was only out by \$600 million, but again it could not keep to its budget; it could not cut its costs to keep to its budget. In 2001-02, \$2.132 billion was overspent and this year it is \$1.544 billion over and above the budget. Part of that goes to the wages deals.

I refer to some of the wages deals that have been detailed by the Auditor-General. He identifies \$23.5 million in the November 2001 Community and Public Sector Union deal, above the guidelines; \$53 million for the teachers, above the guidelines; \$124 million for the nurses, above the guidelines, and \$73 million for Human Services, above the guidelines.

On and on it goes. During the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee meeting on 14 May the Treasurer was asked about wages growth this time around. Honourable members would know that the budget papers show a 3.6 per cent growth in wages this year. That includes all the new public servants to be hired in line with election commitments.

The Treasurer then made the point that the baseline for the wages guidelines will be 2.25 per cent and anything above that would need to be reflected in productivity growth. Honourable members know that a significant round of enterprise bargaining agreements is to come up in the next year or so. Does the government expect the people of Victoria to believe the government will be able to hold the wages line to 2.25 per cent? Wages have gone up at an annual rate of 7.3 per cent in the life of this government which is 5 per cent over and above the amount that the Treasurer says he will hold to. It gets back to the issue of where the savings are coming from.

This year \$141 million of savings are expected to be found plus \$130 million for the productivity dividend. If the government does not get them, then it does not have a surplus at all. Nobody I know expects the government to bring in the budget at the right level. Nobody I know thinks the government can do it: it does not have the will, the brains or the ability.

It also goes partly to the way the government spends its money. Like me I am sure some honourable members got a letter from the Minister for Small Business. Attached to it is a folder saying 'State Government of Victoria', which is very nice. Inside there is a two-page press release, a picture of the Small Business Commissioner and two postcards. It is a small example, but why did members receive this letter? If you look after the pennies, the pounds look after themselves: that was the adage we were taught, and this is a small example of waste.

The other day in this place Mr Baxter referred to the number of copies members got of the *Independent Report of the Victorian Industrial Relations Taskforce*. This government does not have the capacity to look after the little things. And what happens? It gets the big things wrong as well!

Let us look at the list which shows that \$60 million was wasted on the vindictive ambulance royal commission, and at least \$44 million was wasted on the Seal Rocks fiasco. As Mr Baxter and I know from the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee meeting the other day, before the last election the government got advice from two Queen's counsel who said, 'Don't go ahead with it'. The Premier refused to release the advice, but the government went ahead anyway adding to the cost because it did not want to put the fact that it owed \$44 million into its forward estimates. It was just another funny-money deal.

The blow-out at Federation Square is extraordinary, and think about what happened at Saizeriya. This government has been lucky to get away with the property boom and the buoyant economic conditions primarily because of its inheritance from the Kennett government but also because of extraordinarily good management by the federal government. If you look now at what the Victorian government expects for the year ahead, the growth rate is down and Victoria is not doing as well as the other states anymore. That is demonstrated time and again. Page 181 of the budget estimates shows that the new investments facilitated and announced in 2001-02 were \$2.2 billion. The target for 2003-04 is \$1.4 billion, down on this year's expected outcome of \$1.6 billion. What is happening? Why are people not investing here?

The other day the Treasurer made another claim about people flocking to Victoria. I got a copy of the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures on net migration into Victoria, headed 'Statistical summary Victoria: population growth and decline'. The second page shows that for the September 2002 quarter, there was net migration of 89 people into Victoria.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — If you had listened to the Treasurer at the committee you would have thought it was thousands!

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Extraordinary, isn't it! That gets to the important issue of spin, because in the end this government is about spin. Honourable members would know that I raised the issue recently of the press release that had 'pick your figure'. There were two sets of figures, and you could pick your figure.

I want to turn briefly to land tax. As I drive to work I come down Queens Parade and George Street. Opposite George Street on Alexander Parade there is a big sign which says:

Dear Mr Bracks,

Victoria's land tax is:

The highest in the world

Carries a 20 per cent penalty

Anti-investment

Will cause a Victorian property recession

Will shift retirement funds to Queensland

Mr Bracks please fix your land tax disaster now

I finish on this note because it is the land tax — property taxes and stamp duty — which has kept this government in the black — just. This year if the government does not get its savings — and I believe it cannot — it will be in the red. It will not make the savings: we know it has not got the capacity to do it. So we are over taxed and highly taxed. There is no doubt that there is nothing to show for the taxes that have been spent other than a wages blow-out across the state. We are on the brink and the opposition does not see any sign of government members addressing the fundamental problems facing Victoria. It is a sad thing to say that in four years the state can be wrecked so quickly. The opposition does not like it; it does not want to see it happen. It wants to see a vision which continues Victoria's growth; it does not want it to slip backwards or find ourselves heading back in the same direction we found ourselves in during the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

The government has a responsibility to govern for all Victorians, not for sectional interests. It has a responsibility to spend the taxpayers funds wisely. It is not doing it and the people of Victoria know it. They are the ones who are saying, 'Where has all the money gone; what is there to show for it; where will it all end?'. I say to the government it is in real trouble. Now is the time for it to address the issues that face Victoria, not the time for the slick public relations stunts, or the mealy-mouthed words that come from the press statements. It is time to bite the bullet and deal properly with the issues that face Victoria. The government should not blame Kennett, or the drought, or the offshore problem. It is time for the government of the moment to face up to its responsibility to govern for all Victoria. This is a budget on the brink. How quickly it has all deteriorated!

Hon. W. R. BAXTER (North Eastern) — This is a very disappointing budget. I have heard the details of a lot of budgets in this place in the time I have been here, and this one is exceedingly disappointing. One could also say it is a predictable budget, that you would get from a Labor government just entering its second term. It is no surprise. As Mr Forwood has so well pointed out in his contribution, the people of Victoria have no faith in Labor governments being able to manage money. They are seeing in this budget their worst fears being realised again. They were prepared to give Labor another go; they saw Labor come into office with a huge surplus bequeathed to them from the outgoing government.

They desperately hoped Labor had learnt the lessons of the Cain-Kirner years, and that the new generation of Labor members and ministers would want to chart a new, fresh and responsible course and that they would not fall into the traps that the Cain and Kirner governments so disastrously fell into, with the extraordinary cost that their decisions and lack of decisions at the time imposed upon all Victorians, and which made it so difficult for their successors in government for so many years to get the economy and the state back on an even keel.

But I have moved around my electorate since this budget has been released and have found the same sorts of sentiments expressed that Mr Forwood heard at his service station. I would say to Ms Hirsh that it is not just one person saying it to Mr Forwood at the Shell service station in his electorate, it is dozens of people saying it all around the state of Victoria, and, I would think, particularly in country Victoria. I do not have much experience of what they are saying in the suburbs, but I was in Tallangatta last Thursday evening at a dinner function of some 160 people. I moved

around the tables and the overwhelming sentiment, at table after table, was, ‘Well, it’s happening again; here we go again; they can’t manage. They simply cannot manage money. Where has it gone? What’s happened to it? What happened to all that cash surplus that Kennett left to them?’.

Hon. P. R. Hall — Yes, \$1.7 billion.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — I think it was a bit more than that, Mr Hall. I think it was about \$1.8 billion in fact. And people are now finding it extraordinary that this has been dissipated so quickly and that the healthy surplus somehow disappeared, and we now have a budget that this year has been propped up, as Mr Forwood illustrated to the house earlier, by receipts from property transfers that have come in some \$500 million or \$600 million ahead of their budget. If we had not had the fortuitous circumstance of the property boom continuing this budget would be in the red. It is a pretty sobering thought to contemplate that next year, if the property boom falters — and many of the pundits are suggesting that it may well do so — we can be plunged into the red because this budget is so predicated on this windfall gain that there are certainly no guarantees that it will continue.

People are saying, ‘Where has it all gone?’ Mr Forwood asked where it has all gone. I have a bit of trouble explaining to my constituents where it has all gone. I have to listen, as other members do, and particularly those of us who are unfortunate enough to be on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee (PAEC), to the Premier and the Treasurer engaged in the blame game. I sat there for two days last week, listening to the Premier and the Treasurer blaming the federal government: ‘It is all the federal government’s fault; they won’t give us enough grants; it is all the Kennett government’s fault’. Somehow or other, four years into its term of government Labor members are still blaming the Kennett government. ‘It is all the drought’s fault’, they said. Droughts are a fact of life in this nation. If the paltry amount this government has spent on drought out of a \$24 billion budget is to blame for having undermined the budget, and if something like the drought and the small contribution — at this stage — that the government has had to make to it is going to throw the budget off track, it shows what a very narrow path we are treading. ‘Oh, it’s the bushfires’, they said. ‘We spent \$201 million on bushfires’, the Treasurer said.

The committee has such a quaint method of operating that one does not actually get the chance to explore some of the claims that were made by some of the ministers who appeared before the committee, but I

would have liked to ask the Treasurer how much of the \$201 million was made up of expenditure in the Department of Sustainability and Environment that was going to occur anyway. We acknowledge that there was some overtime that would not have been paid except for the bushfires, but much of that \$201 million is probably the wages that were going to be paid to those people anyway. Yes, they would have been doing something other than fighting fires. Nevertheless the expenditure should already have been budgeted for and accounted for in the system.

Did we get a chance to explore that? No, unfortunately on this rotational system we have on the committee we then got Dorothy Dixers asked by Labor members, and they even persisted in asking questions the answers to which had already been provided.

Hon. Bill Forwood — A waste of bloody time.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — Yes, Mr Forwood, a waste of time, I agree with you.

Now we hear about rail standardisation. Before the election, even before the 1999 election, this government was going to spend \$96 million on rail standardisation, but it has not happened yet.

Hon. D. K. Drum interjected.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — I gather that, Mr Drum, and the Minister for Transport in the other house is probably going to go into the business of flogging surplus railway lines, because when the Treasurer was asked about that the other day he said, ‘No, the feds will not help us, we cannot do it until the feds assist us’. I do not remember that caveat being put on Labor’s promise when it made it for \$96 million. It was going to go ahead regardless of the feds, but now it is saying it cannot do it because the feds are not assisting it in this nation-building project.

Hon. P. R. Hall interjected.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — Absolutely. Then we heard about the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline. Why will the federal government not commit to the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline as the state government claims to have committed? It is very odd because on the very day that the minister was saying that, a press release was being issued under the name of Mr Truss, Dr Kemp and, lo and behold, Mr Cameron and Mr Thwaites. The press release headed ‘\$7.77 million for the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline’ states:

‘The proposal to extend the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline system across the entire domestic water supply channels in

the Wimmera–Mallee region represents a major infrastructure project', Mr Truss said.

Mr Truss said that the federal government:

... has been highly supportive of replacing the old and inefficient water supply systems in north-western Victoria, contributing over \$27 million from the National Heritage Trust to piping projects.

This amount includes \$4 million for piping the Cannie Ridge and Patchewollock sections in the northern Mallee region, projects which are currently proceeding ... well.

I challenged the Treasurer at the PAEC meeting last week as to whether the feds have put in any money. He skated all around it. He left the committee with the distinct impression that it was Steve Crabb who did this in the northern Mallee and that the feds have not put anything in. Yet on the very day he was saying that his two colleagues are issuing a press statement which gives a lie to the line the Treasurer was running at the committee.

As Mr Forwood says, I say get on with it. If you are so proud of the money you have put up, get on with it. In fact the Labor government delayed for so long signing the agreement to get on with the planning, and waiting until they could get up to Horsham to make a big song and dance about it, that it is the one that is actually delaying it. I am in no doubt that the federal government will come on board at the correct and proper time because, as I said to the Treasurer last week, even if the feds had made an allocation in their budget last week it could not be spent in this financial year because the rural water authority up there already has \$15 million in the bank for this project, but it cannot spend it this year.

I move to the Calder Highway project, which is very dear to the heart of my colleague Mr Drum. We heard all about it at the committee last week. We were told the feds will not do enough in funding the Calder Highway. I used to be minister for roads — —

Hon. D. K. Drum — How much did you put in, Bill.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — I put a fair bit in, but I also went to Canberra and got the balance. That is how the Woodend bypass was built and that is what happened with other sections of the Calder Highway. Because we had a good relationship with the federal government, we went up, knocked on its doors and negotiated a proper arrangement. It seems to me that the Minister for Transport in the other place just wants to issue critical press releases from out there in Denmark Street, Kew, to make political capital. He is

not too interested in actually sitting down with the federal minister and working out a program. I challenge him to do so.

We also heard about the Mitcham–Frankston freeway. We were told, 'It is all unfair, we have had to make it a toll road because the feds will not do enough'. Yet the feds put \$436 million on the table — and it is still on the table, but the government has walked away from that because it has run its affairs so poorly and so appallingly that it cannot find the money to match that amount. Now it intends to make it a tollway. As I said in a debate a week or two ago, I do not believe it will ever be built as a tollway because the government will not get a private investor to stump up the money under its proposals.

Then at the committee last week we heard about the Geelong bypass. The committee was told that the feds would not put in the money for that bypass. I remind this government that the Geelong bypass is a state responsibility — why does it not accept its responsibilities? Why does it not get on and do the job? Under the road funding regime we have in this nation, the government cannot badger the federal government about the Geelong bypass. The Victorian government has to accept the responsibility. It should get on, do the job and not try to pass the buck to the federal government.

Hon. P. R. Hall — What about the Pakenham bypass?

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — I understand, Mr Hall, that work on the Pakenham bypass has been dragging for quite some time. It clearly is also a priority.

A few minutes ago I dealt with the drought. I think we would all acknowledge that the \$20 000 package that this government announced for the drought was a welcome announcement and was a good initiative. It made a lot of capital out of it. The result is that it is hardly costing it a bean, for two reasons. Firstly, it made the eligibility criteria fairly stringent. I do not necessarily complain about that, but I complain about the fact that the moment the federal government extended exceptional circumstances to any part of Victoria the state government closed the books on its assistance package and in terms of other areas you had to have it in by 7 May or you missed out.

The government must not use the drought as an excuse for the fact that its budget is going bad because it has not spent very much money on the drought in any event, certainly not compared with what the federal government will finally be commended for, allowing

for the lead time for its exceptional circumstances system to get under way. It will cost it nationwide something like \$700 million or \$900 million.

I also want to say something about why I think the budget is going bad. I do not accept all this blame game, or that it is not getting a fair deal from the federal government. I do not accept that the drought has undermined the budget, and I do not accept that bushfires were such an impost and had such an impact on the budget that it has been blown off course.

It is the government's own actions that have caused it to get into trouble so early in its term. I look for a moment at what has happened to the public service numbers as that is very illustrative. We all remember what happened in the Cain-Kirner years. That is how they fixed unemployment back in those days — they put everybody on the public payroll.

Hon. P. R. Hall — It was expensive.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — Yes, it was expensive.

Hon. B. W. Bishop interjected.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — Exactly, Mr Bishop, it becomes embedded — that fashionable word! — in the underlying budget. If we look at the PAEC report of October 2002 on the review of the Victorian public service we find that the number of full-time equivalent public service staff, but not including teachers, and nurses and police, of which we hear so much from this government, has increased by 2665 or 11.3 per cent between June 1999 and June 2002. That is a pretty substantial increase in percentage terms, but it is made even more stark and graphic by a comparison with what happened over the year to June 1999 when the previous government was in office, when there was a reduction of 853 or 3.5 per cent.

I will dwell on that for a moment. Here we have an absolute contrast of two governments and their public services. We had the former government reducing numbers because it was making use of technology. It was getting productivity gains. It was delivering services better and more cheaply, and therefore it needed less people.

What does the government do? Productivity does not seem to come into the argument at all. It says it is taking up new technology. We hear all about this innovation which the Treasurer never stops talking about. Why then do we need 2665 more people? I leave the question hanging in the air because I have not been able to get a satisfactory answer. As Mr Bishop has

said, that becomes embedded in the budget year on year, and we are stuck with it forever.

One of the other reasons the budget is getting into trouble is unreasonable union demands. I will not enumerate a whole list, but I remind the house — —

Hon. D. K. Drum — The MCG!

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — Thank you, Mr Drum, fancy you thinking of that one! Around \$70 million of taxpayers money was squandered for no other reason than to avoid the scrutiny of the federal employer advocate to check on what the unions were doing, to check on how much ghosting of jobs was going on down there and to check on all the sorts of rorts that we know will be happening at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. They gave in to \$70 million of union demands.

Another reason the budget is getting into trouble is that the cabinet is subject to the ideological view of some of its supporters who object vehemently to anyone earning a living from public assets and public land. One only has to look at Seal Rocks. If ever there was a classic illustration of where there is ideological hatred against people being able to utilise public assets for the benefit of the community at large, they have spent, well, who knows — a \$60 million judgment at the moment, add on the legal costs and add on another appeal perhaps — \$100 million of taxpayers funds will be down the gurgler at Seal Rocks. That is another example of how the government is getting into trouble with its own budget.

I shall deal with priorities and how the government sets priorities, and give only two examples, but I am sure there is a range. One example is Eildon Weir. Our major dam in Victoria at Eildon absolutely underpins the economy via the food bowl in the Goulburn Valley and the tourist industry in the north-east. It needs money spent on it of the order of \$30 million to bring it up to world best practice in terms of safety. That is not to say that there is anything wrong with the dam wall, but it was built 50-odd years ago and standards have increased. We are required now to have our reservoirs accommodate super floods and super rainfall events, in numbers that have never been experienced before, and unlikely to be experienced in the future, but we need to be prepared for them just in case.

Eildon Weir now because of the drought is nearly empty. What a perfect time to undertake the work that is required to strengthen the wall to bring it up to those world standards — what an absolutely perfect time to do it. Is there any money in the budget for this? No. Table 7.4 of budget paper 2 is headed 'Labor's

Financial Statement 2002 asset investment funding to be considered in future budgets'. It is a lovely euphemism, is it not — it properly means on the never-never but, nevertheless, it might be considered later. We find that upgrading of the irrigation system of the Goulburn and Broken rivers is \$40 million somewhere down the track. It might not get the chance to do it again for another 20 years if we were fortunate enough to get a good winter and a wet spring and Eildon fills. How will it do it? Or will the government say to the irrigators, 'Well, we've got to do this work next year, you can only fill Eildon to 60 per cent full'. What will it do to the economy and what sort of risk does that expose the budget to?

I am glad the Minister for Commonwealth Games is in the chamber because he and his government propose to spend \$28 million building a footbridge for the purposes of linking a couple of parks here in Melbourne for the Commonwealth Games. It must be a marvellous footbridge for \$28 million! Nevertheless it is an indication of the cockeyed and skewed priorities of this government that it can find \$28 million for a footbridge, but cannot find \$28 million to \$30 million to fix one of our major infrastructure assets in this state, and by not fixing it the budget is exposed to even greater risk of being disrupted further down the track.

The other aspect I turn to in terms of priorities is changes to apprentice training. On what basis did the government decide it would attack the training of apprentices and discourage employers from taking on young people in this very time when most sensible-thinking people are very concerned about where our artisans will come from in the future. Those who go into any mechanics garage, any panel beater, any plumbing shop will see that most of the current batch of tradesmen have grey hair and are like farmers, with the average age somewhere in the fifties. Yet the government says to employers, 'We are going to make it less attractive for you to take on apprentices and we want you to put your money up front, put your money in first and yes, down the track, if this particular guy completes you might get some sort of recompense, but if for some reason he does not complete, through no fault of your own, stiff luck, you've taken him or her on in good faith but not completed, you miss out'.

This is an extraordinary decision. I gather from the budget papers it will only save about \$10 million a year, yet the pressure it will put on in denying young people the opportunity to take on apprenticeships is enormous. I find it absolutely extraordinary that the government would contemplate that in the terms of its overall budgetary strategy. It makes me believe, as Mr Forwood quoted from his bible, *John Cain's Years*,

it is an indication that the cabinet is becoming dysfunctional in that it cannot prioritise and that ministers are going off and doing their own thing.

Hon. P. R. Hall — Some 78 per cent of apprentices actually complete their apprenticeships.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — Is that so, Mr Hall. It is a good percentage. Why the change? I want to discuss some of the risks that the government is facing regarding its future and its capacity to maintain the budgets that the Treasurer keeps telling us about — that is, maintaining a surplus. I have already illustrated that this year's surplus, while it is not false, is based entirely on a windfall.

The first risk is confidence. The government is at grave risk now of confidence running away for the reasons I have already alluded to. The mindset is developing in the community that this is Cain and Kirner starting all over again, and confidence is a very fragile commodity. Once confidence is lost there is no stopping it. It runs away, and we will see investment leave the state and the economy undermined. I object to the Treasurer constantly crowing about the AAA rating by Moody's and Standard and Poor's that the government has held as if that is some great achievement of his. Who lost the AAA rating in the first place? A Labor government lost the credit rating. It squandered the credit rating of the state. The former government struggled valiantly, managed well and recovered it, and this government, thankfully, still has it.

If it had already lost it, it would have been a disastrous turn of events. But as Mr Brideson rightly asks, for how long will we have it? One can already see from Moody's release of last week that it is already beginning to get a bit nervous and ask whether this will last. It is totally out of turn for Mr Brumby as Treasurer to be crowing about the AAA rating. He had nothing to do with getting it back for the state. He has a responsibility to maintain it, and the way he is going it is beginning to look shaky.

In terms of confidence in the state, the weekend's activity at the Labor Party conference will sap confidence. I have heard it jokingly referred to around the house today as a punch-up. This was much more than a punch-up — it was actually violence on the floor of a conference.

Hon. M. R. Thomson — It was not. You weren't there!

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — The minister says it was not violence. The minister has just arrived here and she has not been party to some of the other interjections and

side play that went on during Mr Forwood's remarks, but I would have thought that the evidence adduced during Mr Forwood's remarks was pretty conclusive evidence that a fair bit of violence occurred at the ALP conference over the weekend. That indicates that this party which preaches peace and anti-violence and which has carried on about doing things by consensus and negotiation cannot even manage itself. The union view is that if do you not get your way, resort to thuggery, resort to punching someone; and that is what came into play on Saturday. How ministers could sit there and witness that and believe that they were members of a responsible organisation absolutely beats me. They ought to be ashamed of themselves.

Hon. D. K. Drum — I think they are ashamed.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — I hope they are, Mr Drum. Frankly, I am ashamed to be involved in politics if the norm on how decisions are made is whoever can hit the hardest. That will destroy the capacity of cabinets to take correct decisions and do what is right. If violence and the threat of violence and thuggery become the way we run this state then I do not want to be any part of it. I look to the government to disassociate itself from what happened on Saturday rather than trying to palm it off as some mere sideshow. It clearly was not a sideshow; it was the main game on Saturday.

I also want to examine the wage demands. Mr Forwood alluded to this, and we got it at the hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week when the Treasurer was talking about a 2.25 per cent a year increase in wages unless better productivity and service delivery could be proven. The usual suspects were quick to come out of their caves. Mary Bluett from the Australian Education Union said the government would face stern resistance from the state's 35 000 teachers if it went into pay negotiations offering an increase of 2.25 per cent. She said:

'If they tried to negotiate on 2.25 per cent as an offer then we would be involved in a major dispute with the government', Ms Bluett said.

The Community and Public Sector Union secretary, Karen Batt, said:

Although the government was entitled to make its ambit claim —

and I daresay it knows a lot about ambit claims —

it would be wise to offer a decent deal to public servants to avoid a costly and lengthy arbitration process.

So neither of those union leaders talked about productivity; neither showed any inclination that they are prepared to deliver better value to the taxpayers of Victoria. No, they just want to grab the money, and they are not happy with 2.25 per cent. They will go for goodness knows what — we will have to wait and see. This is another risk to the government. We saw what happened under Cain and Kirner with outrageous wage demands and we are seeing it start here. It is a risk to this budget.

The drought remains a risk also to this budget. Despite the generally good rains that have occurred in the last few days, although not generally throughout the state, the drought is not over yet. Just because the concrete is wet and the bitumen is damp, the government should not assume that the drought is over. I, for one, fervently hope it is, because I am sick of seeing and experiencing the sort of stress that I felt at Tallangatta last Thursday night at the meeting I previously referred to.

Here were people who spent 40 or 50 days fighting the bushfires. They are tired and stressed from that. They have been feeding stock now day in and day out with very expensive fodder — hay and grain. They live in an area which, by the middle of May, would normally be lush and green, and yet it is still brown and dry. Their stress levels on Thursday night were palpable. I know they got a good rain on Sunday, and I hope it continues. But unless we get very substantial rains in the catchment of Eildon in particular we will face another crisis come the spring and summer irrigation seasons. Goulburn-Murray Water, in its announcement made last Friday, said:

Water storages are now at lowest levels ever and there is insufficient water held in storage to provide full entitlements in 2003-04. Water allocations for the 2003-04 season depend almost entirely on the coming winter and spring inflows.

That is quite unusual when we usually have sufficient carryover to underwrite the forthcoming season's allocations. It went on to say:

In the Goulburn system there are about 7 chances in 10 of reaching 100 per cent water right by February.

Goodness knows what the opening allocation will be on 15 August. I suspect it will be somewhere around 20 per cent, and that will impose an extraordinary stress level on so many of our irrigators. I say to the government: the drought is not over yet. Be very, very careful, because it has already blamed it for undermining this budget, and it will undermine the next one much more severely if we do not get substantial rains shortly.

My sixth risk to the budget is union legislation. We have seen the uniform systems, the employment of children and the outworkers legislation before the house, all with an emphasis on coercion and blunt instruments being wielded against employers by union officials. I say that if the government is not careful industry will leave this state. If we are to see a continuation of legislation put before the house at the behest of the unions, the government will undermine our industrial base in this state.

My next risk is water security. Last week I dealt with the *Living Murray* document. This morning when I attended the United Dairyfarmers annual conference in Warrnambool along with my colleagues the Leader of the National Party, Mr Ryan, the honourable member for Rodney, Mr Maughan, and the honourable member for Shepparton, Mrs Powell from the other place, that was the issue most raised with us at the session — that is, the fact that dairy farmers in northern Victoria in particular are very worried indeed about their water security and what decisions might be taken under the Living Murray document.

Victoria traditionally has operated a very secure water supply system. The tough decisions were taken years ago. The water users in this state have their allocations well managed, well husbanded and very much reduced from what they might otherwise have been if we had conducted ourselves like New South Wales and South Australia. If we are to give in under the Living Murray document to the lowest common denominator and do something to accommodate New South Wales and South Australia, then I say we are selling our irrigators short and undermining the economy. It is clearly a very grave risk to the budget and the economy of the state of Victoria, and I put the ministers on notice that they need to take a little more interest in this than they have thus far shown.

I was very pleased that last Friday the meeting of ministers at Toowoomba took a decision which does not sideline the *Living Murray* document but certainly puts it on hold for the time being. The ministers have asked that some other work be done. I have not got time to illustrate to the house the nature of that work but I am very pleased that, following representations many of us have been making to the ministerial council, some notice has been taken.

I again express my concern about the federal leader of the Labor Party, the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Crean, for what he has been saying about the River Murray. I still do not know whether what he is saying about the River Murray is in total ignorance or he is simply playing to the gallery in Melbourne and Sydney.

If what he announced in his budget reply last week was put into action on the time frame that he suggested the irrigation industries of this nation would be destroyed.

I do not believe it will come to pass, but one of the things that concerns me about all the talk we now have about sustainability — it is the fashionable word, the fad of the time — is what does it mean? Does it mean that we are going to destroy our irrigation industries because that is the political imperative of the suburbs regardless of the reality out in the countryside or what our rivers and streams really need? I have grave concerns that we might have short-term political fixes that will undermine the whole economy of the nation forever.

Let us not forget to ask, despite the sorts of articles we saw in the *Herald Sun* last week about who uses water and how much irrigators use: who is the end user of the water that irrigators put on their paddocks? It is the person who goes to the supermarket and buys the litre of milk, the pound of tomatoes or pork chops and the lettuce.

Hon. D. K. Drum interjected.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — Yes, all of us, Mr Drum. We are the end users of the water, not the irrigators. They are simply using it as part of their production that keeps us all alive — that provides us with abundant supplies of fresh, cheap food.

In the few moments that I have left I want to also mention the other risks that this budget is exposed to. If we do get a wet winter — and I rather hope we do for our water reservoirs and other reasons — we are going to find that local government in country Victoria will have an almighty problem with its road infrastructure. We have been living in a sort of false paradise for the last seven years of below-average rain and dry winters. Our road system has not been under the pressure that a wet winter places it under; maintenance has not needed to be done to the extent that is normal. I can see that in the event of a wet winter we are going to have thousands of kilometres of roads collapse almost simultaneously, which would be well beyond the capacity of local government to accommodate, particularly taking into account the superannuation black hole it is grappling with.

In the event of a wet winter this government's budget will be exposed and the government should take that on board. It is also a risk to this government's budget that it relies on taxes and inflation to get it through. The decision to index more than 300 taxes in this state is absolutely iniquitous. The taxes are going to be jacked

up year on year. Putting them up by the consumer price index is akin to a dog chasing its tail: there is a rise in the index, you put the taxes up; that causes the index to rise, which triggers another round of increases in the tax — it goes around and around in circles. It is a very, very bad way to run any sort of system.

The other disadvantage of putting up taxes automatically is that there is never any opportunity or incentive to review taxes, to see whether they are still appropriate, to see whether they are out of line, and to see whether changed community attitudes still require a certain tax to be at that level. If a tax just goes up automatically year on year there is no opportunity to review it. That ought to be taken into account as well.

Time is going to prevent me from dealing with the fire services levy, save to say that the house well knows Victoria is the most diabolical state when it comes to fire service levies. For example, in country Victoria the taxes on commercial insurance premiums equal 88 per cent. You can compare that with the South Australian premiums of 22 per cent and those in Queensland of 19 per cent. I know a review is under way. I would implore the government, in particular the Treasurer, to grasp this prickly nettle. I am the first to acknowledge that this is an issue that has been around for more than a decade. It is a big problem, but it needs to be tackled. We cannot any longer sustain the fact that in country Victoria you are paying 88 per cent in taxes on an insurance premium.

Hon. P. R. Hall interjected.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — Very well, Mr Hall. Yes, the National Party has made an excellent submission to the fire service levy review and it provides some alternatives, options and different ways of doing it.

Let me conclude by saying that there is a great deal of concern in the community that things are running off the rails — that capital projects that have been promised are in jeopardy. For example, the former government committed \$5.8 million to build a new hospital at Beechworth. We still think we are going to get it, but not a brick has been laid yet.

Hon. Andrew Brideson — They could put a toll on the door!

Hon. W. R. BAXTER — You never know, Mr Brideson. But this is a concern. Five years have passed and the hospital is still to get under way. That is alarming people and it undermines their confidence in what governments say.

Many Victorians are waiting with bated breath to see what happens to our economy. They have seen the surplus bequeathed to this government disappear. They see this surplus that we have this year, that the Treasurer is so proud of, is based on a windfall gain that was not budgeted for and without which we would already be in the red, so they are nervous. They see the risks are high, the wages blow out, the unions' demands. They see the debt is rising again and they remember the \$33 billion debt of only 12 or 13 years ago, and they do not like to see the trends that this budget exhibits of debt again creeping upwards. It could race upwards if the sort of indications that Mr Forwood talked about come to pass.

So I say the people of Victoria do not want history to repeat itself. They have put this government into office in good faith, but they are now getting mightily worried, and I think this government and its backbench as well as its cabinet should be mightily worried indeed as well.

Hon. J. G. HILTON (Western Port) — It is with great pleasure and pride that I speak today on the 2003–04 budget. The Bracks government was elected to repair the damage inflicted on Victoria by the previous Kennett government. The Kennett government worshipped at the altar of economic rationalism. It closed schools, sacked nurses, reduced police numbers and sold off public assets — and to achieve what? Is education improved if we have fewer teachers? Is health improved if we have fewer nurses? Is community safety enhanced if we have fewer police? And do we get better electricity if electricity generation is now in private hands?

The answer to these questions is, of course, no. The Bracks government was elected to undo the damage, and in the first term a significant amount of work was done: extra teachers, nurses and police were employed. At the election in 2002 the public rewarded the Bracks government with a record majority in the lower house and, for the first time, a working majority in this house. The electorate indicated loudly and clearly the type of government it wanted.

The first budget of the government's second term continues the progress that has been made. The budget is socially sensitive whilst at the same time being economically and financially responsible. The Bracks government accepts the constraint of maintaining an annual budget surplus of \$100 million and the subsequent maintenance of our AAA credit rating. I am happy to repeat the often-stated comment of my honourable friend from Geelong, Mr John Eren — AAA here to stay.

This most recent budget was prepared against a backdrop of significant financial difficulty. The bushfires, the drought and the weakness of the international stock markets had a significant effect on the government's freedom of action.

However, before addressing this issue, I would like to highlight some of the contents of the budget which affect the areas in which I am particularly interested — that is, education and environment. For education, the budget allocates an investment of \$285 million-plus over the next four years which will fund another 700 teachers. Additionally, there will be \$137 million invested in new schools or in modernising schools.

I am pleased that my electorate will benefit directly from completion of stage 1 of the Somerville campus of the Mount Erin Secondary College and 10 general purpose classrooms and a staff work area for the West Park Primary School in Hastings. These initiatives, amongst many others, continue the Bracks government's commitment to providing improved education facilities for all our young people. Since 1999 over \$2.75 billion has been invested in Victoria's education and training system. If there is a better way to spend \$2.75 billion, I would like to hear it.

Secondly, the environment is precious and fragile, and I am looking forward in coming weeks to speaking on another piece of legislation which the government will be bringing forward to protect and enhance the environment for this and future generations. Initiatives in this budget include over \$90 million to ensure greater protection and management of the state's water resources, a \$10 million commitment to establish a weed control program, a \$16 million commitment to employ 50 new park rangers, and \$13 million to accelerate the take-up of energy efficiency and renewable energy resources.

I could mention other portfolio areas where significant progress has been achieved but I am sure my honourable colleagues will describe those initiatives in their contributions.

A common refrain from the opposition — and we have heard it today — is: where has the government's \$1.8 billion surplus gone? I suggest it has gone into employing nurses, teachers and police, which is as good a trinity of recipients as I could imagine. But I would also like to refer to an article in the *Sunday Age* of 11 May, written by Tim Colebatch. The article is headed 'Most of the money is still there', and I quote directly from it:

... the main reason the surplus has fallen so much is that the share market plunge added \$917 million this year to the

state's unfunded superannuation liability, whereas in 1999–2000 rising share values reduced the liability \$505 million. That is, on notional gains and losses, a \$1.4 billion slump.

The bureau of statistics measure shows Victoria still heading for a surplus of \$1.3 billion this year. Taxes have raised more revenue, the government has spent still more but most of the surplus has not gone — it's still there.

Whenever any budget is prepared, either at the household or state level, there is always the question of balance: how much money is available; on what should it be spent? There are no easy answers. The business of government is complex and how our revenues are allocated depends on one's philosophy. The extreme economic rationalists and government minimalists would say that government has no place in providing services, except possibly defence, and that all other services should be provided by the market.

The Bracks philosophy is different: a government provides services which improve the lives of the community and those services are provided in areas which have most impact on the day-to-day lives of the majority of people. These areas are obviously health, education, community service and jobs. I believe this budget has struck the right balance. I believe it is a good budget for all Victorians and I would like to commend it to the house.

Could I now briefly discuss the Mitcham–Frankston tollway. Personally I have absolutely no problem with the principle of user pays for major infrastructure. Why should electors in Mildura or Wodonga, ably represented in this house by honourable members of the National Party, pay for a road which they may never use, when the money could be spent on services provided by teachers or nurses, which they almost certainly will use?

Honourable members will say, 'But you made a promise', and I do not disagree. However, as I have alluded to, the conditions affecting this budget were difficult and some tough decisions had to be made. Whatever decision the government made to preserve the underlying budget surplus while still providing increased services in areas of key interest to the people of Victoria, it would be criticised. However, I believe the correct decision in relation to the tollway was made, and I support that decision.

In the last sitting week great play was made by honourable members opposite of the anger being expressed in the community. In fact, honourable members opposite worked themselves into a lather of self-righteous indignation, criticising what they called the dishonesty and hypocrisy of this government and

indicating that this was the start of the long, slippery road to the opposition benches.

Well, I beg to differ. After the policy was announced, I received one phone call to my electorate office about the tollway issue, and that was from a journalist. Again, an article in the *Sunday Age* of 11 May, headed 'Bracks rides out backflip' states:

The Victorian government's backflip last month on the Mitcham-Frankston freeway appears to have had no impact on its soaring popularity in the electorate, according to a new poll.

Despite the announcement of a toll on the Mitcham-Frankston freeway ... the ALP attracted 52 per cent of the primary vote, well above the 47.9 per cent it won in last December's election. On a two-party-preferred basis, it won 62 per cent support in a Morgan poll taken after the announcement.

The poll was conducted among 1046 voters and showed support for the Liberal and National parties continued to fallow below that seen in last year's election landslide.

The Liberal Party scored just 30.5 per cent —

Mr Pullen — How much?

Hon. J. G. HILTON — It scored 30.5 per cent.

The Liberal Party scored just 30.5 per cent below its primary vote of 33.9 per cent in the election, while the National Party slipped to just 2.5 per cent.

Those surveyed attributed their support for Labor to Premier Steve Bracks's personal popularity and their belief that the Victorian economy was doing well under Labor while others said the Liberal Party was still in a shambles and showed no leadership.

My conclusion is that when the Premier made the announcement on the tollway the people of Victoria listened to the Premier, considered and accepted his explanation and moved on.

It also says something else: until the opposition parties develop some policies on health, education, community safety and the environment, which the electors see as relevant to their lives, the opposition will be resigned forever to wandering pitifully in the wilderness, unlistened to, unloved and unwanted.

Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash) — I have much pleasure in speaking on the budget papers, but I am also gravely concerned about the parlous state towards which this state is heading. I am very, very concerned about where this money has gone and what has happened to it all. The trend that is starting is also extremely concerning for all Victorians, and I believe the next budget will be a greatly embarrassing budget for the Treasurer, Mr Brumby, to bring down. He will

be in a very difficult position, and Victoria will then start to really focus on what exactly is happening behind the scenes.

I will speak predominantly about four issues: one is my electorate of Monash Province, and the others are my portfolio areas of tourism, ageing and carers. First, in relation to Monash Province, the Governor spoke in his speech about how this government was going to be doing things for rural, regional and interface areas of Victoria. I welcome rural and regional development, but I remind this house that I come from an inner suburban seat, and nothing is happening in this budget for inner suburban seats. Absolutely nothing is done in this budget for Monash Province, and it is being totally neglected. As I say, I welcome the development of rural and regional Victoria, but my own seat has been badly neglected, and that is starting to become a trend.

One of the major issues in my electorate is the Alfred hospital. The Alfred is not just a major public hospital for all and a centre of excellence for the whole of Victoria, it is the local hospital for my electorate. The most worrying part of this budget is to see the Alfred on page 135 of budget paper 2 in the never-never list of things on hold, on the backburner and not to be considered.

Hon. J. A. Vogels — It will never happen under this lot.

Hon. ANDREA COOTE — As the Honourable John Vogels says, it will never happen under this lot. That is absolutely true. Look at the things that the Liberal Party did for the Alfred. Look at the burns centre and the excellence of the emergency centre. Look at all the things the Liberal Party put an enormous amount of work into. Let us have a very good look at what the Kennett government did for the gay community and for the HIV/AIDS community with Fairfield House and the old braille library. This government has done absolutely nothing for that community at all. We have a centre of excellence for all those programs that were established not by this Labor government but by the previous Kennett government.

However, as I have said, the Alfred hospital is on the never-never list on page 135 of budget paper 2. Some \$60 million was supposed to be spent on the elective surgery centre of excellence at the Alfred but now that is on the never-never list, and I believe we will not see that in the life of this Parliament. In fact, it is going to be very interesting to watch as it slips off the budget papers for next year, never to be seen again.

Another issue in my electorate relates to Inner South Community Health Services, which was told it was scheduled to get four new dental chairs at a cost of \$400 000. Once again, what happened? They are nowhere to be found. A promise was made, a promise was broken, and something else is not happening in our area of Monash Province.

But this budget has done a few very negative things for the people of Monash Province who are paying in the vicinity of \$1900 a year a household in additional taxes, including higher car registration fees, more police fines, higher stamp duty and higher land taxes. Indeed, what is happening is an absolute scandal.

I turn to the *Herald Sun* of 8 May 2003 and the article headed 'Spotlight on fees', which deals with a number of additional fees that will affect my electorate and add to that \$1900 a year. They include gaming licences, and I remind the chamber that the Crown Casino is in my electorate; brothel licences, and I have a significant number of brothels in my electorate which will be significantly affected by this; tour operator licences, which I will come back to; fishing licences; jet-ski licences; boat registration; and scuba-diving licences, to name but a few of the additional taxes we will now see.

Hon. J. A. Vogels — Three hundred in all.

Hon. ANDREA COOTE — The Honourable John Vogels reminds me 300 additional taxes will affect many of the constituents in my area.

I turn to the issue of carers. There is nothing in this budget for carers. There is absolutely nothing in this budget for the people who look after the ageing and the elderly. By contrast, in the federal budget the Minister for Ageing, Mr Kevin Andrews, gave a 7 per cent boost — I repeat, a 7 per cent boost — to national respite in the carers program. The federal government is to be commended. It is a pity the state government did not do more in this area.

In the aged care part of my shadow portfolio, the silence is absolutely deafening! What was done for the aged in this state? Absolutely nothing. The industry is seriously disappointed. It had been led to believe it was going to be well and truly looked after, but no, it received another set of broken promises.

I turn to the document entitled *Healthy Communities — Labor's Plan for Seniors and Community Health — Bracks. Listens. Acts.* Bracks listens and acts — and does absolutely nothing. There were all sorts of promises, but this is a document of myth — a fairytale document. Nothing has happened.

I turn to something the government did do. According to page 71 of budget paper 3, respite care will be stagnant for the next three years, despite what was anticipated to be a huge boost. Indeed, it is a reflection of the enormous demand there will be on respite care in this state.

Another really interesting thing is that the government made a big song and dance about giving \$1.9 million over four years to encourage senior Victorians to participate in sport and recreation. That sounds very admirable until you do the numbers and have a look at the fine print, which people must do to really get a grasp of what this government is doing. For the 65 to 70-year-old age bracket, this \$1.9 million over four years equates to \$1.40 a person a year. How will that encourage senior Victorians to participate in sport? It could not even buy them the tram ride to get there!

I turn to another broken promise: the election promise of \$70 million to redevelop 10 rural nursing homes. The government has not even allocated half of this money in this term. Only \$25.5 million has been allocated at page 103 of budget paper 2. This is a disgrace to rural areas. I have been out into the rural areas, and they need a lot of support. The Minister for Aged Care himself was out in Seymour recently, and the *Seymour Telegraph* of 23 April reports that he visited Barribill House to talk about the \$4.5 million redevelopment plan. But it is not surprising that when he was asked by the journalist, 'What is the starting date?', he was unwilling to name one. That is because none of the \$70 million that was allocated is going to be seen by people in rural and regional nursing homes. It is a disgrace. The government builds people up to understand that they can expect these things, and then their hopes are dashed. We are dealing with people's lives here, not with figures and not with numbers. We are dealing with people's lives, and it is absolutely unjustifiable.

On the other hand I would like to mention what our colleagues in the federal Liberal government through the Minister for Ageing, Kevin Andrews, have done for the elderly in the budget which was brought down in May. He has given a 10 per cent funding boost to the government assessment teams. The home and community care program has been given an additional \$58.3 million; \$24.1 million will be spent on voluntary health assessments for people aged 75; and \$2.3 million is available for a national falls prevention program. These are all issues our state government should have been looking at for our elderly. They are areas the government has spoken about in its pre-election promises and its documents, but none of them have seen the light of day in its budget.

The most pleasing thing about the federal budget, which is not reflected in the state budget at all or in what Mr Kevin Andrews the federal aged care minister had to say, is that for the first time the total aged and community care budget will exceed \$6 billion in 2003–04, up from \$5.7 billion last year. I assure the state minister that I will be watching to see how much money will be spent in this state next year. We saw nothing this year and I hope he will go out and do something next year; he should go to the cabinet and the caucus and tell them that aged care is important in this state and to get on with it.

Tourism, another of my portfolio areas, is truly difficult. We had an extraordinary press release from the Minister for Tourism saying that \$40 million was allocated in the budget to address severe acute respiratory syndrome. In contrast to all other states in this country in dealing with SARS, the Victorian government and the Minister for Tourism have said absolutely nothing. You would have thought there was no SARS epidemic. You would have thought it was not affecting us or affecting Victoria in any way.

The other day I asked a question about a man who is suffering huge problems in his Chinese restaurant on Phillip Island. He wanted to know what the minister was going to do to address this issue and the minister has been totally and utterly silent. His statement is misleading: \$40 million for SARS was an election promise that the Minister for Tourism came up with. He rebadged, refocused and put the spin on SARS. We have not heard him say anything about SARS since. He may not even know what it is all about, but the people in the tourism industry in this state are bleeding. They are finding it very difficult. The \$40 million is not directed to the epidemic of SARS. It has been a budget line item for a considerable time and it is nothing new. It will be interesting to see what happens when the minister addresses SARS as he says he will.

An article in the *Herald Sun* of 8 May talks about what fees are on the way up. It affects people in tourism right across the state. These our ordinary Victorians enjoying things in the state. Particularly because of the SARS epidemic we want to encourage intrastate and interstate tourism in Victoria. However, with these additional taxes and pressures people feel confused and anxious as to when they can come to Victoria and enjoy some of our tourist facilities. The article states:

Popular recreation and sporting activities are among hundreds of charges being considered for annual rises after the state government's decision to tie fees and fines to inflation.

Camping and park entrance fees, licences for recreational fishing, scuba diving, jet skiing, and shooting and hunting are among an array of charges being considered for indexation.

The 'fun taxes' would help raise an extra \$112 million over four years, or \$23 for each Victorian over that time.

That is absolutely scandalous. We are trying to encourage people to come to Victoria for tourism and to enjoy what the state has on offer.

I would like to finish my contribution today with a poem which relates to Labor today:

Hand out the merry millions,
That long may it be told
How Labour marked its progress
In milestones made of gold.
Fling forth the glittering bullion;
We'll squander all we get,
And build, before we've ended,
Our monument of debt.

Shower out the merry millions,
For this is Labour's way.
Who dares to speak of prudence?
The devil cares who'll pay!
The gold the rich have hoarded,
May some day reach its end;
So grab and scatter freely,
While you have strength to spend.

Throw wide the merry millions,
They won in toil and sweat.
If millions more are needed
We'll bleed them deeper yet.
A fig for drought and sorrow,
And all that croakers say;
Who cares about tomorrow?
We're millionaires today.

This poem was published in the *Australian* of 3 August 1912. Labor has not changed what it does, has not changed its ways. We are back to the old ways. It is entrenched in its culture and this is what it is all about. Nothing has changed. Here we have again: big spending Labor governments; governments which do not build; they just spend and spend.

We will be watching to see what happens. In another 91 years I am sure someone will be writing about how hopeless this government is too and they will head it up by saying, 'Where did the money go?'. I charge the poets to come up with the next version of this poem because nothing has changed.

Mr SOMYUREK (Eumemmerring) — It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to speak on the 2003–04 budget papers. At the last state election Victorians sent an emphatic message to the opposition parties that they were very pleased with the government's achievements and that they were not

prepared to forget the atrocities of the Kennett government with respect to the destruction of the state's key services.

Mr Forwood, Mr Baxter, and Mrs Coote have all mouthed the inane and unimaginative mantra of the Liberal Party: the 'Guilty Party' and 'Where has the money gone?'. What hypocrisy! The only guilty party is the Liberal Party — the party that decimated our key services and that continues to kill universal health care. Let us deal with the question of where the money has gone: it has gone to key services. That is a concept that is totally alien to the Liberal Party. It has gone to hospitals, education and community safety. The government has not hidden surpluses as the erstwhile Kennett government did. The message from the electorate at the last election was loud and clear: continue on the path of providing a world-class health and education system, make our communities safer and implement environmentally sustainable policies, but do all of it within the framework of financial responsibility.

This budget continues to do exactly that. It provides funding for each of the 133 recurrent spending commitments made by the government during the last election campaign. It continues to ensure that the fundamentals of the state's economy are sound as the Bracks government embarks on another term of increased service delivery to all Victorians. The prudent economic management that has been a feature of this government is the reason it can proudly boast a projected growth in the economy for this financial year of an impressive 3.75 per cent, an operating surplus of \$245 million for 2003–04 and forecast surpluses averaging \$391 million over the following three years.

Furthermore, the Victorian labour market continues to perform well with the unemployment rate being at a 13-year low. Confidence in the Bracks government remains strong in the business community; investment is at record high levels and is expected to be given further impetus with a reduction of payroll tax from 5.3 per cent to 5.2 per cent. All of this is despite a downturn in international markets, a costly drought, severe bushfires, public transport privatisation gone wrong and a commonwealth government that delivers nothing to Victorians and persists in cost shifting to the states.

The Bracks government continues its commitment to the health care of Victorians. The budget allocates a massive \$1.4 billion to boost hospital services and health facilities over the next four years. It allocates \$464 million over four years to recruit 900 more nurses

and health care staff which will assist in the treatment of an additional 35 000 Victorian patients a year.

Health services in Melbourne's south east will be a major beneficiary with an allocation of \$28 million for Dandenong Hospital and Monash Medical Centre's Moorabbin campus. Dandenong Hospital will undergo a \$9 million redevelopment of its acute services section. It is a significant boost for the hospital and a significant boost to the health care needs of the people of Eumemmerring Province and the residents of the south-eastern suburbs generally. It is all the more important when considered in the context of a 9 per cent increase in demand at the Dandenong Hospital's emergency department, the result of a collapse in the system of bulk-billing — the federal government's disgraceful attack on Medicare is an example of its blatant cost shifting.

Residents of the south-eastern suburbs will greatly benefit from the \$19 million funding allocation towards the Monash Medical Centre's radiotherapy units. The boost in health funding for the south east is part of the Bracks government's commitment over the next four years to build new hospitals and hospital services, cut hospital waiting lists and treat more patients.

The Bracks government continues its commitment to education and training. The budget allocates \$82 million over four years for 450 additional teachers in secondary schools and \$50 million over four years for 256 primary school student welfare officers and \$37.1 million for new and replacement schools, including the construction in my electorate of Strathaird Primary School in Cranbourne North. The government has also allocated \$41 million to upgrade facilities at existing schools including a \$3.2 million stage 3 upgrade to Lyndhurst Secondary College and a \$1.8 million investment in the Upper Yarra Secondary School. Both of those schools are in my electorate.

By allocating \$300 million to community safety the government continues to demonstrate its commitment to safer communities, and \$126 million of that figure is allocated to boost police numbers by 600 over the next four years. In my electorate the government has allocated \$9.5 million for the Pakenham police and emergency services complex.

The budget also includes public transport initiatives totalling \$171 million as part of the government's Linking the Suburbs program, and \$121 million of this has been allocated for the construction of the 20-kilometre Pakenham bypass. In addition, the people of Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs will have a vital

transport link by 2008, and I speak of course of the Mitcham–Frankston freeway.

The Bracks government has provided for the biggest infrastructure spending in the state's history. Over \$5 billion is expected to be invested in infrastructure over the next two years with \$180 million allocated for the extension of the Rural and Regional Infrastructure Development Fund for another five years to include \$70 million to extend country Victoria's gas network. The residents in the Gembrook district of my electorate will benefit greatly from this initiative.

The budget delivers on the government's commitment to protect our water resources by allocating \$92.5 million to make Victoria's water supplies sustainable and to encourage Victorians to save water.

The 2003–04 budget continues the Bracks government's commitment to building stronger suburbs and improving services and infrastructure in outer suburban Melbourne. My constituents in Eumemmerring Province and those in other outer suburban areas will benefit from new and improved roads, schools, hospitals and police stations across the suburbs.

In summary, this budget delivers responsible financial management and continues to invest in the future of all Victorians through education, health, community safety, the environment and historically high levels of infrastructure spending. I commend the bill to the house.

Hon. ANDREW BRIDESON (Waverley) — It is really quite sad to be on this side of the house listening to the members of the government who have been spun off this planet by the spin doctors. All their contributions have been nothing but reiterations of the spin the government has put on these budget papers. Most of the spending in this budget is essential and necessary spending that any state government would do. Unfortunately this type of budget is something we have become used to since the Labor Party came to power in 1999. Last year in my budget response speech I said it was a smoke-and-mirrors budget, and that is the only term that comes to mind again while perusing this year's budget papers.

I want to touch upon five or six areas in the time allocated me — schools, essentially in Waverley Province, but I want to make some comments on the closure of schools by the Bracks government — I have some figures which show that — and how the slashing of the community business employment program has affected some of my constituents; the farce of the

synchrotron; the lack of police stations in my province; and the abandonment of a couple of important road projects and what needs to be done in my electorate. If I still have time I will talk about the massive tax slug that has been inflicted upon motorists.

Despite the continuing revenue that has been supplied by stamp duties, speeding fines and gambling taxes, not to mention the massive surplus the previous Kennett government left, there is a lack of substance to this budget which displays an unwillingness to see through certain election promises. Tax revenue has risen by \$3.8 million since 1998–99; police fines have almost quadrupled; and an extra \$512 million has been received from stamp duties. One might ask: where is the problem? As every member does at this time of year, I have looked through the budget papers to see what has been allocated to my electorate. I must say I have not been able to find very much. I put it to members of the government that if they have a concerted look through the budget papers they will find there is very little detail about the amount of spending going on in their electorates.

Hon. J. H. Eren interjected.

Hon. ANDREW BRIDESON — I know it is a problem that people on the other side have faced because when I look through the debates in the other house I noticed that the member for Mount Waverley was only able to identify one actual item in the budget for her electorate, and again that was for what I put in the category of essential and necessary spending in that \$5 million has been allocated for the rebuilding of Mount Waverley Secondary College, which as we all know was destroyed by fire. I ask: is this to be applauded, or is it just to be expected? Again, it shows the spin this government puts on budget papers.

Whilst I agree with much that this government has done, when I look at schools in my province, I realise my electorate is still suffering. The percentage of primary schools in Mount Waverley that have maximum class sizes of 30 and above is 40 per cent. The percentage of prep classes in Mount Waverley that are over 21 is at 30 per cent. In the Clayton electorate, 25 per cent of primary schools have maximum class sizes of over 30. In the Mulgrave electorate, 60 per cent of schools have maximum class sizes of 30 and above, while across the entire four electorates in my province, there is a 32 per cent incidence of primary schools that have maximum class sizes of 30. Just over 20 per cent of prep classes exceed the cap of 21 pupils.

What can we believe about the budget? The previous speaker mentioned that the government is going to

provide 256 primary school welfare officers, but when you look at the budget paper, you find that only 65 will be employed in the first year of the budget, which means approximately 1 in 5 of these primary schools will have one of these officers. I went to the annual report of the Department of Education and Training for the last reportable year, and it is very enlightening to look at some of the figures.

We on this side of the house hear how draconian the Kennett government was and how many schools were closed. The Bracks government has closed 21 primary schools — and my source is page 150 of the annual report of the Department of Education and Training. Seven secondary schools have closed, but what is more alarming when one looks at these figures is the continuous drift of students from the public system into the independent and Catholic school system. If you look at the number of schools in the last five years, you see that 2 new primary schools, 25 new primary-secondary and 2 new secondary schools have opened in the independent sector.

We read a lot in the budget papers of how the Bracks government is spending millions of dollars on employing new teachers. Again, I say it is necessary and essential. If you look at enrolment figures in government schools between 1998 and 2002 you find there are 10 564 additional students. Is it any wonder that more teachers have to be employed? The figures are alarming when you look at the equivalent full-time students by school type and sector between 1998 and 2002 in the independent sector where there has been an increase of 12 802 students. So, despite its rhetoric, the government is not doing anything to hold students in the public sector, and I believe that is a cause for concern.

One of the other issues I am very concerned about in Waverley Province and which I have mentioned in previous speeches on the budget is that the Kennett government spent millions of dollars on upgrading run-down school facilities in Waverley Province, schools that the Cain and Kirner governments abandoned by putting their money into other things, shifting money around, and the schools were totally neglected. A lot of the schools the Kennett government refurbished are now due for major cyclic maintenance. There is no money allocated for the majority of these schools in the current budget, and I doubt there will be money allocated in the forthcoming years.

I turn to the community business employment program. Clayton has been treated absolutely contemptuously by the government. In an electorate that suffers from very high unemployment and significant youth and crime

problems we learn that the government has again disappointed constituents by cancelling the community business employment program and slashing the community jobs program. This program was another successful Kennett government initiative established in 1994 to provide free job placement assistance to the 15 to 24-year age group and the unemployed aged 45 and above.

The cancellation obviously adversely affects the unemployed but also the service providers who had previously got \$850 per placement. There are six such providers servicing the area in and around Clayton. These agencies have contacted my office in the last week complaining of the absence of any level of consultation on the part of the government regarding this decision. In fact, a month before the budget release these agencies were assured that the program would remain, but they were given only 24 hours notice prior to the budget release that this was not the case. Suddenly these organisations are faced with the reality of shedding staff and putting off hundreds of clients, the majority of whom are not eligible for any other type of assistance as their status is that of skilled migrants and they do not receive any commonwealth assistance. One particular agency has 800 clients on its books for this financial year, but it will have to get rid of three staff members as a result of the cut. The service provided by these agencies is intensive and specialised. It is not something they can get at the Commonwealth Employment Service. However, the government has not considered these points at all.

In the last 12-month period those who have been considered disadvantaged or unlikely to gain employment are being again grossly disadvantaged by the current Bracks government. Programs have been cut in half, and the budget papers indicate that the total number of people to be assisted in the program will drop from 1950 to 875. There is no excuse for such a savage cut to such a successful program. There is a particular need for youth employment services in Clayton as 34 per cent of them are unemployed.

I now turn to the synchrotron. This is an absolute farce and shows the spin the government puts on programs. On page 6 of the budget overview it says there is an additional investment of \$57 million in the synchrotron. When you turn the page you note it says \$57 million over three years, building on the government's commitment. When you turn to page 179 of the budget papers which deals with outputs you find that the target for this year is six meetings and four community consultation forums. No money is being spent on the synchrotron in this financial year. When you look at the chart on page 231 of the budget statement, table A10,

you find the allocation for 2003–04 is zero. It beggars belief whether the government will be in a financial situation in future years to fund the \$57 million required to complete the project. It is an exciting project and is one to be applauded, but the government's financial mismanagement will not see this program come to fruition.

I now turn to police. Basic requirements like the relocation of the Clayton police station have not been realised. I have been calling for this for the 10 years I have been in this place. Unfortunately the Liberal government did not do it, but the Bracks government has still failed to do it. I have consistently repeated my concern repeatedly about the poor location of that police station. It is on busy Clayton Road and it is extremely difficult to access. There are traffic lights in front of the station, and it is in an extremely busy spot because it is directly opposite the Monash Medical Centre. I have visited the police station a couple of times, and I simply do not know how the police officers work there. The station is long overdue for replacement. In the lead-up to the last election the honourable member for Clayton in the other place promised that Springvale would receive a new police station. The promise was printed in all the literature that was distributed by the honourable member. However, it has not eventuated and is much like the federation park that was promised for South Oakleigh.

In the last couple of minutes available to me I will touch on the fact that motorists are being slugged in this budget and that that will affect every family in Victoria, particularly in my electorate where public transport is not all that good. Many of the families are two-car families and in many instances three-car families as the kids go to university and need cars for transport. There has been a \$17 increase in motor registration fees. From 1 July compulsory Transport Accident Commission third-party insurance premiums will also rise. The budget estimates on pages 458 and 459 outline all the other increases that have been dumped on motorists.

I also make mention of the increased use of traffic cameras. This government claims that the use of traffic cameras has reduced the road toll. The figures I have put lie to that as last year there were 397 fatalities — 397 too many in my view. If you go back to 1992 there were 396 road fatalities; in 1994, 378; in 1997, 377; in 1998, 390; and in 1999, 384. The road fatalities in all those years were far less than they were before speed cameras were used.

I have even analysed the month-by-month road fatality figures. Last year, when there were more traffic camera fines than probably for all other years put together,

there were only two months where the road toll was below 30. In the other years I have mentioned you could double, sometimes quadruple, the numbers of months where the road toll was below 30. The government needs to have a very serious look at the effects of — —

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. B. W. Bishop) — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Ms HADDEN (Ballarat) — I rise to speak in support of the budget papers 2003–04. This is another example of the Bracks Labor government's commitment to sound financial management and ensuring Victoria has a AAA credit rating and a \$100 million operating surplus in the budget.

We all know we are going through difficult times at the moment, and we have to accept the impact of the international markets, the global downturn in the equity markets, the seven-year drought — a very serious drought across the whole of the state — and the bushfires in the north-east and Gippsland which lasted for about nine weeks commencing on 1 January last. We also had the impact of public transport privatisation adding pressure to the state's finances. We have to accept that and cannot turn our minds away from it.

This government is continuing to deliver and is committed to delivering for the whole state, including country Victoria. I heard previous opposition speakers asking where the money has gone. They know jolly well where it has gone, and I will give the house some examples. In our first term in government we placed an extra 3000 teachers back into our schools. We invested \$800 million to build better schools and TAFEs, including 16 new schools and 5 replacement schools. We employed 3300 nurses back into the health system and opened 12 new ambulance stations. We placed over 260 new paramedics back into jobs. We employed an extra 800 police 18 months ahead of schedule, which has made our state safer. We built 65 new police facilities across the whole of the state.

We commenced projects in our Linking Victoria strategy, which aims to revitalise our transport links, and we provided funding to deliver fast rail to our regional centres, including our other regional rail lines. We introduced the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund for capital works in rural and regional areas with initial funding of \$180 million.

We also provided funding to build the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline which will see 93 000 megalitres of water saved each year. We

increased the Snowy River's flow to 6 per cent of the original flow as a first step in the agreement with the commonwealth and New South Wales governments to restore the flow to the Snowy to 28 per cent.

We established the world's first comprehensive and representative system of marine national parks and sanctuaries along the Victorian coast. That is where some of the money went, and I could go on and on, but I do not have the time and wish to go on to other areas.

Very importantly with the budget papers 2003–04 the government is continuing its commitment to grow and link regional and rural Victoria, especially with a \$70 million commitment for the upgrading of the Calder Highway between Melbourne and Bendigo. As well, the very successful Regional Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) of our first term of government has been further committed for a further five years, allocating \$180 million to improve strategic transport links across Victoria and create better opportunities for businesses and communities in rural and regional Victoria.

Specific initiatives include the commitment and promise of \$70 million to extend natural gas to regional Victoria, one commitment which I am very pleased with and proud to have been instrumental in obtaining from the government with the extension of natural gas to Creswick as one of the first three towns promised by the Premier at the Creswick town hall last November to be linked to natural gas. There is a commitment of \$20 million to attract investment to small towns and isolated communities to help those communities grow and provide job opportunities. Currently the government is finalising the funding guidelines for the distribution of the \$70 million for the natural gas extensions to the first three towns of Creswick, Barwon Heads and Bairnsdale.

The budget shows that the government is getting on with the job of governing and strengthening all communities across the state — for example, in Ballarat Province \$33.7 million was allocated for major rebuilding programs for schools in country Victoria, including Ballarat High School, as well as the Maryborough education precinct of \$3.7 million. Some \$18.2 million has been allocated for building improvements for schools in country Victoria, including small primary schools in small rural townships of Ballan, Creswick, Delacombe and Buninyong. The extension of the RIDF will see a major boost for jobs and social benefits to our rural communities with \$70 million for the extension of natural gas to rural and regional Victoria.

The key environmental and agricultural initiatives announced in the budget include: \$24 million over four years for a major new weed control program; \$10 million to reduce salinity and improve water management; \$16 million to increase environmental flows and undertake catchment management works around Victoria — we all know how important that is for our river systems; \$52.5 million for upgrading water infrastructure, including irrigation systems and country town water treatment; \$24 million for defending farms against disease; and \$40 million for forests and parks.

We have also committed a further \$234 million over four years to recruit 450 extra secondary college teachers and 256 student welfare officers in our schools. We have also provided \$464 million to recruit a further 900 nurses and health care staff which will be used to treat an additional 35 000 public patients each year. We are certainly committed to further building our communities, rebuilding our services and delivering for the whole of the state.

Another important announcement was the \$6 million capital upgrading announced for the Victorian Forensic Science Centre. This announcement includes \$3.8 million to extend and refurbish the chemistry wing, and \$2.2 million to replace equipment, including the acquisition of specialised DNA equipment. Justice reforms were high on the agenda, and they are certainly ones I follow with great interest having been a practising lawyer before coming into this place.

The budget papers will deliver — and show a delivery on our election commitments — over \$45 million over the next four years towards justice reforms, including new courts at Moorabbin and in the Latrobe Valley. It also provides an extra \$14 million over four years to boost Victoria Legal Aid (VLA) and community legal centre funding, as well as \$5.2 million for the creation of a domestic violence division of the Magistrates Court to enable the justice system to better respond to family violence issues. I certainly welcome that commitment.

As well, \$6.2 million is provided for the establishment of a sentencing advisory council, which is certainly welcomed. The innovative sentencing advisory council will provide information to the courts to assist with guideline judgments and stimulate a balanced public debate on sentencing issues. It is not before time.

The VLA funding is welcomed, and certainly welcomed by the Central Highlands Community Legal Centre which has been given increased funding of \$11 273. The Central Highlands CLC is based in Ballarat and services the western region of the state,

and does an enormous amount of work. The workers do a tremendous job and service to the community, and I commend the Central Highlands CLC and the Attorney-General for always featuring Central Highlands CLC in his funding announcements.

The extra 800 police that have been put back onto the streets during our first term contributed to the 8.4 per cent fall in the overall rate of crime in the state. That was one of the reasons attributed by the Chief Commissioner of Police, Christine Nixon, when she said:

A number of strategies implemented by Victoria Police, combined with the additional 800 police, are having an impact on crime rates.

There was also the announcement of the \$77 million boost for disability services, which is important because there are many people in our communities who require quality and accessible services due to disability. The disability funding includes \$33.5 million for the Homefirst program; \$5 million for the Making a Difference program; \$10 million for an Older Years and Carer Support program; \$2 million over four years to establish the Metroaccess program; \$13.4 million to improve individual planning and support for people with a disability; and \$1.8 million to extend the current motor vehicle stamp duty exemption for people with disabilities from 1 July.

The budget also saw a boost for women. We announced the return-to-work grants to assist parents returning to the work force after caring for children full time for a minimum of two years as a major initiative. We have committed \$11 million to that program. We will also see the implementation of the women's health and wellbeing strategy, the expansion of mental health services for women, and the provision of better access to breast prosthesis services. We will implement women's health initiatives which will see improvements to maternity services in rural Victoria, and an extension of Koori maternity services across the state. This government certainly does deliver.

Before the federal government delivered its budget on 13 May the Premier asked whether it would pay its half share of the cost of the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline. Well, not in this federal budget, not yet.

Will the federal government give proper support to the Commonwealth Games? The answer is: not yet. Will the federal government pay its full share of the \$242 million Pakenham bypass? Well, not yet. Will it pay its half share of the Geelong bypass? Not yet. Will it pay its half share of the \$140 million Calder Highway — the Kyneton to Faraday duplication, as it is

called? Not yet. Will it transfer the defence land at Point Nepean National Park on the same terms as it gave to New South Wales for the Sydney Harbour National Park? Not yet.

This state and the Bracks Labor government certainly acts on its promises, and promises what is important for all Victorians, and it is a shame the federal government does not do likewise, especially with the amount of taxes and GST that we contribute from this state.

A Victorian Employers Chamber of Commerce and Industry representative in Ballarat labelled our budget as 'financially prudent'; the Ballarat Tourism executive director said there were a 'couple of positive tourism initiatives', including the \$10 million allocation for regional marketing campaigns in Victoria, and \$10 million for international marketing, which certainly Ballarat tourism will be able to tap into — for example, marketing Sovereign Hill and the Ballarat Wildlife Park.

The *Herald Sun* had a vote line, which asked the question: do you approve of the state budget? There were 6353 people who called into that vote line, and 75.7 per cent said that they did approve of the state budget. So I think that is a resounding victory for the budget and certainly says, 'Yes, we are getting on with the job of governing for all Victorians'. It is a fair and just budget.

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — I do not share the previous speaker's enthusiasm for this set of budget documents that we are debating here tonight. I claim it is a far from impressive set of documents. It was delivered on Tuesday, 6 May, by the Treasurer, and in his own words in the Treasurer's speech he talks about this budget being set in:

... a challenging environment.

He says there is a whole range of things that have been:

... putting the state's finances under considerable additional pressure.

He spoke also about the 2003–04 budget being delivered against the backdrop of these demanding and challenging circumstances, and he also spoke about the Bracks government's prudent financial management, and even Ms Hadden, in her contribution, mentioned that this has been a difficult budget in difficult times, and she outlined the difficult circumstances.

Let us accept that premise to start off with. With that in mind, what do we find in the major daily newspapers, the Monday after the budget, on 12 May? We find the sort of rubbish that I have in my hand here — a big

three-quarter page advertisement stating, ‘Will Victoria be the first casualty of Canberra’s Medicare reforms?’.

I opened the newspaper on the next day, Tuesday, 14 May, and saw repeated the same sort of thing — a big advertisement, with a picture of the Premier in the paper saying, ‘Will the federal budget penalise Victorians again this year?’. These advertisements cost the Victorian taxpayers a reported \$40 000 or \$50 000, and the government is paying this at a time when it tells us that times are tough! Why are we spending \$40 000 or \$50 000 on advertisements in the papers? I thought we were scratching for a penny in this budget, yet it seems that less than a week after the budget the Premier is prepared to waste \$40 000 or \$50 000 of taxpayers money on nothing. What do Victorian taxpayers get out of those advertisements? Absolutely nothing. When this government says this budget is set in a tight time frame against some difficult circumstances, I say it is blatantly wasting money, so times are obviously not so tight if the government can engage in some blatant political propaganda at the taxpayers’ expense.

This goes to reinforce my own personal view that within these budget papers is one great big con trick, where the people of Victoria are being conned again to try and believe that this is a government that has as its credentials prudent financial management, when the opposite is the case. It wastes money, there is unnecessary expenditure and it is conning the people of Victoria.

I will substantiate that claim by talking about three major areas showing why the budget is a con. The first is the fact that every single tax and charge that the government collects will be increased not only this year in this budget, but in every other year to come. Every tax and charge collected by the Victorian government will be indexed. There will be legislation this year, but it will not go through next year — we will see automatic increases in taxes and charges.

How many taxes and charges will be increased? We were told that motor vehicle registration would increase by \$17 — that was a pre-budget leak to soften the blow; but when the budget papers were presented on Tuesday, 6 May, we found that every single tax and charge collected by the government will increase by the CPI, and how many of them are there? There are literally hundreds of them.

They are listed in the *Herald Sun* of Thursday, 8 May. They talk about camping and parking entrance fees, licences for recreational fishing, scuba diving, jet skiing, and shooting and hunting among an array of taxes. In terms of the ‘fun’ taxes, they will help raise an

extra \$112 million over four years, or \$23 for each Victorian over that time. And that is only the fun taxes — the fishing taxes, the parks. Then the *Herald Sun* article goes on to say:

The rises reach into every corner of society, from professional and business licences, to motoring and real estate fees. Licences for taxidrivers, brothel operators, hoteliers, tour operators, gaming venues and second-hand dealers are on the possible hit list.

Possible? A definite hit list we now find out. It goes on:

So are permits for collecting domestic firewood, burning off, having personalised numberplates, or even keeping a dingo or other ‘pest’ animal. A number of commercial licences for fishing and aquaculture, beekeeping, chicken hatching, mineral exploration, timber harvesting, water rights and professional licences are also on the list.

It talks about:

Environment Protection Authority licences, freedom of information, application fees and wills are also being examined. Indexation of traffic fines, court charges, birth, marriage and death certificates, motor vehicle and boat registrations, drivers licences, business name registrations —

and the list goes on. But the most damning comment is this last one where the newspaper quotes:

Mr Bracks said it would be some days before a full list of the rises was available. ‘Obviously it’s a task that requires a bit of work’, he said.

What has he done then in preparing this budget? The government has not even done the preparation work before the budget is announced! It put a budget before this Parliament, but it cannot even tell us the full list of taxes and charges that will be increased. Government members do not know. They just say, ‘This is what we estimate for revenue we will collect, and to hell with what you people think; this is what we will do. We have not done the work to identify the full list of all those taxes and charges’.

It is an appalling situation, and they reckon they are good financial managers! They have not even done the preparation to present a full budget for the people of Victoria to consider.

When the Kennett government was in office the Australian Labor Party was all too ready to accuse the Kennett government of being the highest taxing government in the nation. I say to the Australian Labor Party, ‘Now you have won that title. You are the kings of taxation in this country. Perhaps we should change your name from the Australian Labor Party to the Australian Taxation Party; or perhaps we could call it the Australian Debt Party because that is what you are all about — taxation and debt’.

I will go to the issue of debt because that is the second con trick in this budget. We all know that in 1992 when the Kennett government won office the state debt was around \$33 billion.

Mr Pullen — Who started it? Bolte. That's who!

Hon. P. R. HALL — You people did. When the Cain and Kirner governments came to office it was \$12 billion. You took it up to \$33 billion in eight or nine years. It was a pretty good effort for increasing debt. That is why we should be calling you the Australian Debt Party. By the time the Kennett government had finished after seven years that \$33 billion figure was down to a figure of \$5 billion or just under. If you look at the recurrent account during those particular years, when the Kennett government came to office, the current account was running at a deficit of \$2 billion per year on a total budget of around \$16 billion, which is around a 12.5 per cent loss on revenues that come in every single year. No wonder the debt was climbing! The turnaround during the Kennett years was to reverse that \$2 billion recurrent account deficit to a \$1.8 billion surplus.

What do we get in this budget? Despite buoyant economic times — no-one challenges the fact that we have just gone through a period of very buoyant economic times — and unprecedented increases in taxes, gambling revenues and traffic infringement fines, what is the government doing to state debt? It is starting to increase the debt again — state debt is on the way up.

The budget papers on the table tonight tell us that over the next four years state debt will again increase by \$800 million. That is how this government — this Australian Taxation Party, this Australian Debt Party — handles debt and that is its financial credential: increase taxes, increase debt. That is what it is all about.

The third con trick about these budget papers is the complete lack of detail that you find — or I should say that you cannot find — in them and the delayed implementation of many of the government's promises. For example, I wanted to look at an area in education, which is a particular interest of mine. I read through and thought there was one interesting initiative, which I applaud, and that is that \$82 million will be spent over four years for 450 additional teachers in secondary schools to promote specialisation within subject areas that best meet community needs. Terrific! Great program!

I wondered where I could find more detail about that. I could not find any more in the budget overview so I had

to look at budget paper 2, which is the next place it is mentioned. At page 67, once again there is reference to this program but no more detail. I thought, how is that \$82 million going to be spent? I had to keep trowelling through these documents until I came to page 204 of budget paper 2 to find 'Investing in teachers to support excellence'. It follows a table which shows how the \$82 million is going to be spent.

Lo and behold! Of that \$82 million, \$4 million is going to be spent in 2003–04, \$14 million the following year, \$28 million in 2005–06 and \$36 million in 2006–07. In this budget less than 5 per cent of that initiative is actually going to be spent. The con trick is that the government tells us of its great plans but it spends only minute amounts — fractions — in the first financial year.

I can look at a whole range of programs — in the area of justice, for example. I welcome the fact that we are going to get new police stations in areas of my electorate at Bairnsdale, Warragul and Swifts Creek and in the new justice precinct of Morwell. The table of asset investment initiatives at page 237 of budget paper 2 shows funding of \$4.7 million for new police stations in 2003–04, then \$20.6 million in 2004–05 and \$34.4 million in 2005–06. Once again, it is a delayed implementation. The government cons us by saying that it is spending great amounts.

I turn to the Pakenham bypass because it has been mentioned before. Again I had to scour through the documents before I found mention of funding commitments. There has been a lot of play, saying that the federal government is not going to put in its full fair share towards this project and great play by the Premier, saying that he will put in our state's \$121 million.

The table on page 224 of budget paper 2 indicates funding commitments of \$20 million in 2003–04, \$25 million in 2004–05 and then \$30 million and \$40 million for the following financial years. The line total appears as \$121.2 million. Forgive me if my maths is correct — I was a maths teacher for 14 years before I came here — but if I add up those figures they amount to \$115 million and not \$121.2 million. The government is saying that its share is \$121 million, but its commitment in this paper adds up to only \$115 million. The government cannot even get its maths right! This is another example of why these budget papers are a con.

I would have loved to spend more time on specifics in the budget, but I am going to have time to mention only one and that is the abolition of payroll tax exemptions

for employers who take on trainees and apprentices. What a woeful initiative this is! What a great disincentive for any employer to give a young person a job as a trainee or apprentice! The government is going to save \$158.6 million by doing this.

The government claims that it is going to replace the scheme with a \$51.4 million subsidy called a completion bonus. The government currently spends \$210 million on the scheme. By taking \$51.4 million for the new initiative it will have a net saving of \$158.6 million. The government is taking that amount of money away from employers. It means that hundreds of apprentices and trainees will no longer get an opportunity to start their life in the work force.

Why do we need it any way? Yesterday in a committee hearing I asked somebody from the department about completion rates. Currently the completion rate for apprentices is 77 per cent — that is, nearly four out of every five apprentices who start an apprenticeship complete it. If there is a problem in the end surely the government should be addressing that one in five who do not complete their apprenticeship. For traineeships the completion rate is 55 per cent. When I asked, 'Have you worked out what has happened to the others? Have you mapped them or tracked them in any way?'. I was told, 'No, but we believe some of them go on employment opportunities'. That means they do not complete their traineeship because a full-time job comes up. Who would not take a full-time job? The government has not tracked through the outcomes of those people who do not complete apprenticeships and traineeships. That is why I say that this is another big con trick. It is a con trick merely to save the government \$158.6 million over four years at the expense of young Victorians who could well do with a chance in life by starting off a job as an apprentice or trainee.

I could talk about the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund. Aspects are positive but in a nutshell there has been reduced expenditure on the RIDF. I could talk about the broken promises contained on page 135 of budget paper 2 and the \$8 million for community health at the Latrobe Regional Hospital at Traralgon that has not been delivered in this budget. Radiotherapy services for Latrobe Regional Hospital have not been developed and are not delivered in this budget. It is a con. It is a hoax.

The ACTING PRESIDENT
(Hon. B. W. Bishop) — Order! The honourable member's time has expired.

Mrs CARBINES (Geelong) — I am extremely delighted to speak in the house tonight on the budget. Indeed, this budget — the fourth of the Bracks government and the first of our second term — clearly further demonstrates our commitment to growing the whole of the state to ensure that all Victorians, no matter where they live, benefit from the prosperity of our state.

The budget importantly builds on the key priorities of our first term — priorities that Victorians told us before the 1999 election they very deeply cared about. They were the services of education, health and community safety. Victorians also told us that they cared very deeply about the environment and wanted to see policies that protected it. This budget builds on the already delivered commitments and the already delivered projects to Victorians across the state, and it is all about ensuring that we are building a smarter, healthier, safer and more environmentally sustainable Victoria.

This house has heard me many times remind Victorians of the ravages of the Kennett government. It sacked teachers, nurses and police. It drastically refused funding to these critical areas across the state, and the ramifications of those draconian policies will never be forgotten by the people of Victoria. These ramifications saw themselves in huge class sizes, in hugely increased teacher workloads, in stressed hospitals, lengthy waiting lists and overworked medical staff. We saw fewer police and a higher crime rate when the former government was in power, and some of the members of that government are still in this place.

In our first term we commenced the rebuilding of Victoria, the re-establishment of services in health, education and community safety across the state. We did that by employing thousands of teachers, nurses and police to rebuild those services.

This budget — our fourth — will see further employment in these essential areas across the state. We will see an extra 450 secondary teachers employed across the state and, as a former secondary teacher who worked for nearly 20 years in the state school system, I understand the importance of these extra teachers — the extra staff — to schools across the state. They will further bring down class sizes and further reduce teacher workloads, which is very, very important.

We will see for the first time the employment of welfare teachers in primary schools. Primary schools have been advocating for a long time for the employment of welfare teachers. This budget will deliver the funding to see the employment of some

256 welfare teachers for primary schools across the state. I applaud that initiative of the Minister for Education and Training.

This budget will also see the employment of a further 900 nurses across the state, again reducing waiting lists and making sure that our hospitals are less stressed. We will see the employment of another 600 police, which is welcome news indeed, because Victorians continually tell us they care very much about community safety on our streets. Six hundred police will go a long way to further making our streets and towns across Victoria safe.

This budget will also provide funding to employ a further 219 firefighters, which is very welcome news indeed. The employment of these teachers, nurses, police and firefighters will make a real and positive difference to all Victorians and further improve those key services that we committed some four years ago to improve. The employment of these people will further improve those services and will clearly demonstrate that our government, the Bracks government, is getting on with the job of governing for all Victorians.

My own electorate of Geelong Province, a regional seat which I represent along with the Honourable John Eren in this place, has shared very much in the prosperity of our state in our first term, and this budget delivers several of our key election commitments to Geelong. It is very important to see this money come through in the first budget, and we are very keenly aware that we have been elected for four years, and the remainder of our commitments will be delivered over that time.

I am very pleased to see a number of our schools receive money in this budget for upgrades of their facilities. We have seen some \$3.5 million allocated to Geelong High School.

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

Mrs CARBINES — Before dinner I was explaining that the first budget of our second term has continued our commitment to grow the whole of the state and to deliver on important services that Victoria really cares about — education, health, community safety and also protection of the environment.

I was starting to outline the provisions in the budget that are relevant to my electorate of Geelong Province. I talked about the \$3.5 million that is being allocated to upgrade Geelong High School — a much-needed allocation of money. It is in quite a bad state of disrepair. It is a very old school, and I know that money has been very warmly received by the principal, Diane Joseph, and the school council.

We also had money allocated to upgrade Lara Lake Primary School and to complete stage 2 of the Ocean Grove campus of the Bellarine Secondary College. This is particularly important to the residents of the Bellarine Peninsula. Before the 1999 election the government committed to build a new facility at Ocean Grove for Bellarine Secondary College — a facility that was just a collection of portables. The school community at Ocean Grove was very fearful that the Kennett government planned to close this facility and relocate all students to the Drysdale campus. This commitment of further funding for stage 2 will see the completion of a state-of-the-art facility at Ocean Grove.

An important issue that Geelong residents had enunciated to me throughout our first term was the need to do something to alleviate the traffic pressure and problems on Latrobe Terrace, which dissects Geelong. In its first term the government conducted a feasibility study looking at the traffic issues across Geelong and a number of options to alleviate those traffic issues.

It was determined through that feasibility study that a ring-road was needed through the western section of Geelong to alleviate the pressure on Latrobe Terrace, and our government committed \$190 million as an election commitment to pay half the money that is needed to build the Geelong ring-road. This budget has seen just over \$4 million allocated to the planning and the environment effects statement necessary for the Geelong ring-road.

This is welcome news indeed for Geelong and it has been very warmly received, but we in Geelong feel very, very let down by the federal government because it has refused to allocate any money to fulfil its part of the bargain to commit \$190 million to the Geelong ring-road. The residents of Geelong are extremely disappointed in the member for Corangamite, Stewart McArthur, who refuses to lobby on our behalf and to see his government — the federal Liberal government — commit equal funds with the Bracks Labor government in Victoria for the completion of that road.

The budget has also delivered one of the Bracks government's key election commitments — that is, money to build the Grovedale railway station. The people who live in Highton, Belmont and Grovedale have lobbied very hard over the last few years for a railway station to be built there to service their needs and also the growing needs of residents of the Surf Coast Shire who live at Torquay and Jan Juc.

We also saw some \$15 million allocated to the port of Geelong in the budget. This money is very important

and builds on money the Bracks government allocated in its first term to link key wharves at the port of Geelong to the standard gauge rail. As a result of the money allocated to the port of Geelong in the budget last year, we saw a huge investment by the private sector in our port, where significant investment has taken place.

An issue of great importance to Geelong residents has been the future of Kardinia Park and Skilled Stadium, which is the home of the mighty Cats — who are unfortunately not very mighty at the moment as they are languishing on the bottom of the ladder. We have wanted to see Kardinia Park upgraded for a long time. Kardinia Park is not just the home of the Geelong Football Club, it is also the home of our cricket club, netball teams and the Geelong Football Umpires League. The \$14 million the government has allocated will complete stage 1 of a necessary upgrade to ensure that all users of Kardinia Park fully benefit from having better facilities.

The budget also furthers the government's commitment to community safety with the allocation of \$5 million to build a new police station at Bannockburn.

Members of this house have heard me speak many times about the provision of natural gas to my electorate, and last week in my contribution to the address-in-reply I said how great it had been to see natural gas delivered by the Bracks government to residents in north Bellarine. This budget allocates some \$70 million for the extension of natural gas to townships across the state, and the Treasurer has already announced that giving Barwon Heads in my electorate access to natural gas will be one of the key priorities for this money, which is very welcome indeed.

We have also seen funding provided in this budget to refurbish the Anglesea Recreation Camp. As a student and as a teacher I spent many happy hours and days at the Anglesea Recreation Camp and I am sure many other members of this place did too. It will be great to see that wonderful recreation camp upgraded.

I am also very, very pleased as Parliamentary Secretary for Environment to see \$14 million allocated in this budget to fulfilling our commitment to end logging in the Otways. This money will be used to help with the transition, to help remove the loggers from the Otways, to invest in significant infrastructure for tourism in the Otways, to help establish a national park from Anglesea to Cape Otway, and to see the employment of extra park rangers.

All the items in the budget allocated for Geelong Province have been very happily received by members across the Geelong community. In fact we hosted a budget lunch in Geelong on the Friday after the budget was announced and the Treasurer, John Brumby, spoke to a room of about 60 people. He outlined the budget in detail to business and community representatives and it was very, very happily received. I thank the Treasurer for making the time available to come down to my electorate to speak to my community about our budget.

I commend the Treasurer for an excellent budget which further rebuilds services that Victorians have told us they care about. It rebuilds education, it rebuilds health, it rebuilds community safety and it protects the environment.

The other thing the budget does is further demonstrate the Bracks government's commitment to growing the whole of the state. That is very, very important to me as a member from regional Victoria. I know how important it is to the community I represent in this place. Our government is committed to ensuring that all Victorians, no matter where they live, receive the benefits of the prosperity of this state and that all Victorians enjoy the benefits of commitments from this government. This is in stark contrast to the former Kennett government, which was interested in prospering only those who live in metropolitan Melbourne.

I am very, very pleased to speak tonight on the budget on behalf of the government and I commend the Treasurer for bringing down an excellent budget for all Victorians.

Hon. R. DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra) — I thank honourable members for their contributions today because it has been quite enjoyable to listen to the debate on both sides. I refer firstly to the Honourable Bill Forwood who, on this side of the house, outlined initially his concerns about the budget. The overarching concern has been that over the past three and a half years this government has seen a massive increase in fees of about \$3.4 billion — that is an absolute take, a money grab, or whatever you wish to call it. What that means is that every Victorian household now has to pay an extra \$1900 out of its pocket because of this government's inability to manage the budget, but I will come to that later.

I noted this morning that the Minister for Finance was interjecting on a question about where the money had gone, and Mr Lenders said the money had been spent on infrastructure.

Mr Lenders — And police, and nurses, and teachers!

Hon. R. DALLA-RIVA — The minister specified infrastructure, so I thought I would hold the minister to his word and go through the budget papers, which I did. Budget paper 2 states at page 15:

In *Growing Victoria Together* the government identified the following priority infrastructure actions —

and I will draw one dot point out of a number —

building fast, reliable and efficient transport and communication infrastructure.

Let us look at the effectiveness of this government in terms of that statement alone. Let us talk about the very fast rail that was to go to Tullamarine airport. I seem to recall that. Let us talk about the very fast rail network to all the regional centres. Where is that? Let us talk about the standardised rail network. Where is that? I will tell you where that is: about 100 tonnes of metal that has been bought is sitting rusting because this government could not deliver. And let us talk about the big one, the Scoresby freeway. Let us talk about the efficient transport and communication infrastructure. Let us talk about the fact that the federal government through a memorandum of understanding had already agreed to submit — put on the table — \$445 million. This is a government that talks about great infrastructure!

I will pick up another dot point:

connecting more Victorians to the Internet and other new technologies.

What do we see in the *Age* today? Qantas is prepared to leave Victoria and take 50 of its staff from the information technology section into another state. That is a great representation on this budget!

I should not be talking down the budget, I know that. The government has delivered a range of successes, and it is important for *Hansard* to note the successes that have been delivered to Victorians. As honourable members know, the government had inherited a \$1.8 billion surplus, which was the taxpayers' money that had resulted from hard work.

An Honourable Member — Where has the money gone?

Hon. R. DALLA-RIVA — Where has the money gone? I will get to that later.

Let us talk about the successes: tax revenue has grown \$1900 a household since 1998–99; police fines — what a great success — have gone up from \$99 million to a

budgeted \$427 million. This government relies for its surplus on people breaking the law, and that is fundamentally wrong. Let us look at another success: an extra \$171 million was contributed to the budget by the taking of the dividends from the Victorian gas, water and other authorities. The other success is the stamp duty windfall for this year which alone netted the government an additional \$512 million. This is what the government has delivered.

Perhaps I am being unfair, so let us talk about the number of investments. Let us look at the investments the Labor government has made. It has made a lot of investments for its labour lawyer mates — \$60 million has been spent on the flawed ambulance royal commission. Where has that gone? What has it led to? Nothing!

An amount of \$44 million plus has been wasted on the Seal Rocks fiasco. A total of \$50 million has been wasted on pre-election spin. We saw it leading up to this budget when the government spent money on further spin. It forgot about \$77 million so it could support the unions in maintaining the Melbourne Cricket Ground pickets — it did not want the \$77 million from the federal government and it does not want \$445 million for the Scoresby freeway. This shows that the government is not in control.

Mrs Carbines spoke about the freeway, and I think it is important to put on record that there is \$445 million on the table with a signed memorandum of understanding between the Premier and the federal Treasurer in relation to this matter. We should not let the government forget that.

We should reflect on the losses, and it is important to note the spin that comes in from the Labor government in terms of this budget. The government says the losses are because of the bushfires, the drought and a number of other issues. The reality is that bushfires and drought have affected the current year's outcome but they have little effect on the budget for the year ahead. I thought I would look back at the budget of an icon. Government members like to talk about the Kennett years and the past, so I went back to when the Honourable Tony Sheehan was Treasurer in the other place. On 28 April 1992 he spoke about why the then government was about to deliver a deficit budget — which is where this government is heading. In 1992–93 the then Labor government was about to deliver a budget which was \$836 million in deficit. The reason was interest rates and external factors such as globalisation and the market. Mr Sheehan said the federal government would not help. We just heard government members saying

the federal government will not help them. It sounds the same in my view.

The bottom line is that we now have a surplus of just over \$200 million, and that is a shame. It is very dangerous for Victoria given that the government has been presented with many other circumstances.

The Honourable Geoff Hilton spoke about the past. It is important to reflect upon the current Treasurer's statements in his second-reading speech. I refer to page 4 where it states that:

The government will achieve \$141 million in savings in 2003–04 through greater efficiency in administration ...

There was a certain other Treasurer in the other place under another Labor administration called Mr Sheehan. On 12 August 1992 he said the government would save \$200 million through improvements in efficiency in government administration. That sounds exactly the same. It is spin. There were no savings by the Treasurer then; there will be no \$141 million savings as the Treasurer recently outlined in his budget speech.

I would like to move to two other specific issues before my time expires. One particular issue starts to bite. When it starts to run down a budget, as the budget has been run down over the past three and a half years, the government has to start penny pinching. One of the areas affected is that of apprentices. This is very distressing to me because I toured the facilities of the Holmesglen Institute of TAFE. Some of the trades I saw were plumbing and gas fitting, carpentry and joinery, plastering, concreting, bricklaying, gardening, roofing and furniture manufacturing. It even had a specialised apprentice program for those people you see on high-rise buildings cleaning the windows. The only such apprentice course is at Holmesglen TAFE, which provided over a million student contact hours. That represents about 20 per cent of the contact hours Holmesglen TAFE delivers. This government will remove the benefits of the apprenticeship program. That will mean it will deliver savings of \$30 million, then \$60 million and so on. That is penny pinching.

The Minister for Industrial Relations says the government will spend \$9 million for better workplaces and industrial relations reform in this budget. That is just another grab for union militancy in this state. It is \$9 million that should have been invested in Victorian youth. The government does not care about the youth of Victoria or their apprenticeships. All it cares about is looking after its union mates and it is here in black and white. It is hard for government members to take that but the fact of the matter is that the youth of our society needs to have opportunities such as apprenticeships but

the government has ripped them out and taken them away. That is a great shame for Victorians, and the government needs to be held to account.

The second issue — before I am finally gagged in this debate — is related to corrections. I have been through the budget on this issue and, to set the framework, we know that in Victoria under this administration the cost of keeping prisoners has grown. I have said before on the record that the commonwealth productivity commission's report on corrective services for February 2003 indicated that the cost of keeping prisoners in Victorian jails is more than double the national average.

It now costs \$53 901 per annum to keep a prisoner in a Victorian jail, and I put that on the record to make it clear before I set the framework. Page 206 of budget paper 3 states:

existing prison facilities will be expanded to meet projected growth in prison numbers ...

I told the minister that that was a statement about the growth of prisons. I then went through the government's media releases on the budget to see if it is committed to improving correctional services in Victoria. I went through the budget papers and downloaded all the media releases relating to the budget. I looked a couple of times and could not see any press release from the Minister for Corrections about either his statement or indeed the development of further prisons in Victoria. There is no statement about either the development of prisons or other issues that I will not debate because they will be coming up later. There was no media release from the Minister for Corrections about building a responsive corrections system.

I then went to the web site of the Department of Justice to see if there was anything. There was a tatty old report dated July 2002 which talks about the future, but if you turn to the budget papers to see where funding is allocated for the development of prisons, there is nothing.

I also went to budget paper 3, page 233, headed 'Enforcing correctional orders', which gives a stark reminder about the inefficiency of the government. We like to talk about the previous Kennett government and the reality is that the average daily prison design capacity utilisation rate under that administration was never over 100 per cent. Yet the expected outcome for 2002–03 in this government's budget is 118 per cent to 125 per cent.

Hon. Kaye Darveniza — You sold the prisons!

Hon. R. DALLA-RIVA — It is in your budget! The reality is that the government expects that the prison system is going to operate at nearly 25 per cent above its design capacity. You can argue that the government is doing things but putting in bunk beds in prisons, as was stated in the paper, is not what I would call a responsible corrective services program. Little additional money is being provided. I will not go into further detail because a home detention bill is coming up, but items in the budget clearly expose the government in relation to that issue.

Over the short period I have had I have tried to outline that the budget is a real and scary demonstration of a government out of control. My concern is that it replicates another period about 10 or 11 years ago, and that is a great shame for all Victorians.

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA (Melbourne West) — I am pleased to make a contribution to this important debate tonight. It is interesting to hear Mr Dalla-Riva raising a whole range of issues and talking about the inheritance this government had when it first came to office. You often hear the Liberal and National parties talk about that inheritance. They ask, ‘What happened to the money?’. They do not seem to understand that the money that was here as a surplus when this government came to office, and the money that this government continues to have, is not its money and it was not the opposition’s money when it was in government. Certainly the Liberal and National parties believed it was their money and they still do not get it. It is not their money, and it is not the government’s money: it belongs to the people of Victoria.

Hon. R. Dalla-Riva interjected.

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA — Where has the money gone? Mr Dalla-Riva, let me tell you where the money has gone. Over the government’s last term, what it did and what it continues to do in this budget — and I will go into it in some detail — is to build on what it did in its first three years of government. In the last three years the government fixed the mess inherited from the previous Liberal and National government. Let me tell you a bit about some of the mess we inherited because it was a disgraceful mess in all of those areas that the community depend on so much such as health, education and community safety. They are all issues which the community feels very strongly about and they are all areas that were significantly neglected by the previous government.

I will tell you where the money went. It went into supporting our hospitals and building them up into reasonable facilities that were able to offer a reasonable

standard and quality of care, something the opposition did not care about when it was in government. This government has increased the number of nurses, opened schools and renovated schools, hospitals and community centres. It has employed teachers and built new police stations and has significantly increased the number of police.

Those are some of the areas in which this government has been spending the funds in the last three years. It is absolute rubbish for Mr Dalla-Riva to stand up and say the Labor government inherited a great pot of gold and then to ask, ‘What has happened to it?’.

This money that was in surplus was money that belonged to the people of Victoria. We went to the election in 1999 with very clear-cut policies and platforms of services that we wanted to introduce and improve, and we delivered on that by spending the money and putting it back into the community, providing the services and doing what we told the people of Victoria we would do if they elected us. They elected us, and we delivered on those promises. That is what we have been spending the money on. We have been delivering on facilities that the community voted us in to improve, and we have been fixing up the neglect that was being experienced in all of those services.

Mr Dalla-Riva had the nerve to carry on about prison services. What the opposition did was to sell them off! His government privatised them and now says ‘Oh, there are problems’. His government privatised the rail system and the public transport system and now it says ‘Oh, they are a problem’. They were always going to be a problem because they were bad decisions, which the people of Victoria knew of in 1999 along with a whole range of other decisions that the opposition made while in government. In 2002 the Victorian people had seen what the Bracks Labor government had been able to deliver in three years of government and they allowed it the opportunity to build on those achievements.

This budget delivers again on the Bracks government’s election commitments. What were they about? Our commitments were about ensuring a smarter, healthier, safer and more environmentally sustainable Victoria. Those are the sorts of commitments we made, and they are the commitments we are delivering on in this budget. What Victorians told us and made very clear to us through our last three years of government and particularly during the last election was that they wanted us to get on with the job and continue the work we had been doing over the past three years. They wanted us to provide world-class education and a world-class health system and to make communities

safer. They also wanted us to do more to protect the environment. Those are the sorts of things this budget provides.

This budget provides funding for each and every one of 133 recurrent spending commitments that were made by this government during the last election — I know that other members have mentioned this, but it is important — despite the fact that we had a whole range of challenges in putting this budget together, including the worst bushfires that we have seen in the state's history, the continuation of a drought as well as a much slower world economy. This budget will secure Victoria's finances and also lay down a foundation stone for the state's future prosperity. It is a very good budget that delivers on the things that we said we would deliver on.

I will quickly run through a couple of the areas I am particularly interested in and pleased about. It will not be a surprise to any of my colleagues in the house to know that one of those areas is health. In this budget we see \$1.4 billion being spent over four years to both build new facilities and boost hospital services to cut the waiting lists. This is all about treating more patients. We see \$215 million in new funding which is going to be targeted to key areas in the health system such as dental health, breast screening, early detection treatment programs and ambulance services. Another \$284 million of this \$1.4 billion will be invested in upgrading Victoria's hospitals and modernising medical equipment and computer systems undertaken in other health capital works.

What you see here is a government again building on what it did in the past three years, building on the improvement in our health facilities and the standard of care that we provide to Victorians. Along with the improvements to hospitals, the upgrading and modernising of medical facilities can only raise the standard and quality of care for all Victorians. Again, this is about addressing the problems that the government inherited, and there is no doubt that the health system was in a very poor state when we took over government in 1999. We have been continuing to clean up the mess that was left to us by the previous government.

I will run through a few of the initiatives. One that is particularly worth noting is the \$30 million that will be spent over four years on ambulance services to establish new ambulance stations as well as providing additional professional paramedics in Bendigo and Geelong. This will upgrade five services to two-officer crews in a range of areas but particularly in rural and regional locations.

In rural and regional areas — and again the rural work force program is another area I am particularly interested in — we find that there is difficulty in attracting and retaining health professionals. We have a commitment of \$6 million over four years to attract and retain health professionals in rural and regional Victoria. We will target the recruitment and retention of doctors, nurses, physiotherapists and other professionals and allied health workers. A professor of physiotherapy will be appointed in Shepparton, and extra resources have been allocated to fund the creation of that position which will provide professional support for a range of country physiotherapists. There is also additional funding to improve maternity services in rural Victoria, bush nursing hospitals and the redevelopment of hospitals such as in Nhill.

I particularly welcome the expansion of public dental services. A new dental chair is to be created. A dental clinic will be at Wyndham in my electorate as well as at Omeo and PANCH Health Service. Money is in the budget to train more dental nurses as well as to promote oral health in preschools.

On the matter of improving health services for women, one of the areas that I was particularly pleased to see was the expansion of the breast-screening program. As all of us know, breast cancer is a disease that kills many women in Victoria and right across Australia. There has been \$10.5 million allocated over four years to expand the program. That will be used to increase the number of women who are being screened by 96 000 over the next four years. That means a considerable extra number of women will be able to have breast screening. These breast-screening programs help women of all ages to live healthier and more active lives in their communities and go on about their ordinary daily lives because of early detection programs and the early treatment of breast cancer.

We particularly want to promote the importance of breast screening for women in the 50 to 69-year age group as well as to promote its importance for women in the 40 to 74-year age group. This is a very important initiative.

I am pleased to say that in my electorate of Melbourne West Province a number of health areas have received increases in funding. The Western Hospital in Footscray has had an additional \$7 million allocated to its mental health program. The Werribee Mercy Hospital, which I visited the other day — and it is a lovely and well-run facility — has received an additional \$10 million towards improving the accident and emergency centre, which is definitely in need of an upgrade.

The other area I want to talk briefly about is one that I am particularly pleased about — multicultural affairs. As the parliamentary secretary I assist the Premier in multicultural affairs. In this budget we are building on the achievements of the last term of government. We have seen \$18.6 million introduced in initiatives, \$6 million to fund skilled and business migration programs, \$6 million for the excellence in language initiative, which is about improving and boosting language programs in Victorian schools as well as establishing centres of excellence in language, and \$5 million has been — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member's time has expired.

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — I rise to talk about the budget and acknowledge a number of projects that have been funded in the budget for my electorate of Koonung Province and to make remarks on other aspects of the budget. I certainly welcome the allocation in this budget of \$3.15 million for the redevelopment of Vermont High School. That project has been under consideration by the school community and has been supported by local members of both persuasions in that area for many years. It is pleasing to see that that project has now received funding and will proceed.

I am also encouraged that Antonio Park Primary School has received \$950 000 for additional building facilities. For a long time I have worked to get improved facilities at that school, which is a remarkable success in its increasing enrolment. In the early 1990s it was suffering quite a decline in enrolments, but it now has a vibrant school community with a significant enrolment and a bright future. It is pleasing to see the facilities being provided with the government recognising, as local members in that area have recognised for quite some time, the needs of that school.

On the other side of the scale, though, I am concerned that Kent Park Primary School in Ferntree Gully and Glendal Primary School in the Glen Waverley area have both missed out on funding in this budget. The Kent Park school concerns me in particular because the honourable member for Knox in the other place in the last Parliament, Hurtle Lupton, was a strong advocate of the need for another primary school in the Rowville area. That certainly is a view I support very strongly. It is unfortunate that the government has not seen fit to provide further primary school facilities in the Rowville area or even to fund extensions to the Kent Park Primary School, which is trying to cope, as are a number of other schools in that area, with excessive numbers of students simply because the government

has not responded to the needs of that community in providing an extra school facility.

There is discussion in this budget about medical facilities in Knox. I would have to say that I am concerned that there will not be a public hospital in Knox, as the Liberal Party would want to see and as local members under the Liberal banner have campaigned for over some years. Whilst the budget has talked about the possibility of some sort of medical facility in Knox, it has put those on the never-never program and there has been no real commitment to them.

An allocation of \$2 million has been made to planning for a redevelopment of the Box Hill Hospital. I welcome that, but I note that that development is in a fairly long queue, which includes the Austin hospital, the Dandenong Hospital, the Werribee hospital and presumably the Royal Women's Hospital, an upgrade of which was a commitment the government gave at the last election. It is something that certainly at this stage has not eventuated as any sort of commitment in budgetary terms.

Like many people in the eastern suburbs I am most concerned that the government went to the last election suggesting it would underground Middleborough Road rather than accept what was the local council's — the Whitehorse City Council — proposal and the proposal of the Liberal Party that Springvale Road should be undergrounded in the eastern suburbs in terms of its traffic capacity and the role it plays as a north-south road in the distribution of traffic in the eastern suburbs. The government has come up with a rather unique alternative — undergrounding Middleborough Road.

I note in the budget the government has allocated \$1 million to a study to find out whether that would be a good idea. Having made an election commitment that the road would be undergrounded — and I do not see much merit in it from a traffic point of view, indeed it will cause a lot of traffic problems if Middleborough Road is undergrounded without other work being done in that eastern suburbs corridor — I find it extraordinary that the government should now fund feasibility studies and try to establish whether it was a good idea to make that promise.

I am also concerned that there is no allocation for the Eastern Freeway extension or the Scoresby freeway. I note that the federal government has continued to make a budget allocation towards its fifty-fifty commitment to the Scoresby freeway construction as per an agreement struck with the state Labor government in 2001. It is a great pity that this government has walked

away from that commitment and that following the commitment it made and the memorandum of understanding it signed with the federal government it has yet to allocate funds in any budget to bring life to that particular promise.

I also note that there are no funds in the budget for a third railway line between Blackburn and Mitcham railway stations that would improve express services on the Belgrave and Lilydale railway lines. Despite the fact that it was a promise taken by the government to the 1999 election, it seems to have dropped off the edge of the agenda, because it has not been mentioned since. That is of great concern to me.

I am mindful that budgets are a tool to implement policy — they are not an end in themselves. This budget in many ways lacks vision. There are not a lot of new programs in the budget or opportunities that one could point to for Victorians into the future. I appreciate that members of the government have been talking about extensions of some services and additional employees in some areas, some of which have not been without merit, but in creating a future for Victorians this budget does very little. It does not introduce many new programs.

In the area of responsibility that I have in the Liberal Party of monitoring the small business area it is interesting to note that the Minister for Small Business could only find one thing in her press releases to cheer about regarding the budget, and that was the Streetlife program. I was fascinated by that, because the Streetlife program has been running for some time. It is not a new program. Indeed, the minister extolled the virtues of this program and the fact that it has funding of \$2 million over four years.

That is an interesting thing to cheer about because that program was started by the Kennett government, but the level of budget funding for that program today is half what it was in the last year of the Kennett government. The minister has been crowing about a program that has suffered a reduction in funding and, I suggest, has had a significant change in its structure and objectives. It has now come under some degree of criticism from small business people who had previously been involved in Streetlife and understood its potential.

It is interesting to note that in terms of the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development the Treasurer in talking to the budget has indicated that he is looking for further productivity cuts from government departments over a period, and certainly the small business department will not escape from

those budget cuts. Given the way the budget has been structured and the way the government has gone about employing so many people — not always in the frontline areas of nursing, education, teachers and police, as it frequently points to as being a virtuous program in terms of government spending; the Liberal Party certainly supported increased numbers of people in all of those areas — it has by way of pay rises and employment of bureaucrats put people on in many more areas.

It occurs to me that the Treasurer, in looking for these productivity gains, could well have us face the bizarre situation in the not-too-distant future where imposed department productivity gains result in more bureaucrats working on less programs. The only way I can see some of these areas achieving productivity gains is by cutting out some of the initiatives to save dollars. While it is easy to cut initiatives and programs and the money that might go outside the bureaucracy to ensure that particular programs take place, it is a lot more difficult to cut public servants from the payroll. I can see a bizarre situation where we will have more public servants chasing less and less programs.

One of the real concerns I have with this budget is its reliance on certain areas of funding for its income, particularly gambling taxes. Some mention has been made of those again today in newspaper articles about the problems some people have with addiction to gambling. This is a government that was sanctimonious about its aversion to gambling and how it was going to tackle that problem. In fact the government is more reliant on gambling taxes than any government previously.

The government is certainly very reliant on taxes and charges associated with motorists, particularly with fine income from policing of motorists, speeding fines and so on. Whilst that is clothed in a sanctimonious cloth of road safety, it occurs to me that there is a much greater focus today — the police are certainly concerned about this focus — on the police becoming photo takers rather than thief takers and tax collectors rather than community protectors. That is something the Liberals and the community are concerned about. The government should be on notice in addressing those issues.

I note that the federal budget has continued an allocation for the Scoresby freeway. As an individual I have concerns, though, about one aspect of the federal government's budget, and this is a salutary lesson for all governments. I refer to the increases in the higher education contribution scheme because there is real concern with the broader social policy when you take

actions in a particular area. One of the concerns I have about that is that the young people who come out of university have significant debts as a result of their tertiary education, which means they are less likely to be able to move into the housing market at an early stage. I note some people would suggest that this will result in a much stronger and better quality university education, about which I make no remark because I would accept that this has been part of a very extensive and comprehensive review. However, given that we are an ageing society and given the impact and our concerns already about fertility rates in our community, then that sort of policy has ramifications.

What we need to understand as legislators is that every decision we take has consequences. Every one has impacts on other aspects of people's lives and on the decisions and choices people have. In that context this budget is unfortunate, because I do not think it advances opportunities for people.

I am very mindful in closing that the operating spending of the government has leapt 36 per cent, or \$7 billion, in just four years. According to this budget it will rise just 10 per cent, or \$2.5 billion, in the next 10 years. I am not sure that the government can hold it to that sort of level, particularly given pay rises that are already in the works and the range of other commitments which the government has funded with peanuts at this stage in this budget to make sure it gets favourable press releases but which will need significant and proper capital funding in the future if they are to be realised within the term of the government.

Hon. S. M. NGUYEN (Melbourne West) — I am delighted to make a contribution to the budget speech. We have discussed matters for the 2003–04 budget, which was delivered in the Legislative Assembly on 6 May. The government has looked carefully at what it plans to do for the coming year. We have to take the tough decisions to deliver promises to the Victorian community but at the same time keep the surplus. We are facing difficult times from the federal government. It does not support Victoria or contribute funds because Victoria has a Labor government that does not cooperate as much as the federal government would like.

Therefore we have to carry the burden. That is why we are facing a tough time. The budget is clear that we have to deliver services for country Victorians who have had to deal with the bushfire crisis and the drought occurring at the end of last year. The expectation was that we would encourage the economy and the life of our country people. We want growth in country

Victoria, so we have to consider everything we can to bring everyone together.

This government serves all Victorians, no matter where they live. At the same time we want to have a AAA rating. That is the commitment of the Premier, Mr Bracks, for Victoria, and particularly for the business sector. Before the election Mr Bracks said we did not want to have a black hole again. We want to maintain a strong economy.

The budget provides services for education, because we want our young children to have the best education in the world. We want to keep them in school as long as possible, so we need to provide everything we can to help them stay in school. We are providing welfare services to help young people dealing with crises to help them stay at school. We want to prevent these crises, so we have put money into this area. A few years ago we had a problem with young people using drugs, leaving school early and becoming street kids. This causes many problems in society, and we want to prevent that.

In health we are providing a better health system — more nurses and reduced waiting lists in hospitals. Our public health sector is one of the best health systems in Australia and the world.

We also want to maintain community safety in Victoria to protect against the people who try to damage our society. At the same time we want high security to keep terrorism away from Australia. We are working closely with the federal government to tackle this issue.

We also have to deliver the Commonwealth Games in 2006, so we are providing a lot of funding for the games. Our games will be the best in the world. The Minister for Sport and Recreation and the Premier are working hard to answer all concerns about the games.

Through the budget we will continue to build new police stations for Victoria. We want our policemen and women to have the best facilities and equipment to make their jobs easier. These are difficult times in crime, and our policemen and women must be prepared for their jobs.

The government is spending a lot of money to fix Kennett's transport mistakes. It has cost us a billion dollars to fix the transport problems. The opposition does not see that problem. They are still attacking us because we are not providing the freeway from Mitcham to Frankston. If the public transport debt had not been so high, we would have had more money for such projects.

Victoria's unemployment continues to be one of the lowest rates in Australia. Victoria has had the lowest unemployment in 13 years. The Victorian business sector is very happy because of the business confidence that creates. Many people are using scare tactics to say the Labor Party is only interested in the unions, but business investment is high. People are moving to our state because of our business initiatives.

At the same time we need the federal government to support us in building roads and funding the Commonwealth Games. We expect its contribution, but it is very slow. It has to do something about that. It will not help us because we are a Labor government, and that is not fair.

Our government has many programs to help youth look for jobs. We are working with local councils to create jobs for young people. The aim is 1100 new jobs and traineeships in the coming months. That is for young people aged 16 to 24, all from rural, regional and metropolitan areas, so it is a lot of jobs for young people. They need encouragement, experience and assistance, so this scheme will help them.

The government has recognised the importance of our ethnic communities and their services also. Many of them are volunteers working long hours for their own communities because they want to help the community engage with mainstream society. The government recognises that important role and is supporting them by giving them small grants to get themselves organised. In addition festival grants have been offered over the last 12 months. Many ethnic organisations have organised their own New Year or cultural festivals. Sometimes they have had a problem with paying for the cost of hosting the event because they do not charge at the door. They have become free admission events. A lot of community ethnic festival organisers give thanks to the Bracks government for having recognised the importance of that matter.

We also encourage the community to study after hours at ethnic school. The government has approved the grant. We are helping the community — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — A very good report too, Sang.

Hon. S. M. NGUYEN — Yes, a very good report. I read it on the weekend. We have support. We like to encourage young students to come on Saturday or Sunday to study their native language — their mother tongue — so they can speak better English as well as their own language. We support the funding for this initiative.

The government recognises the importance of interpreters for translation services in the health and legal sectors.

This state government looks at how it can make Victoria one of the healthiest economies by helping business in the future. It has reduced payroll tax so people can afford to do business in Victoria.

In conclusion, the government has looked carefully at what it can do to ensure services are delivered to all Victorians. It is important to note that country Victoria is still on the government's list.

We want to ensure everyone is looked after in the health and education sectors, in rural matters and in export. We have created a new portfolio of manufacturing and export, thinking of exporting overseas. Our neighbours will see the value of our manufacturing in Victoria. Manufacturers need some support from government to send their goods, products and services overseas. Our neighbours are keen to receive them.

Especially in health now and on the issue of severe acute respiratory syndrome, Australia is — —

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

Hon. D. K. DRUM (North Western) — I take great pleasure in being able to rise and talk on this issue. It surprises me — I suppose it should not — how much feeling and honour is exhibited in the debate from both sides. Obviously people on one side of the house tend to think that everyone on the other side is lying; people on that side of the house must think that we are lying. It is a stark fact that people on both sides of the house totally believe in what they are saying. It is quite amazing that we can be reasonably intelligent people looking at the same sets of figures and yet arrive at different outcomes as to what those figures actually say.

Some of the issues that I would like to raise about the budget are to do with the apprenticeship and trainee schemes that have been abolished and the whole concept of payroll tax exemptions. I will touch on those later in my talk.

The Regional Infrastructure Development Fund is important in the minds of the National Party and is an area of great interest to us. It was set up by the government with the express aim of providing funds specifically for people who live in truly traditional regional areas. The initial fund, which was set up with \$180 million over three years, had some great

initiatives in it and we congratulate the government on setting up this fund — —

Hon. J. M. McQuilten — Over four years!

Hon. D. K. DRUM — Over three years, thanks, Mr McQuilten. We would like to point out that there is still \$47 million of that \$180 million yet to be spent and that the current government has until 30 June to allocate that money.

The local councils that we spoke to last week are watching the government eagerly to see which way it moves on the remaining \$47 million, because they fear that it might be spent in the interface councils and they are wary because this money was originally planned for traditional regional areas. They expect that that money will be spent, and we hope that it will be spent in truly regional areas of Victoria.

The new \$180 million that was designated to be spent in the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund for this current period has been spread over five years, which mathematics will tell you is a 40 per cent reduction. A member for Geelong Province, Mrs Carbines, continually tells us that the RIDF outlines the commitment of this government to people in country Victoria.

I continue to thank her for saying that because a 40 per cent reduction for country people, in our opinion, is showing the Bracks government's commitment to country people, and if government members are continually going to rave about the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund then they should be careful about raving about something that they have just cut nearly in half.

Mrs Carbines — Rubbish.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — It is not rubbish, it is exactly the truth, and it cannot be refuted because they are your figures.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — What about the \$70 million gas extension?

Hon. D. K. DRUM — It is a fantastic part of the plan, the \$70 million gas extension. You and I both know that we support that, and you and I both know, Mr Theophanous, that it is not enough — —

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! Through the Chair, Mr Drum.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — Thank you, Deputy President. We know that it is not enough. We know that the \$180 million over five years has been rejigged back.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — We would just like to talk about this program here, and we have a \$20 million allocation out of the \$180 million that will be going to small towns. Again we compliment the government on that. We have \$70 million for gas extensions. We compliment the government on that. But it leaves a paltry \$90 million to be spread over five years. For a true Regional Infrastructure Development Fund program this government is going to spend \$90 million over five years. It is just abysmal, and if it is true that it has come to \$130 million over three years, then all of a sudden there is a little bit less left for everybody, and if \$30 million of that has already been allocated, it could be true that there is about \$10 million left to last this state in regional areas — \$10 million maybe — over three years.

Hon. Kaye Darveniza interjected.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — Good luck. I hope they have a good fight over trying to get their piece of it. If you want to include the nine interface councils that have now been added to the regional areas, according to this government, then you are going to find that the actual money that is available for true regional areas will be further diminished.

I would like to refer to some figures that have been bandied around post the budget becoming public that have to do with the estimates put in place in the 1998-99 budget when the Kennett government estimated its revenue for the 2002-03 year to be in the vicinity of \$21 billion. The \$21 billion has since grown to \$26 billion. And what effectively we know has happened is that the government had an additional \$5 billion to spend and it has spent it.

But not only that, if you remember the \$20 billion that the Kennett government had to spend, every time we ask questions in this house such as, 'What are you going to do about health? What are you going to do about transport? What are you going to do about law and order? What are you going to do about environment?', the answer we always get is, 'Well, we are doing more than you guys did'. The government would want to do more than the Kennett government did because it has so much more money than the former government had. If government members do not think they have more money, whose figures are they looking at?

Hon. Kaye Darveniza — What about the inheritance?

Hon. D. K. DRUM — The \$1.8 billion that the government has spent has already been well and truly documented by enough members of this house, so I do not need to carry on about that as well. Government members have enough people that want to remind them about their inability to handle money, they do not need me to do it.

One of the issues the government must understand — and any reasonable person would understand — is that if it has a much larger pie to share, surely the share it gives to each of the individual departments and the areas of health, transport, whatever they be, by natural progression must be increased.

Mr Viney — They have been.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — And they have to be increased by at least 30 per cent before they actually break even with the commitment that was given by the previous government.

Mr Viney — A thousand extra coppers, 4000 — —

Hon. D. K. DRUM — We do not want to be talking about that.

Honourable members interjecting.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT — Order! I think the member has a right to be heard without a barrage of interjections. We can have apposite interjections.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — Thank you very much, Deputy President.

The taxes that have increased under this government have been in one way or another a slug on families, and again the figures that are in the budget papers suggest it is a 39 per cent increase in taxes. A bit of silence! A 39 per cent increase in taxes equates to \$3.4 billion. Fines have been increased by 93 per cent. Whilst we always support the government in its endeavours to keep the road toll down, the number of motorists that are being killed on our roads continues to rise, and we have to continue to work harder there. Motorcyclists are in fact leading the way in reducing the number of fatalities for this particular year. Their fatalities have reduced, and yet our fines have still continued to increase at an exorbitant rate.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — If you take it as improved policing for the motorcyclist, you have to say it is the exact opposite for motor vehicle drivers. You cannot have it both ways. But what we are saying is that, without any apparent improvement in safety issues, the government is still reaping exorbitant amounts of money, and it is using that money to balance the books the best way it possibly can. It is true, and it is a fact. We are not saying it is deliberate; we are just saying it is a fact, and it is happening.

Hon. Kaye Darveniza interjected.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — We have promises, which I am just about to touch on, thank you, Ms Darveniza.

In the Bendigo region we will have a new primary school at Kangaroo Flat which will be going up in the next year. We are very appreciative of that and support it wholeheartedly. Specimen Hill Primary School has been approved for a new development, and we applaud the government for doing that. Police stations in Bendigo and throughout the region and also an ambulance station in Kangaroo Flat are also fully supported; again we applaud the government for the work it is doing in our region. We also understand that if you are going to be supportive of regional Victoria you must also have a true understanding about what it is in regional Victoria that is needed. So many of the issues and problems and concerns — —

Mr Viney interjected.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — Mr Viney wants to keep using that term, which we find an insulting term, but if he wants to keep bringing it up I will keep letting the people know how government members refer to us in the regional areas. We would appreciate it if the government would stop using that term because I find it insulting. I would appreciate it if Mr Viney left it alone.

Mr Viney interjected.

Hon. D. K. DRUM — We often hear enough about Jeff, and we are hoping that one day this government will grow up so it can actually be responsible for its own actions. Maybe one day. Maybe one day it will stop blaming Jeff or stop blaming John Howard or stop blaming somebody else and will actually do something about taking responsibility for its own actions.

Getting back to regional Victoria and the jobs that are needed to make the Victorian regional economy grow, in this budget we have had the community jobs program cut. This program had a target whereby the government said it would reach 9400 people throughout the term of its four-year target. That target has now

been cut back to 3500 people, so almost 6000 people are going to be left out of the community jobs program, 6000 people throughout country Victoria and the rest of the state.

The community business employment program had a target of 10 000 people. This community business employment program was a pre-election promise by the government. It said there was no way that it would cut the funding of this successful business employment program. It was a pre-election promise. The funding for that program has now been cut completely. So we have 10 000 people there who are now left out in the cold and 6000 people from the community jobs program have been left out in the cold.

The hotchpotch collection of programs that has been put in place, which will total in the vicinity of \$150 million, has no hope of being successful, because each of the programs is too small, too diverse, and there are not sufficient resources for any one of those programs to possibly make a difference.

The government is applauding its own programs and then putting a knife through those programs and putting in place a whole range of other programs which will cover its back but which will effectively not get the job done. Some 16 000 people throughout Victoria will miss out on opportunities because this government wants to reap in the money.

Mr Viney — Where are we putting it?

Hon. D. K. DRUM — Good luck finding out where it is going!

I want to touch on the issue of apprentices. Having been an apprentice myself, I know that the important thing about becoming an apprentice is that you need someone to give you a chance. You do not need someone to give you a bonus when you get through to the completion of your apprenticeship; you need someone to give you an opportunity to start right at day one. Once you are a year or two years into your program and have received 12 months or 24 months of employment, if things go wrong and you find yourself out in the cold you will have no problem, because there will always be someone there to take you on. Getting a start is what is crucial.

The other great thing we have in central Victoria at the moment is the fast train — spelt f-a-r-c-e! We have the farce train coming in; we have the local member for Bendigo West calling people economic vandals because we simply want this fast train to be standardised or convertible sleepers to be used. The member for Bendigo East is totally silent while the

three surrounding shires and councils are screaming for the Minister for Transport to at least listen to what the people are saying they want. We wish the government all the best. Good luck!

Ms MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in support of the Bracks government's fourth budget — a budget that is both fair and responsible. This budget has been delivered in the context of a difficult international economic climate — a climate that is more difficult than the one we have experienced in recent years.

The downturn in international markets has impacted on the state's superannuation funds, and the drought, the recent bushfires and the impact of the Kennett government's public transport privatisation have all added to pressures on the budget bottom line. Despite these pressures the Bracks government has continued to undo the damage inflicted on this state's services during the Kennett years in the key areas of health, education and community safety.

We make no apology for the fact that we are spending taxpayers money on these key areas. This is what the community wants and expects of us. Clearly the opposition has not learnt the lessons of the 1999 and 2002 state elections.

Hon. J. M. McQuilten — Some of them have, but they are not here!

Ms MIKAKOS — That is very true, Mr McQuilten. Some members of the opposition have learnt those lessons, but unfortunately they are not here now to share the benefits of those lessons with their colleagues who remain in this house.

This budget builds on the successes of the Bracks government during its first term when, for example, it put over 3000 extra teachers and staff back into our education system. This budget includes \$82 million for 450 additional teachers in our secondary schools and \$50 million for 256 additional student welfare officers in our primary schools.

In our first term we committed over \$800 million to build better schools and technical and further education institutes, including 16 new schools and 5 replacement schools. This budget allocates \$107 million for new and upgraded schools, which will benefit growth areas such as the northern metropolitan area of Melbourne.

Hon. Kaye Darveniza — And the west!

Ms MIKAKOS — And the west. In the health area during our first term the Bracks government attracted

over 3300 nurses back into our public hospital system to improve the health care of all Victorians. Labor is unashamedly committed to our public health system — unlike the Howard government, which is committed to decimating our public health care system and the universality of the Medicare system.

The Bracks government also opened 12 new ambulance stations and placed over 260 additional paramedics on the road. As part of this government's commitment to the hospital demand management strategy, this budget will provide for an additional 900 nurses and health care staff to treat an extra 35 000 patient admissions a year in public hospitals and 47 000 emergency department presentations. For example, the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre, which is on the fringes of my electorate and services many of my constituents, will benefit from \$29 million in new radiotherapy facilities.

As Parliamentary Secretary for Justice I am especially proud of the Bracks government's record on community safety and making our justice system more accessible. I want to focus my contribution on some of those initiatives that are included in this budget as they relate to both community safety and the justice system.

During our first term the Bracks government deployed an extra 800 police on our streets and funded 65 new police facilities across Victoria. This will see new police stations in Northcote and Preston, both in my electorate, and a new police station in Mr McQuilten's electorate. This budget will fund \$126 million to recruit, train and deploy an additional 600 police, which will see an extra 1400 police officers deployed by 2006 and which will take the size of Victoria Police to 10 900 officers. The Bracks government is committed to fighting crime and to ensuring that Victoria remains the safest state in Australia.

This budget also includes a further \$66 million for new or replacement police facilities in metropolitan Melbourne and country Victoria. This will see six new 24-hour stations at Bendigo, Brunswick, Bairnsdale, Caroline Springs, Pakenham and Warragul. In addition, new stations will replace poorly equipped police stations at Bannockburn, Edenhope, Mount Hotham, Myrtleford, Nyah, Robinvale, Tallangatta, Mitta Mitta, Swifts Creek and Woods Point. This means that by the end of this term the Bracks government will have constructed or rebuilt 135 police stations across Victoria at a cost of \$280 million.

In addition to this capital funding the budget also allocates \$6 million over the next two years to upgrade the Victoria Forensic Science Centre, with \$3.8 million

to be spent on extending and refurbishing the chemistry wing and \$2.2 million to replace equipment. This budget allocation is important as it will improve the capacity of staff at the Victoria Forensic Science Centre to conduct analysis of DNA, drugs, fingerprints and audio recordings and to assist the police in solving crimes in this state.

In addition, the budget includes \$2 million over four years to set up a major crimes reward fund to assist in solving the most serious of crimes committed in Victoria. In addition to this, the asset confiscation scheme will be enhanced with a \$6.6 million boost over four years. This funding is particularly important because it will ensure not only that we are helping Victoria Police to solve unsolved crimes but also that convicted criminals do not profit from their crimes.

I am particularly proud of the fact that the Bracks government has included in this year's budget \$400 000 over the next four years to set up a multilingual Crime Stoppers line to provide advice on issues relating to multicultural policing. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Chief Commissioner of Police, Christine Nixon, and Victoria Police on the very fine work they do in working with multicultural communities across this state and on the commitment they have to developing and maintaining a very good relationship between Victoria Police and our multicultural communities. The phone line will seek to promote and enhance these relationships and to ensure that all members of the Victorian public are able to effectively communicate with Victoria Police in their time of need.

The budget also commits \$20.5 million over five years to buy up 9500 handguns. Recently we debated legislation in this house providing for changes to laws on a national basis restricting the possession of handguns and particularly removing dangerous handguns from the community. This is part of a national approach, as I have indicated, and the buyback will begin on 1 July this year. The budget commits the Victorian government to this buyback to ensure that Victorian homes and streets are safer places.

The government also had a longstanding commitment to ensuring that Victoria is ready and able to respond to a terrorist attack. In November last year, for example, the Bracks government announced \$38 million as part of an antiterrorism package. This budget allocates a further \$60 million towards counterterrorism initiatives in particular to enhance the ability of our different emergency services to respond to chemical, biological and radiological incidents.

The antiterrorism allocation in the budget includes enhanced security at Parliament House and Government House to provide new screening equipment for checking visitors to the buildings. I am sure members would welcome this enhancement given what some people would call the somewhat lax security we have had in this building over recent years.

The budget also allocates \$9 million as part of a \$60 million allocation for setting up an emergency services coordination unit and a chemical, biological and radiological planning and response unit in the Department of Human Services. It is important that the government and its different agencies are prepared to ensure that if a terrorist incident occurs our critical communications infrastructure and protective equipment are available to respond to such a crisis and that the Victorian public is protected.

I am pleased that the budget includes a boost of \$30 million for state-of-the-art equipment, vehicles and other vital resources for our emergency services. For example, the budget provides \$11 million over four years towards the cost of training and deploying 219 firefighters, with additional funds expected to come from local government and insurers.

As we have seen in this summer's recent bushfires it is imperative that Victoria's emergency services agencies are able to protect lives and properties in our state. I am also particularly pleased that the budget includes a commitment of \$10 million over the next four years to the community safety emergency support program which provides grants to local emergency services units for new equipment and vehicles. Already Country Fire Authority and State Emergency Service units have been beneficiaries of those local grants.

The Bracks government is committed to ensuring that our justice system can be accessed by all members of our community, even our most disadvantaged Victorians. The budget includes \$14 million over four years to boost funding to Victoria Legal Aid and community legal centres. It is a commitment I am particularly proud of and pleased with as it includes \$1.4 million for community legal centres to provide legal services to the most vulnerable in the community. It also includes \$1.6 million to enhance regional access to Victoria Legal Aid and \$11 million to provide the first increase in professional fees to legal aid lawyers in 11 years.

The increase in funding to Victoria Legal Aid will mean, for example, that for the first time the City of Whittlesea will have a community legal centre available to the community. I was very pleased to announce last

week that Victoria Legal Aid has now allocated \$175 000 to establish a new legal centre in the City of Whittlesea which will service a growing community in the northern metropolitan area of Melbourne.

I want to contrast the Bracks Labor government's commitment to legal aid funding with the abysmal support shown by the Howard government to legal aid. I note in respect of this year's federal budget that Victoria Legal Aid will be allocated \$27.75 million — the same funding allocation it had in 1998–99. That demonstrates that the Howard government is just not interested in ensuring access to justice or supporting Victorians' access to legal aid; nor is it committed to our community legal centres. We have seen in the past its attempts to forcibly merge many of the CLCs in the state.

The government has also committed \$5.2 million in the budget for the establishment of a domestic violence court, and \$6.2 million for funding the Sentencing Advisory Council which we recently introduced in this Parliament. An amount of \$20.5 million over four years is also provided for the construction of the Moorabbin Magistrates Court and a new Latrobe Valley court and police complex. I commend the budget to the house.

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — I wish to commence my own budget reply by asking when Victorian taxpayers can expect to read government financial reports such as budget papers in plain English — that is, be able to follow the money trail and be able to compare previous and present budget reports. If I remember correctly that was one of the promises made in the Independents charter — that budget papers would be able to be followed clearly so everybody knew what was going on. That has never happened.

It is always important to see where you came from before you start looking at the bigger picture — that is, what your goals were and what you achieved as a result of setting these goals; and where you intend to be in, say, four years time in the life of a Parliament.

I do not intend to revisit the Cain and Kirner era, except to say that when they lost office the state was in debt by about \$34 billion and suffering recurrent losses of \$2 billion a year. Seven years later the Bracks government was sworn in with a debt reduced to \$7 billion and a recurrent budget surplus of about \$1.8 billion. In other words, the Liberal government reduced the debt incurred by the Cain and Kirner governments by \$36 billion.

In the Bracks government's first financial document, released shortly after its election in 1999, it is

interesting to note that the surplus projected for the 2002–03 budget was \$828.2 million. Since that first financial document the government has received a massive \$4.5 billion in extra revenue over and above its predicted forecasts. As the shadow Treasurer pointed out in his excellent budget reply last week, you would have trouble spending a net extra \$4.5 billion. But no, in true Labor style, the government achieved it easily and in fact managed to spend \$5.2 billion.

Since Labor formed government in 1999 and in the three years that followed taxes and charges have increased by 27.1 per cent or \$1900 a family, while spending has increased by a massive 38 per cent. The inability of Labor governments in Australia to manage money responsibly defies logic. The principle of spending more than you earn eventually leading to bankruptcy is what we try to instil into our children, and sometimes we finish up taking their credit cards away, chopping them up in their faces and throwing them away saying, 'You can't manage this responsibly. I am going to take it away from you'. This is what happens with all Labor governments.

Another aside before I spend time pointing out how the budget will, like all previous Labor budgets, force local government into another round of rate increases: I took up the invitation to attend the budget seminar kindly sponsored by the Department of Treasury and Finance over at the Park Hyatt. They pointed out some figures and it became obvious fairly early in the piece that a lot of the budget surplus was predicated on the breaking of the drought. I have two sons who are dairy farmers, so when I got back to Parliament I rang them up and said, 'Don't worry about it, the drought has broken. Treasury has told us so. Stop buying that exorbitantly priced grain. What are you buying it for? The drought has broken. The Labor Party has said there will be a surplus because the drought has broken'.

It is interesting to note that since 1999, taxes and charges under Labor have increased by the same amount as local government charges — that is, 28 per cent. Cost shifting by this government onto local government has become an art form whereby Victorian councils have been forced to meet increased financial obligations foisted on them by this government.

Chapter 9 of budget paper 2 is headed 'Estimated financial statements and notes' and is the only section of the budget that the Auditor-General comments on. Local government grants will be reduced this year by \$38.5 million or approximately 7.5 per cent in 2003–04, and page 189 shows that they will be reduced by a further \$60 million during the forecast period.

If that is not difficult enough for councils, grant moneys are tied to the consumer price index, so with wages increasing at an average of 7.5 per cent per annum and the consumer price index going up by about half that, councils are in an enormous amount of trouble. There is no better example of this than the home and community care (HACC) budget.

Hon. Kaye Darveniza — The home and community care budget is excellent!

Hon. J. A. VOGELS — You say it is excellent, and since the election of the Bracks government in 1999 there has been a small increase in HACC funding. This year it has been increased by \$12 million. If you work that out it is an average of \$13 000 per council per month or \$23 000 a year per provider, which is about half an equivalent full-time person per provider. That is absolutely shameful!

We also know that the Bracks government has contributed to the erosion of HACC funds through massive increases in Workcover premiums, which will become even greater when councils have to meet a complete no-lift policy for HACC workers, as well as changes to industrial conditions where staff are moving back to council award conditions.

It is also state government policy to keep people at home for as long as possible — and nobody can disagree with that — which is saving the Department of Human Services tens of millions of dollars in acute health costs. A large amount of those savings should be handed over to local government to help provide HACC services, because they are out there doing the work and that is where the money should be provided.

Cash-strapped libraries in rural and regional Victoria in particular are in a dire financial situation and may be forced to go into debt. The Glenelg and the Corangamite regional library boards, and no doubt many others across the state, have made desperate pleas for more government funding to ensure service continuity and viability. What did the 2003–04 budget project for our libraries? Not one extra cent for books and services. Over the past few years funding has dropped from a 50:50 formula to 70:30 — and the councils are paying the 70 and the state government is paying 30! The dilemma now for councils is a choice of one of two evils: cut the service or ratepayers will have to meet the funding shortfalls. Neither are good options, and neither will satisfy ratepayers. Library services are an essential educational and community asset to Victorians, and the Bracks government needs to restore 50:50 funding to enable the continuity and viability of this service.

The budget has seen the withdrawal of \$240 million in black spot funding. As the federal government now provides grants directly to local governments through the Roads to Recovery program, for the first time in many years councils had an opportunity to have an impact on their road maintenance. At the first opportunity this government has withdrawn its \$240 million. The hypocrisy of this is breathtaking but never surprising.

Before the last federal election we heard a never-ending tirade from the Labor Party against the Howard government for not reducing petrol taxes and how wicked indexation was. The Howard government listened and removed indexation on petrol, probably costing it tens of millions of dollars a year. The Bracks government as usual has done the complete opposite and has mercilessly targeted our motorists. It has reduced the speed tolerance limit from 10 kilometres an hour to 3 kilometres an hour and affixed speed cameras to almost every lamppost you can think of, often in heritage colours to really trick motorists, and so on. I call it the Gotcha program. The Bracks government's Gotcha campaign injected an extra \$350 million in revenue from motorists last year with \$450 million predicted for this year. It is merely a money-making machine and if you look at our road toll figures, sad to say they have not changed. In fact they have probably increased since 1999.

Hon. D. Koch — What about the tolls?

Hon. J. A. VOGELS — The Bracks government lied or broke an election promise to motorists about no tolls and knocked back \$450 million from the federal government to fund the Mitcham–Frankston freeway, or tollway, as it should be called. Even blind Freddy can see that if the Geelong bypass is ever constructed by this lot it will be a tollway not a freeway. And while this skulduggery is going on, as well as the removal of the \$450 million black spot program, there is no funding at all for our local bridges and local roads. As I said before, there is a reduction in capital grants for councils.

The Kennett government clearly published each year where the 3 cents a litre from petrol was spent. During that time we knew the break-up and that it was split between country and city. I ask the Auditor-General to look at that and see where the money is going at present because nobody seems to know. The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) believes its insurance broker, Jardine Lloyd Thompson, is struggling to purchase reinsurance due to exploding payouts. Councils have been warned to anticipate a 100 per cent

increase in public liability insurance over the next two years — if they can even get insurance.

The Bracks government has been warned that every volunteer organisation, every committee, every sporting organisation or tourist operator, and every professional body from builders to doctors, and the MAV are all screaming out for help. We heard something about that today, but until I see the fine print I do not know whether it will have an effect or not.

The decision of the High Court of Australia to abolish the common non-feasance defence is also coming home to roost. Instead of nipping this in the bud last year the Bracks government brought in a bill which gave us temporary relief to 1 January 2005. Unless the government demonstrates some leadership on this issue that is only 18 months away, the cost to councils and ratepayers will ensure that no insurance company will take this on, because non-feasance is a huge issue for all councils. I agree fully with the sentiments of Justice James Thomas who said:

Some of us have enjoyed playing Santa Claus, forgetting that someone has to pay for our generosity.

...

We have allowed the tests for negligence to degenerate to such a trivial level that people can be successfully sued for ordinary human activity.

Last year the Bracks government introduced legislation which will increase landfill levy payments for municipal waste from \$2 to \$7 a tonne. That is a 300 per cent increase. By the end of this government's term, these landfill levies will have increased from \$12 million to \$42 million, and once again who has to wear the cost? It is local government.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — It's recycled.

Hon. J. A. VOGELS — It's not recycled; it just goes into a hole somewhere. Surely it would be more equitable to have a system where you do not collect levies in the first place. Let councils deal with the issue or hand the levies back to councils. I think at the moment 70 per cent goes to Ecorecycle, 20 per cent goes to the Environment Protection Authority and the councils get a miserable 10 per cent of it.

Victorians are again to be slugged an extra \$60 million in fire insurance bills, and once again council rates will have to blow out to cover these costs. The Metropolitan Fire Brigade and Country Fire Authority budgets are expected to rise by 20 per cent or 25 per cent next financial year, mainly due to deals struck by the government prior to the last election. The MAV has

dubbed the extra cost to householders, business and ratepayers as a de facto tax increase.

In conclusion I would like to take a script out of the Premier's advertising over the last couple of weeks before the federal budget. It went something like 'As a Victorian and on behalf of all Victorians I ask the federal government to put in so much money for all these different projects'. My answer to that would be: 'As a Victorian, on behalf of all Victorians I would ask the Premier as leader of the state: why did you further penalise Victorians in your state budget this year? Why did you on behalf of Victorians rescind \$77 million of federal government funding for the Melbourne Cricket Ground development; rescind \$450 million of funding for the Scoresby freeway; take \$350 million from our pockets in one year for traffic infringements; rescind your government's \$450 million black spot program; shamelessly spend \$80 million of our money on the ambulance royal commission —

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member's time has expired.

Mr SMITH (Chelsea) — I rise to speak in response to the budget, but I have to start by saying I am disappointed with the time allocated to me. However, I will make the best of what I have.

The PRESIDENT — Order! You won't be stopped. You will be just interrupted.

Mr SMITH — I have listened to contributions from both sides of the house on this debate. I have to say that on this side there were quality contributions and on that side the usual belligerent, whingeing and carping, except for the Honourable Damian Drum who I thought added a tad of honesty, and dare I say even a little humour. Quite clearly their contributions have stated again and again that they do not get it. They still do not understand what has happened to them politically. They still do not understand what is happening in the real world.

They whinge about the fact that we spent their \$1.8 billion — money that we supposedly inherited. People out there are now voting big time for what we are doing — that is, spending their money on what they want, which is services. I know the opposition does not like it but the Nats complaining about our spending money on public servants is just too much to bear. The former Department of Natural Resources and Environment, under the previous coalition government, sacked 500 members of the Australian Workers Union who worked in the bush doing things like clearing creeks, cutting firebreaks with bulldozers or whatever.

They sacked the lot of them. What happened in the bush with all that environmental impact? A disaster. What did the Nats do about it? Nothing. They did not do a damned thing, but they paid the price.

If they do not understand what I am saying they should listen. In a public poll two days ago people across the country were asked, 'What do you want — the tax cuts delivered by Mr Costello or health and education services?'. Funnily enough 78 per cent said, 'Give us health, give us education, and stick your tax cuts'.

Even Amanda Vanstone agrees. She argued the cuts would not even buy you a milkshake and a sandwich. How out of touch is she? When was the last time you could get a milkshake for less than \$4? It is unbelievable. They have no idea what they are doing.

This government understands what the people of Victoria want, and we are giving it to them. This budget has demonstrated again that we are listening to the citizens of Victoria. We are spending exactly where they want the money spent. The opposition would rather not recognise that and listen to the people out there. It would rather hoard the money. It believes it is its money. We are looking at the highest-taxing government in the history of this country federally but in this place the opposition has the audacity to suggest we are over-taxing the people. Do they not understand? No, they do not, we know that — they do not understand or listen. It is clear and obvious to all that they do not understand.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The PRESIDENT — Order! Pursuant to sessional order 10, as it is now 10 o'clock the question is that the house do now adjourn.

Budget: rural hospitals

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — I want to raise a matter for the Minister for Finance through the Minister for Sport and Recreation. When I attended a briefing from Treasury following the budget it was mentioned that there would be a sum of money added to the bottom line of the budget by shifting around certain moneys held by rural hospitals. It has since been drawn to my attention that rural hospitals have been instructed to hand over any moneys they have in trust accounts or reserves so that it can be transferred to a central account in Melbourne.

This asset-stripping from our rural health services into one account controlled by the Bracks government reminds me of the beginning of the end of many of Australia's entrepreneurs in the 1980s, all of whom went belly up, taking thousands of individuals and small businesses with them.

This money has been raised by local communities in support of their health services. This is money that has been donated to these hospitals by hardworking auxiliaries. This is money that was donated by service clubs and hardworking committees. In western Victoria, for example the Murray–Moyné marathon bike ride has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars over the years for local hospitals.

This is money that is bequeathed to local health services through people's wills, which often stipulate the hospital that the bequest must go to; if it does not go to that hospital, it is forfeited and goes somewhere else. This money raises money in itself through receiving interest on the accounts. This money is used to match minor grants which are normally fifty-fifty. This money is used to top up capital grants when a major redevelopment takes place, which is always dependent on a major local contribution. This money is used to buy much-needed hospital equipment. What action is the minister going to take to reassure rural health services that: firstly, their money is safe; secondly, it remains in their own control; thirdly, they are credited with interest; and fourthly, they are able to make their own decisions on how this money is to be spent? This is exactly what happened in the Cain-Kirner era, and we all know the disaster that finished in.

Road safety: drink-driving

Hon. C. D. HIRSH (Silvan) — I raise an issue concerning drink-driving. It is a matter I want to take up with the Minister for Transport in the other place, and I ask the Minister for Sport and Recreation to raise it with him. A recent program has been announced to tackle drink-driving, particularly in rural Victoria, with a joint Roadsafes Victoria and Vicroads sponsorship of the Worksafes Victorian Country Football League.

This is a great initiative because it addresses the road toll in country Victoria which has risen for four years with alcohol-related deaths, which are at their highest level in 10 years. A lot of this drink-driving is to do with drinking among 21-to-29-year-old men who seem to be having a problem. The program the minister has initiated particularly concerns football teams with the message being 'Good sports don't let their mates drink and drive'. It appeals especially to that younger male

group that is getting killed on the roads in single-car accidents.

I would like to see such a program or a program similar to this instigated in outer metropolitan areas, particularly in the outer east where you have roads that whilst these days are classified as suburban are still rural. They are often without street lighting, are treed along the sides and are almost all in urban rural fringe areas. I would like to see a similar program initiated addressing young male drink-drivers in particular, although a range of people is involved.

It is good that the minister is addressing single-car smashes in rural Victoria. However, I would very much like to see that issue being addressed in outer suburban Melbourne with clubs such as the Bayswater, Ringwood and other football clubs becoming involved. I believe it would be a successful program, and as in country Victoria would probably assist in reducing deaths from single-car road smashes right throughout the state.

Mullauna College: work experience program

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — I wish to raise a matter with the Minister for Sport and Recreation for the Minister for Education and Training in another place. I bring to her attention and to the attention of the house a concern I have about work experience programs continuing in secondary education.

I have noticed — and I particularly bring to the house tonight the experience of Mullauna College which is in Mitcham — a tendency for schools to reduce their work experience programs and to question whether or not they will continue with them. Apparently significant changes were required to be made to the program over the summer period. Many of those changes seem to have been generated in the occupational health and safety area.

The result is that employers are required to provide considerably more information to schools that are conducting these programs. Where the schools have any concerns about those reports or believe there is any possibility of injury or adverse incident to students, schools are being required to complete risk assessments. As Mullauna College indicates, in the case of a student who would be going to, for instance, a hospital to undertake work experience there are a great many potential dangers within that environment and a great many risks to be assessed. The school simply does not have the capacity to undertake those risk assessments. As a result Mullauna College is currently

reviewing the entire work experience programs it offers. It is likely that it will put to the college council at a future meeting a recommendation that its program be curtailed — not necessarily stopped but certainly severely limited.

Most members in this place and I, as an employer who has been involved in work experience programs with young people, would be most concerned if this opportunity for young people was lost simply because of rules and regulations that are beyond the necessary requirements that one would expect to ensure the reasonable safety of young people.

Will the minister look at these work experience programs and consult with schools, particularly Mullauna College in this instance, on some of the concerns the schools are raising about those programs, and look at an opportunity to address some of those concerns so that those work experience programs may continue.

Planning: Dandenong

Mr SOMYUREK (Eumemmerring) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Transport in another place concerning the vision for a transport and distribution hub in the Dandenong region.

I applaud the government's far-sighted policy of fostering and promoting the area as a major regional Victorian transport and distribution hub. Big Australian companies, including Allied Pickford, Clelands, Mannway and Regional Logistics group, as well as Australia Post, have been very active in recent investment and expansion. They are now joined by Toll Holdings Ltd which is redeveloping the old Heinz site. These companies have enormous competitive advantages in a sector rapidly being transformed by technology and the growth of e-business into a total solutions marketplace in the integrated logistics industry.

The area is now a centre of excellence in contract transport, warehousing and distribution services which improve both operational and marketing efficiencies of the client companies which are serviced so well out of the hub.

The comprehensive network of rail, road and port facilities is strategically served by the Eastern Freeway and the Hallam bypass which is to be completed by the Bracks government one year ahead of schedule. The fast rail project linking the Latrobe Valley through Dandenong to Melbourne is an indicator of the commitment by this government to the substantial

transport and distribution hub transformed by this visionary government.

I request that the Minister for Transport further enhances this model infrastructure project in planning and transport initiatives with the redevelopment of the former saleyards site located next to the Dandenong railway station.

Dental services: Western Province

Hon. D. KOCH (Western) — I raise a matter of public dental surgery through the Minister for Sport and Recreation for the Minister for Health in the other place. I draw attention to Dental Health Services Victoria figures recently released which show growing waiting lists for public dental care, especially in country Victoria.

Waiting lists in major centres throughout Western Province have almost doubled over the last two years. In Horsham patients are waiting for 39 months to see a public dentist, and it is worse in Hamilton where they have to wait an average 42 months. But it gets worse. In Portland and Warrnambool patients are waiting on average 49 months — more than four years — to get public dental treatment.

This is appalling and unacceptable. Many of these patients are suffering not only from lack of timely dental treatment, but also due to limited access to dental care. Their general health and wellbeing is also suffering. Many of these people are pensioners, economically disadvantaged on low incomes, unemployed, disabled and in isolated communities. They simply cannot afford to engage a private dentist. Nearly 1500 people are waiting for fillings at the Hamilton public dental clinic alone. This is up by a third over the past two years. Victoria has the lowest per capita funding in Australia for dental health. Statewide the average number of Victorians queuing to see dentists has almost doubled since this government came to power in 1999, only over a four-year period.

The situation in Hamilton is that one dentist is employed by Dental Health Services Victoria for two and a half days per week. The vast majority of this dentist's work is limited to emergency treatment, causing people awaiting routine fillings or dentures to be forced to wait simply because there is too much work for one dentist to accomplish.

The dental clinics in Warrnambool, Portland and Horsham are experiencing similar problems. The situation is not expected to improve in the short term. Individuals and welfare agencies that have been in

constant contact with me have also expressed concern about the severe shortage of dentists in rural and regional Victoria. Clearly this government needs to boost training numbers for the long term, and in the short term it needs to put in place initiatives that will encourage more public dentists into regional areas as we have witnessed with doctors.

Will the minister provide an assurance that she will commit herself to improving public dental health throughout country Victoria, turning this present dilemma around, shrinking waiting lists and offering some hope to public dental patients?

Small business: Geelong

Hon. J. H. EREN (Geelong) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Small Business. I know that since the election the minister has been getting on with the job of delivering our election commitments to a very important part of our community, small business, and I congratulate her for that.

I would particularly like to know how these reforms will help small businesses in Geelong. I frequently visit small businesses in my electorate, businesses in Mercer Street, businesses in Yarra Street near my office, and many others. One of the questions that is asked of me is how the new retail leases legislation will affect their business. Small business operators tell me that aside from their day-to-day retail operations the item that gives them a lot of stress, apart from the GST, is the lease. It always costs a lot and they are at a disadvantage when negotiating a new lease.

This worries them. Small business has enough to worry about without more added worries. I can see how a small business owner would be a bit overawed if they tried to understand the changes in the legislation. Although I am not a lawyer I know that they do cost a lot to visit, a cost that small business can do without. I ask the minister, on behalf of small business in Geelong, whether any assistance for businesses is available when it comes to their lease, and, if so, how do they access that assistance?

Tourism: international visitors

Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash) — The matter I raise is for the Minister for Tourism in another place. I refer to the number of international arrivals figures for April released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics this morning. The number of international visitors that spent most of their time in Victoria is down 13.5 per cent since March 2002.

The state budget contains \$40 million for tourism, which is nothing more than meeting the government's election promises made last November. This was before the outbreak of the severe acute respiratory syndrome or SARS virus and the war in Iraq. The issue was that the government was making all this noise, but is trying to turn it around and blame it on SARS.

The budget does not contain any extra money for tourism as a result of the severe downturn in international visitor numbers. Tourism is the backbone of country Victorian regions, such as Phillip Island, Ballarat and the Great Ocean Road, and relies heavily on international tourists. Accommodation houses, restaurants and suppliers will all be affected. What is the government's recovery strategy to attract international tourists back into Victoria and how much funding will tourism receive beyond those election promises?

Insurance: reform

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA (Melbourne West) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Finance. Firstly, I congratulate the minister on his announcement today on the action that the Bracks government is taking to deal with the current insurance situation in this state. As the minister is aware, there is a range of serious concerns that the Victorian community has regarding the difficulty in obtaining insurance for themselves, their businesses or organisations.

Some of the organisations that have requested specific assistance include: fun run organisers; wildlife parks; Scots of Victoria; Russian Women's Association; Heartbeat Victoria; Bacchus Marsh Motocross Club; Maryborough Carers Support group; Gippsland Guardrail and Safety Platforms; walking clubs; Southern Hot Rod Club; Chios Brotherhood of Melbourne; Stratford Fitness Club; Cobden Angling Club; Melbourne Aboriginal Youth Sport and Recreation Cooperative; Dandenong Benevolent Society; and various community festivals.

What assistance has the minister given these organisations and what further assistance can they expect? What assistance has the minister given to other groups and organisations that have found themselves in similar circumstances to the above-mentioned organisations?

Public liability: Crown land and public halls

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — My issue is also directed to the Minister for Finance. It is about public liability insurance, with a good example being

the Walpeup Table Tennis Club — a thriving community club in a small country town just west of Ouyen. The club is about to shut down because of the scourge of country areas — public liability insurance costs and availability. The table tennis club has 45 members, including students, and plays regularly in the Walpeup public hall where the insurance liability of the hall is carried by the Mildura Rural City Council. The council says that the table tennis players are not covered by its insurance, and the club must provide its own insurance or not use the hall. This is not a criticism of the Mildura Rural City Council, as it must work within its own contract.

The table tennis club contacted Table Tennis Victoria which said it was possible for the club to be insured, but it would need to be incorporated, and a substantial amount of documentation would need to be prepared as well as an affiliation fee. Further I am advised that the club members would be required to have a membership fee estimated to be \$30 or \$40 to pay for the insurance, as well as being required to undertake an accident prevention course and keep records of who played as part of a requirement for public liability cover. All of this will probably close the club down.

The huge impact public liability is having on our country communities was made glaringly obvious when Peter Walsh, the member for Swan Hill in another place, my colleague Mr Drum and I met with representatives of six councils in the township of Wycheproof recently. The issue of public liability insurance was on top of the agenda, and again we heard the impracticality of the situation where community groups using facilities such as local halls or areas such as Crown land must insure and wear the costs but at times they are unable to access insurance.

This whole issue has given rise to some ludicrous situations such as a hall that is used for a debutante ball being okay, but the same hall cannot be used for debutante training; and the insurance will not cover a football function or a private function. This issue cannot be ignored by the government any longer. It affects a huge range of events such as pony clubs, ski racing, community events of various sorts, and the list goes on and on.

Tonight I want to concentrate on one area of concern, which is public halls under council insurance policies and Crown land areas. I ask the Minister for Finance to make a start on the tangled mess that public liability insurance has become, to allow a council's cover to be applicable for all functions held in the facility covered by a council's insurance, and to work with the

Department of Sustainability and Environment to achieve the same results on Crown land.

Employment: Jobs for Young People program

Hon. S. M. NGUYEN (Melbourne West) — I raise a matter with the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs in the other place concerning the implementation of the Jobs for Young People program which is part of Jobs for Victoria. The action I seek concerns the implementation of that policy, and I request that there is a process of consultation with the multicultural community in identifying the new opportunities for our young unemployed from the culturally and linguistically diverse sector.

I congratulate the Bracks government on its commitment to developing employment initiatives that foster employment with growth and jobs opportunities for all Victorians. In its first term the Bracks government introduced four traineeship and apprenticeship programs to improve employment and training opportunities for young people. All of these programs have reached their target with over 18 000 young people being placed in employment and training initiatives.

In continuing this emphasis of ensuring shared growth across the whole state, our new employment programs target young people, disadvantaged job seekers, migrants and retrenched workers. Jobs for Young People will increase opportunities for young people to gain employment by providing young Victorians with entry-level public sector employment opportunities; expanding opportunities for employment participation by young people, equipping them with the skills to reconnect and participate in mainstream social and economic life; and targeting young people in rural and regional areas by providing them with employment and training opportunities in their local area, with the aim of increasing the percentage of people in rural and regional Victoria engaged in education and training.

In my electorate in the outer western Melbourne region the youth unemployment rate has decreased significantly from when we first came to government. In October 1999 youth employment was at 18.5 per cent with April 2003 figures indicating it is now at 9.3 per cent — a decrease of 9.2 per cent. The Victorian unemployment rate is 5.9 per cent, which is the equal lowest rate in Australia with Western Australia and below the national unemployment rate of 6.1 per cent. Under the previous government Victoria's unemployment rate was consistently above the national average. I ask the minister to make the necessary arrangements so that this policy can be rolled out as

quickly as possible, and young people are given much needed access to the valuable local employment opportunities.

Professional indemnity: medical practitioners

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — My matter concerns the issue of medical indemnity insurance, and is directed to whichever member of the Bracks government is responsible for this. We have had a lot of discussion about whether it is the Minister for Finance, the Minister for Health, the Premier or indeed local members, whether in Ballarat, Geelong or any other area.

Hon. Kaye Darveniza — On a point of order, President, in the adjournment debate the member should direct the concern to the minister who is responsible for that particular portfolio, and not this absolute rubbish that the opposition member is going on about, saying that he is unable to identify who is the minister responsible.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — On the point of order, President, this is actually a very serious matter. The Bracks government has not made it clear who is responsible for these medical indemnity insurance matters. The Public Accounts and Estimates Committee last week, on Thursday morning, asked the health minister a question about medical indemnity insurance, and she said that the finance minister was responsible. In the afternoon on the same day the finance minister was asked a question about medical indemnity insurance and he said no, he was not responsible, and that it was the health minister's responsibility!

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member will not debate the point of order. He can raise it, but not debate it.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — Further to the point of order, President, there is some confusion within the government, and I raise the issue with whichever minister chooses to accept responsibility for it. I would appreciate a response. I will leave it to the minister at the table tonight, the Minister for Sport and Recreation, to direct it to whichever minister he believes is responsible.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I will rule on the point of order. The member raising the issue can raise the matter with the minister present, who will refer it off to the responsible minister.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — Thank you, President. My matter concerns the government's announcement today concerning the issue of insurance, and in particular that

aspect of the government's announcement referring to medical indemnity insurance. It is very clear that the government's proposals do take a step towards a national framework, and that step is important, but it is not complete. A number of matters have been left undone by the government, and one of the most serious matters with respect to medical indemnity insurance concerns the long dithering of the Bracks government in coming to a conclusion to this issue which is striking so harshly in certain areas of country and regional Victoria — in Ballarat, in Geelong, in Shepparton, in Wodonga, and in a number of other country centres. In these places the crisis in the medical work force resulting from this issue will not be fully resolved by the government's announcement today.

It is clear that, because the Premier or whoever is responsible for this issue has left the announcement so long, a number of doctors have decided to retire in any event. This will leave holes in the regional medical work force in Ballarat, Geelong, Shepparton, Wodonga, Wangaratta and at many other country sites. I do not think members of this chamber — whether Ms Hadden or Mr McQuilten, who again is not attending tonight, or Mrs Carbines or other members — should laugh about this matter because it is very significant. There will be significant holes in the medical work force that will require the Premier — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I know the member has a limited time of 3 minutes and has only 30 seconds to go, but I also draw the member's attention to the fact that an adjournment matter is not to be developed into a set speech or a debate. I ask the member to come to his point in the remaining 30 seconds.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — I thank you for your guidance, President. I get very agitated about this issue and its impact on country Victoria.

The Bracks government has delayed on this issue. Through the Minister for Sport and Recreation I seek from the minister who is responsible for this issue some assurance that the Premier or the minister who is responsible, whoever that may be, will actually step forward and fill those holes, will compensate country towns and will ensure that those towns have no medical work force issues following on from this.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member's time has expired.

Local government: women

Hon. H. E. BUCKINGHAM (Koonung) — I raise an issue with the Minister for Local Government. On

Friday evening last, 16 May, the minister and I attended the 40th anniversary of the Australian Local Government Women's Association, Victorian branch. It was a most enjoyable evening. It gave me cause to consider this adjournment debate. It was gratifying to see a wonderfully diverse group of women — women of all ages and politically diverse backgrounds — representing their local communities in Victoria.

After the most recent local government elections, Victoria has 28 women mayors leading 79 councils. Of a total of 412 vacancies, 114 women councillors were elected. That constitutes about 27 per cent. Unfortunately this is not much of an increase since the last council elections.

Women won the right to vote in local government elections over 100 years ago this year, but it was not until 1914 that the first woman councillor was elected to stand. She was Cr Mary Rogers, who was elected in 1920.

Other significant milestones for women in local government include: the election of the first shire president, Cr Blanche Ross-Watt in 1931; the election of Cr Nellie Ibbot in 1943 as mayor of Heidelberg — she was the first female mayor; the election of Cr Leckie Ord, who served as the first woman Lord Mayor of Melbourne from 1987 to 1988; and Maureen Lyster, who became the first female Minister for Local Government.

As a former councillor who actively encouraged female participation in local government, I salute the Bracks government in achieving the quality and cost-effectiveness of service delivery to make important community services more accessible to those who need them. It is to the credit of the government that it has set about restoring local government autonomy by removing constraints such as compulsory competitive tendering and rate capping.

I ask the minister what she intends to do to support the autonomy and independence of councils and to promote women's involvement in local government. In particular, what will the government do to increase representation of women from culturally diverse backgrounds, to encourage mentoring of female councillors and candidates, and to widen the scope of policy issues and advocacy beyond what are seen as traditional women's concerns — that is, concerns of nurturing, child care, health and education and environment — to non-traditional areas such as finance, infrastructure, logistics and waste management?

Responses

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — In relation to the issue raised by the Honourable John Vogels regarding trust account funds of regional hospitals and rural health services, I will refer this to the Minister for Finance.

The Honourable Carolyn Hirsh raised the issue of drink-driving in rural areas and the 21-to-29-year-old demographic. She referred to a program in rural Victoria and asked about a program of its like for outer metropolitan areas. I will refer this to the Minister for Transport in the other place.

The Honourable Bruce Atkinson raised the issue of work experience programs in secondary colleges. I will refer this to the Minister for Education and Training in the other place.

Mr Somyurek raised the issue of a vision for a transport and distribution hub in the Dandenong area. I will draw this to the attention of the Minister for Transport in the other place.

The Honourable David Koch raised the issue of dental health services in country Victoria. I will refer this to the Minister for Health in the other place.

The Honourable John Eren raised the matter of small business reforms and the impacts on small business in accessing assistance. I will refer this to the Minister for Small Business.

The Honourable Andrea Coote raised the issue of the number of international visitors to Melbourne and attractions mechanisms associated with that. I will refer this to the Minister for Tourism in the other place.

The Honourable Kaye Darveniza raised the issue of insurance assistance for community groups. I will raise this for the attention of the Minister for Finance.

The Honourable Barry Bishop raised the issue of the Walpeup Table Tennis Club and public liability associated with the use of community facilities. I will raise this with the Minister for Finance.

The Honourable Sang Nguyen raised the issue of the role of relevant employment programs at a local level, particularly those in the Melbourne West area. I will raise this with the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs in the other place.

The Honourable David Davis raised the matter of medical indemnity insurance issues in rural Victoria. I will raise this with the appropriate minister.

ADJOURNMENT

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COUNCIL

Tuesday, 20 May 2003

The Honourable Helen Buckingham raised the matter of women in local government and issues associated with local government, including increasing the role of women in positions of responsibility within local government. I will refer this to the Minister for Local Government.

House adjourned 10.34 p.m.