

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT

FIRST SESSION

Tuesday, 19 December 2006

(Extract from book 1)

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

By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

The Governor

Professor DAVID de KRETZER, AC

The Lieutenant-Governor

The Honourable Justice MARILYN WARREN, AC

The ministry

Premier, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Veterans' Affairs	The Hon. S. P. Bracks, MP
Deputy Premier and Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change	The Hon. J. W. Thwaites, MP
Minister for Education	The Hon. J. Lenders, MLC
Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment and Minister for Women's Affairs	The Hon. J. M. Allan, MP
Minister for Gaming, Minister for Consumer Affairs and Minister assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs	The Hon. D. M. Andrews, MP
Minister for Victorian Communities and Minister for Energy and Resources	The Hon. P. Batchelor, MP
Treasurer, Minister for Regional and Rural Development and Minister for Innovation	The Hon. J. M. Brumby, MP
Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrections	The Hon. R. G. Cameron, MP
Minister for Agriculture	The Hon. J. Helper, MP
Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission, Minister for Tourism and Minister for Information and Communication Technology	The Hon. T. J. Holding, MP
Attorney-General, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Racing	The Hon. R. J. Hulls, MP
Minister for Community Services and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs ...	The Hon. G. W. Jennings, MLC
Minister for Public Transport and Minister for the Arts	The Hon. L. J. Kosky, MP
Minister for Planning	The Hon. J. M. Madden, MLC
Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs	The Hon. J. A. Merlino, MP
Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Children and Minister for Aged Care	The Hon. L. M. Neville, MP
Minister for Roads and Ports	The Hon. T. H. Pallas, MP
Minister for Health	The Hon. B. J. Pike, MP
Minister for Industry and State Development, Minister for Major Projects and Minister for Small Business	The Hon. T. C. Theophanous, MLC
Minister for Housing and Minister for Local Government	The Hon. R. W. Wynne, MP
Cabinet Secretary	Mr A. G. Robinson, MP

Joint committees

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Council*): Mr Dalla-Riva, Mr Eideh, Mr Elasmarr and Ms Pulford.
(*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Carli, Mr Jasper, Mr McIntosh and Mr Thompson.

Heads of parliamentary departments

Assembly — Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Mr R. W. Purdey
Council — Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr W. R. Tunnecliffe
Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Dr S. O'Kane

MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

President: The Hon. R. F. SMITH

Deputy President: Mr BRUCE ATKINSON

Acting Presidents: Mr Finn, Ms Pennicuik, Mrs Peulich, Mr Somyurek and Mr Vogels

Leader of the Government:

Mr JOHN LENDERS

Deputy Leader of the Government:

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS

Leader of the Opposition:

Mr PHILIP DAVIS

Deputy Leader of the Opposition:

Mrs ANDREA COOTE

Leader of The Nationals:

Mr PETER HALL

Deputy Leader of The Nationals:

Mr DAMIAN DRUM

Member	Region	Party	Member	Region	Party
Atkinson, Mr Bruce Norman	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Lenders, Mr John	Southern Metropolitan	ALP
Barber, Mr Gregory John	Northern Metropolitan	Greens	Lovell, Ms Wendy Ann	Northern Victoria	LP
Broad, Ms Candy Celeste	Northern Victoria	ALP	Madden, Hon. Justin Mark	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Coote, Mrs Andrea	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Mikakos, Ms Jenny	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Dalla-Riva, Mr Richard Alex Gordon	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	O'Donohue, Mr Edward John	Eastern Victoria	LP
Darveniza, Ms Kaye Mary	Northern Victoria	ALP	Pakula, Mr Martin Philip	Western Metropolitan	ALP
Davis, Mr David McLean	Southern Metropolitan	LP	Pennicuik, Ms Susan Margaret	Southern Metropolitan	Greens
Davis, Mr Philip Rivers	Eastern Victoria	LP	Petrovich, Mrs Donna-Lee	Northern Victoria	LP
Drum, Mr Damian Kevin	Northern Victoria	Nats	Peulich, Mrs Inga	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Eideh, Khalil M.	Western Metropolitan	ALP	Pulford, Ms Jaala Lee	Western Victoria	ALP
Elasmar, Mr Nazih	Northern Metropolitan	ALP	Rich-Phillips, Mr Gordon Kenneth	South Eastern Metropolitan	LP
Finn, Mr Bernard Thomas C.	Western Metropolitan	LP	Scheffer, Mr Johan Emiel	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Guy, Mr Matthew Jason	Northern Metropolitan	LP	Smith, Hon. Robert Frederick	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hall, Mr Peter Ronald	Eastern Victoria	Nats	Somyurek, Mr Adem	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Hartland, Ms Colleen Mildred	Western Metropolitan	Greens	Tee, Mr Brian Lennox	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP
Jennings, Mr Gavin Wayne	South Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Theophanous, Hon. Theo Charles	Northern Metropolitan	ALP
Kavanagh, Mr Peter Damian	Western Victoria	DLP	Thornley, Mr Evan William	Southern Metropolitan	ALP
Koch, Mr David Frank	Western Victoria	LP	Tierney, Ms Gayle Anne	Western Victoria	ALP
Kronberg, Mrs Janice Susan	Eastern Metropolitan	LP	Viney, Mr Matthew Shaw	Eastern Victoria	ALP
Leane, Mr Shaun Leo	Eastern Metropolitan	ALP	Vogels, Mr John Adrian	Western Victoria	LP

CONTENTS

TUESDAY, 19 DECEMBER 2006

OPENING OF PARLIAMENT BY COMMISSION	1	ADJOURNMENT	
PROCLAMATION	1	<i>Punt Road: clearway</i>	39
SWEARING IN OF MEMBERS	1	<i>Schools: relocatable classrooms</i>	39, 42
ELECTION OF PRESIDENT	2	<i>Total fire bans: departmental advice</i>	40
ELECTION OF DEPUTY PRESIDENT	3	<i>Drought: bore water access</i>	40
GOVERNOR'S SPEECH		<i>Beechworth Secondary College: funding</i>	41
<i>Presentation</i>	3	<i>Schools: computer access</i>	41
<i>Address-in-reply</i>	26	<i>Bushfires: government assistance</i>	41
PRESENTATION OF PRESIDENT TO GOVERNOR	12	<i>Building industry: warranty insurance</i>	42
CONDOLENCES		<i>Rail: Noble Park station</i>	43
<i>Donald Neville Saltmarsh</i>	12	<i>Responses</i>	44
COMMISSION TO ADMINISTER OATH OR			
AFFIRMATION TO MEMBERS	12		
MINISTRY	13		
SHADOW MINISTRY	13		
THE NATIONALS: LEADERSHIP.....	13		
GREENS: OFFICE-HOLDERS	13		
STATUTE LAW REVISION BILL			
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	13		
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE			
<i>Schools: funding</i>	14		
<i>Bushfires: government assistance</i>	15		
<i>Disability services: supported accommodation</i>	15		
<i>Schools: government policy</i>	16		
<i>Major projects: management</i>	17		
<i>Planning: building permits</i>	18		
<i>Manufacturing: ministerial responsibility</i>	19		
<i>Docklands: development</i>	20		
<i>Metropolitan Ambulance Service: community</i>			
<i>hero awards</i>	21		
<i>Schools: reporting system</i>	22		
<i>Supplementary questions</i>			
<i>Schools: funding</i>	14		
<i>Disability services: supported accommodation</i>	16		
<i>Major projects: management</i>	18		
<i>Manufacturing: ministerial responsibility</i>	20		
<i>Schools: reporting system</i>	22		
LAW REFORM COMMITTEE			
<i>De novo appeals to the County Court</i>	22		
ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES			
COMMITTEE			
<i>Production and/or use of biofuels in Victoria</i>	23		
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE			
<i>Report 2005–06</i>	23		
PAPERS	23		
BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE			
<i>Sessional orders</i>	25		
SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS			
COMMITTEE			
<i>Membership</i>	26		

Tuesday, 19 December 2006

**OPENING OF PARLIAMENT BY
COMMISSION**

**Fifty-sixth Victorian Parliament opened by
commission.**

**Senior Commissioner appointed by the Governor of
the state of Victoria for this purpose, the
Honourable Marilyn Warren, Chief Justice of
Victoria.**

Proceedings commenced 11.02 a.m.

PROCLAMATION

Following proclamation read by Clerk:

I, David de Kretser, AC, Governor of the state of Victoria, acting under section 8 and 20 of the Constitution Act 1975 and all other powers vested in me, fix 19 December 2006 at 11.00 a.m. as the time for the commencement and holding of the first session of the 56th Parliament of Victoria for the dispatch of business, at the Parliament Houses, Melbourne. The honourable members of the Legislative Council and the members of the Legislative Assembly are required to attend at that time and place.

Given under my hand and the seal of the state of Victoria, at Melbourne, on 5 December 2006.
David de Kretser, Governor.

By His Excellency's command,
Steve Bracks, Premier

**Commissioners entered chamber and were
conducted to chairs by Usher of Black Rod.**

**Senior Commissioner directed that attendance of
members of Legislative Assembly be requested.**

Members of Legislative Assembly appeared at bar.

**The SENIOR COMMISSIONER (Justice
Warren)** — Members of the Legislative Council and members of the Legislative Assembly: the Governor has caused a commission to be issued under the seal of the state constituting us his commissioners to do in his name all that is necessary to be performed in this Parliament. This will more fully appear from the commission, which will now be read by the Clerk.

**Commission authorising commissioners to open
Parliament read by Clerk.**

The SENIOR COMMISSIONER — Members of the Legislative Council and members of the Legislative Assembly: the Governor will attend the Parliament later

this day to inform you of the reasons for calling this Parliament together, and as it is necessary before you proceed with business that a President of the Legislative Council and a Speaker of the Legislative Assembly be chosen, the Governor requests that you, in your respective chambers, proceed to the choice of a President and Speaker.

**Members of the Legislative Assembly retired from
chamber.**

**Commissioner escorted from chamber by Usher of
Black Rod.**

SWEARING IN OF MEMBERS

**Senior Commissioner announced receipt of
commission from the Governor to administer oath
or affirmation.**

Commission read by Clerk.

**Clerk announced receipt of return of writ issued by
the Governor for election of members to serve for
regions set out below and endorsed to show election
of following members:**

Region	Member
Eastern Metropolitan	Bruce Atkinson
Eastern Metropolitan	Richard Dalla-Riva
Eastern Metropolitan	Jan Kronberg
Eastern Metropolitan	Shaun Leane
Eastern Metropolitan	Brian Tee
Eastern Victoria	Philip Davis
Eastern Victoria	Peter Hall
Eastern Victoria	Edward O'Donohue
Eastern Victoria	Johan Scheffer
Eastern Victoria	Matt Viney
Northern Metropolitan	Greg Barber
Northern Metropolitan	Nazih Elasmr
Northern Metropolitan	Matthew Guy
Northern Metropolitan	Jenny Mikakos
Northern Metropolitan	Theo Theophanous
Northern Victoria	Candy Broad
Northern Victoria	Kaye Darveniza
Northern Victoria	Damian Drum
Northern Victoria	Wendy Lovell
Northern Victoria	Donna Petrovich
South Eastern Metropolitan	Gavin Jennings

South Eastern Metropolitan	Inga Peulich
South Eastern Metropolitan	Gordon Rich-Phillips
South Eastern Metropolitan	Bob Smith
South Eastern Metropolitan	Adem Somyurek
Southern Metropolitan	Andrea Coote
Southern Metropolitan	David Davis
Southern Metropolitan	John Lenders
Southern Metropolitan	Sue Pennicuik
Southern Metropolitan	Evan Thornley
Western Metropolitan	Khalil Eideh
Western Metropolitan	Bernie Finn
Western Metropolitan	Colleen Hartland
Western Metropolitan	Justin Madden
Western Metropolitan	Martin Pakula
Western Victoria	Peter Kavanagh
Western Victoria	David Koch
Western Victoria	Jaala Pulford
Western Victoria	Gayle Tierney
Western Victoria	John Vogels

Members took and subscribed either oath or affirmation of allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Senior Commissioner withdrew.

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I nominate Mr Smith.

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — I second the nomination.

Mr SMITH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I accept the nomination.

Clerk declared Robert Frederick Smith duly elected as President.

Hon. R. F. Smith conducted to chair by proposer and seconder.

The PRESIDENT (Hon. R. F. Smith) — Before taking the chair I desire to express my thanks to members and my acknowledgment of the honour which the Council has conferred upon me. I appreciate the confidence which members have placed in me.

The President took the chair and read the prayer.

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — President, it gives me great privilege to congratulate you on your election as President of the Legislative Council. We who have watched your career for many years know your background: you were in the Royal Australian Navy; you are a Vietnam veteran; you spent time in the union movement with the iron workers association and the Australian Workers Union; and more recently your seven years in this chamber as the member for Chelsea, when you supported as a temporary Chair both presidents Chamberlain and Gould.

I certainly look forward to working with you in what are very different times. President, as I came in this morning I read on the floor of the vestibule, as many of us have:

Where no counsel is, the people fall, but in the multitude of counsellors, there is safety.

In this reformed upper house with five parties, I am sure you, President, will have a multitude of counsellors more than ever before. Congratulations!

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — It is a delight, President, to call you Mr President. Some of us in the previous Parliament grappled with the notion that we had a President who we could not address as Mr President. I think the tradition will continue, however, that in this chamber we will refer to the President as simply the President, with that one exception I have just made.

It is a great delight for me to see you take the chair because I believe you will bring your best endeavours to maintain order in what can be a disorderly place from time to time. There is no doubt that the goodwill of opposition members here present is directed toward you in what will be an incredibly challenging environment over the next four years when we move into what can only be described as uncharted waters. As a former sailor I am sure you will know how to navigate those difficult shoals.

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — President, on behalf of The Nationals, I extend our congratulations to you on your appointment as President of this chamber. As it has been said by both the Leader of the Government and the Leader of the Opposition, challenges during the 56th Parliament will be many for those in the chair, but I pledge the support and cooperation of The Nationals in conducting your business as President of the Council.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Given that no-one else has risen, I take the opportunity to respond to those

kind words. In particular I would like to thank colleagues on my right, members of the government, for the support they have offered me in my taking on the Presiding Officer's position for the 56th Parliament.

I also thank my family, who are with me today. Luckily I have been married to my wife for 31 years, and she has supported me through thick and thin, not just through the course of our marriage but in my time as a union official and as a member of Parliament. As members of the house and their partners know, it is not easy at times to be a holder of a public or elected office. It can be particularly tough on the partners, and I have been very fortunate to have had such support.

I thank the two fine young women, present today in the gallery, who are my daughters — Jorja and Christina. They too have been of enormous support for me. I am immensely proud of both of them, and I know they are of me.

I also wish to make particular mention of colleagues in the Labor Party who have been loyal and who have supported me through thick and thin. I will do them a favour by not mentioning them by name, except for one — a very dear personal friend, Senator Stephen Conroy.

Last but by no means least, I want to express the great debt I feel to my old organisation, the Australian Workers Union, and the executive, which is present here today in the form of the national secretary, Mr William Shorten, and the state secretary, Mr Cesar Melhem. Whilst I do not see him in the gallery — I know he would be here in spirit! — I also thank the legendary president of the Victorian branch, Mr Michael Eagles. Their loyalty to me and their personal friendships have been nothing short of outstanding, and I will be forever grateful for that. The fact that I am here is by and large due to their great support for me. I can say to those gentlemen that I will never forget where I have come from, and I thank them for that.

It has already been stated that this Legislative Council will be a little different. I look around the house and I see changes from the 55th Parliament in the faces and in the party make-up in particular. I dare say it will be very different, and quite frankly I look forward to the challenge. I might say from the start that I am determined to ensure that every member in this house — regardless of party, policy or politics — will be given a fair hearing and a fair go. They will be treated with respect; this house will be a respectful place; and members will remember that we are here at the behest of the taxpayer. If we treat ourselves with

respect, we can get on with the business of the house; we will then be more productive and the taxpayers will get better value. I think members should now have some insight into how this house will operate.

ELECTION OF DEPUTY PRESIDENT

The PRESIDENT — Order! The Council is now required to elect a Deputy President. Are there any nominations?

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I nominate Mr Atkinson to be Deputy President.

The PRESIDENT — Are there any further proposals? There being no further proposals, I duly declare Mr Atkinson elected as Deputy President.

I remind members that the Governor will be pleased to receive me in the north library at 2.00 p.m. today. I ask members to meet me in the central library a few minutes before that time in order to accompany me. I will resume the chair at 2.30 p.m.

Sitting suspended 11.35 a.m. until 2.30 p.m.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Presentation

Usher of the Black Rod announced approach of the Governor.

The Governor entered chamber accompanied by suite.

Legislative Assembly members, with Speaker, attended in response to the Governor's summons.

The Governor addressed following speech to both houses of Parliament:

Honourable President and members of the Legislative Council:

Honourable Speaker and members of the Legislative Assembly:

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we stand, the Kulin nation.

I would also like to acknowledge the courageous efforts of the men and women of Victoria's emergency services — including an army of selfless volunteers — who are continuing the fight to protect our community from the threat of bushfires as I speak.

It is also my duty to inform the Parliament of the death of one former member of both the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly, Mr Donald Neville Saltmarsh, member for Waverley in the Legislative Council and member for Wantirna in the Legislative Assembly between 1976 and 1985. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution Mr Saltmarsh made to this Parliament and this state.

Honourable members, Victoria's first Parliament was officially opened on 25 November — 150 years to the day before the election of this, Victoria's 56th Parliament.

This sesquicentenary has particular significance because — just as 25 November 1856 marked the beginning of our democracy — 25 November 2006 marked the beginning of a new era in our democracy.

For the first time, Victorians have voted in fixed-term elections. And, for the first time, the Legislative Council has been elected by proportional representation.

This new era in our democracy also comes at a time when we are entering a new era in our federal system of government, following the High Court's decision on the validity of the commonwealth's WorkChoices act.

To quote Justice Kirby, 'If the commonwealth's view of the corporations power is correct, and is upheld without inhibitions derived from other heads of federal power ... this will have profound consequences for the residual legislative and governmental powers of the states in this country'.

These are, undoubtedly, challenging times for the Victorian Parliament.

Following the results of this election I have commissioned the Leader of the Australian Labor Party, Mr Steve Bracks, to form a government.

Accordingly, I have summoned you today for the first session of the 56th Parliament to outline the policy directions and legislative agenda for the third term of the government.

The government has spent the past seven years working to make Victoria a more prosperous and inclusive place to live and raise a family.

It has done so by creating and implementing a new agenda for Victorian families that is financially responsible and socially progressive:

governing for every region, every suburb and every town;

keeping the economy strong and creating new jobs;

investing the proceeds of economic prosperity in better schools, high-quality hospitals, community safety, a clean environment and a sustainable water supply;

and standing up for the workplace rights of Victorian families.

Those values have seen the government:

create more than 350 000 new jobs;

lead the nation on climate change and water reform;

deliver seven budget surpluses;

take Victoria from the state with the second highest number of business taxes to the second lowest;

triple investments in infrastructure;

rebuild existing services and create innovative new services;

return democracy to the community;

and create more national parks than any other Victorian government.

The government's policy directions and legislative agenda for its third term build closely on these achievements.

The government believes that Victoria faces many challenges. Maintaining our future prosperity will involve much hard work and a commitment from the whole community to address these challenges.

In the short term Victoria faces three major challenges.

This year's bushfire season is already one of the worst we have seen. The fight to protect our alpine towns is continuing, and there are many weeks before this year's fire season will end, and the countryside across the state remains tinder dry.

The drought is having a huge impact on farmers and is now bringing town supplies to critical levels and impacting on the economy. Urgent action is needed to deliver short and long-term solutions on water.

The economy is moving into tougher conditions and the impact of the drought will flow through to reduced demand and slower growth. Spending will

need to be carefully managed through value-for-money procurement.

In the longer term the government will be giving priority to other big challenges that need to be tackled in this term of government including:

arresting the disturbing growth in child obesity and the trend on type 2 diabetes amongst adults;

achieving national and international agreement on climate change — with Victoria leading the way in adoption of renewable energy and conservation measures;

increasing school completion rates and providing the skills training to get more young people into good jobs;

and continuing to address disadvantage in our community — to help more Victorians reach their full potential.

To address these challenges, the government will focus on the issues that matter to Victorian families — namely, sound economic management and job creation, better schools, better hospitals, a secure water supply, a clean environment, climate change, a safe community, better roads and public transport, and a fair go in the workplace.

Economic management and job creation

In financial and economic management, the government will continue its strong record in the management of the state's economy.

During this term the government will maintain Victoria's AAA credit rating, deliver an annual operating surplus of at least \$100 million and continue to invest in world-class infrastructure across the state — both through direct investment and public-private partnerships.

The government will pursue the national reform agenda — a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Australia's governments to invest in the future prosperity of our nation and our people — focusing initially on national reforms for early childhood development, health, education and skills.

The government will also continue to campaign for reform of commonwealth-state finances to remove the imbalance that subsidises resource-rich states at the expense of Victoria.

The government's economic goals include:

creating an additional 150 000 jobs over the next four years;

increasing productivity through continued investment in innovation;

achieving an export target of \$35 billion per annum by 2015;

and cutting the administrative burden of regulation by 15 per cent over the next three years and 25 per cent over the next five years.

Strong financial controls within government will continue and the government will adopt a new policy on procurement and expand its electronic procurement system — ensuring greater value for money for taxpayers and giving Victorian business better access to government work.

A whole-of-government approach to shared services will be adopted, with more processes and technology standardised, and more resources and expertise pooled.

Stronger democracy

During its third term, the government will present initiatives designed to further strengthen democracy in Victoria:

a new Legislative Council Legislation Committee will enable more detailed consideration of new bills by the Legislative Council;

an all-party parliamentary committee will consider options to further strengthen government and parliamentary accountability in Victoria;

Parliament will sit for at least 10 months of the year, and the winter recess will be abolished;

e-democracy reforms will be implemented — making it easy for Victorians to obtain information and comment on matters of public interest;

a parliamentary sitting will be held in Gippsland in 2008;

and, also in 2008, there will a celebration of the centenary of women's suffrage in Victoria.

The reforms recommended by the Victorian ombudsman for the Freedom of Information Act will be implemented.

And, by 2010, the process of reviewing and modernising all of Victoria's legislation, a task begun in 2000, will have been completed.

Education and skills

Education and skills are areas the government has identified as its top priority.

The government believes every Victorian is entitled to the benefits of a quality school education, as well as the option to either go on to university or technical education.

The Premier has announced the government's intention to renew tech wings in every public secondary college — and a 10-year plan to rebuild or modernise every public primary and secondary school in the state.

More than 400 schools have already been rebuilt and modernised since 1999.

The government intends to boost capital works funding by 75 per cent and rebuild and modernise another 500 schools by 2011.

By 2016, the government plans to have rebuilt or modernised every school — making this project, which will cost \$2.3 billion between now and 2011, the biggest education building program in Victoria since the postwar boom. A further \$30 million in capital grants will be made to assist needy non-government schools.

During this Parliament, the government will also:

- implement a major \$76 million science and maths strategy to encourage more students to study science and maths;

- create two new select-entry academic schools;

- build the Sir John Monash Science School;

- establish a new sports school as part of the redevelopment of Maribyrnong Secondary College;

- rebuild the Victorian College of the Arts secondary school;

- establish four new technical education centres in Ballarat, Wangaratta, Berwick and Heidelberg;

- extend funding for the highly successful primary welfare officer initiative;

- employ an additional 300 secondary teacher assistants;

- and introduce the ultranet — a high-tech, virtual education network that will connect our public schools to students and parents.

A comprehensive work force participation strategy will also be implemented. This strategy will see the government:

- investing in TAFE institutes;

- continuing to implement the skills statement, *Maintaining the Advantage*;

- creating an additional 4500 pre-apprenticeship places;

- promoting Victoria's position as a destination of choice for skilled and business migrants;

- and the creation of incentives to encourage more than 700 retired experts to return to the work force in industries experiencing skills shortages.

As well as focusing on education and skills, a range of initiatives will be implemented to give children the best possible start in life.

Access to kindergarten will be improved, with the kindergarten subsidy raised for low-income families and kindergarten programs made available in long-day care centres.

Kindergarten teachers skills will be upgraded, and the dedicated parent management committees will be better supported.

Children's services will be placed in growing communities, when and where families need them, and grants will be provided towards 40 new children's centres.

The neonatal hearing screening program will be extended to all maternity hospitals.

And a greater investment will be made in early intervention services for children with disabilities.

Environment and water

Just as education and skills are vital for Victoria's future, so too is the sustainability of our way of life.

During this Parliament the government will take new measures to ensure Victoria's environmental sustainability into the future, and continue to show national leadership in relation to water sustainability.

The government believes water is Victoria's most precious resource. That is why Victoria has led the nation on water management.

And that is why, in this term, the government will implement its Our Water Our Future strategy and secure water supplies for our state's homes, farms, businesses and the environment.

Through this strategy the government will:

secure enough water for Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat, Western Port and the Latrobe Valley to fully meet their future needs, taking account of population growth and the impacts of climate change;

undertake water supply projects and environmental flow requirements for northern Victoria, Gippsland, Wimmera-Glenelg and the south-west;

cut industry's water use by a further 10 per cent over the next 10 years;

and provide a rebate of up to \$1000 for water tanks connected to toilets and laundries to help households reduce water use.

The eastern treatment plant will be upgraded to treat wastewater to class A standard. A business case will also be completed for the eastern water recycling proposal, which would free up the equivalent of one-quarter of Melbourne's drinking water now used by power stations and industry.

The government will facilitate upgrades to the Shepparton irrigation district by beginning the next major stage of irrigation channel upgrades.

It will also make a significant investment in design of major infrastructure upgrades to other irrigation districts across northern Victoria.

The Tarago Reservoir will be reconnected to Melbourne's water supply.

And, critically, Victoria's separate water systems will be linked up through pipelines — creating a water grid that will reduce water wastage and enable water to be moved where it is needed.

Climate change

The government will also continue to address Victoria's greatest environmental challenge: climate change.

The government — which has already created an Office of Climate Change — believes climate change

threatens our environment, our economy and our way of life.

That is why strong action must be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the impact of climate change.

Parliament will consider a landmark Climate Change Bill and legislation to establish a long-term target to cut greenhouse emissions by 60 per cent by 2050 compared to 2000 levels.

Short-term objectives will also be pursued — including a target to achieve 20 per cent renewable and low-emissions energy generation by 2020 and reduce household emissions by 10 per cent by 2010.

Energy retailers will be required to buy a minimum of 10 per cent renewable energy by 2016 and to pay a fair price for 'feed-in power'.

The government will also lead the development of a national state-based emissions trading scheme, to be operational within five years.

Families will be assisted to install insulation and replace old fridges, heaters, coolers and other inefficient appliances.

And solar panelling will be installed on 500 schools and community buildings over the next four years.

The government's own energy use — which has already been reduced by 15 per cent — will be cut by another 5 per cent by 2010, while its use of green power will be increased to 25 per cent.

The government will also make a major investment in one of the world's largest solar power stations, to be built in north-west Victoria.

The government does not support the adoption of nuclear power as a viable alternative and will legislate to require a plebiscite of all Victorians if the commonwealth seeks to override the Nuclear Free Victoria Act 1983.

Energy

In energy, the government intends to invest in a new clean coal power plant to demonstrate coal drying and gasification.

The government will also:

invest in the retrofitting of one of Hazelwood power station's generation units — a project that will

reduce Hazelwood's greenhouse emissions by up to 30 per cent;

and develop the energy and resource processing industries in south-west Victoria and the Latrobe Valley.

The government will also continue to lead the way in the national energy reform process.

In addition, gas and electricity consumers will be protected with the strongest consumer protection framework in Australia.

Although Victoria's energy sector is fully privatised, the government believes it has a responsibility to do all it can to ensure energy supplies are not just sustainable, but also secure, efficient and affordable for families and businesses.

Environment

The government will also continue to build on the initiatives from the environmental sustainability statement it released in its second term.

Free single-use plastic bags will be phased out by the end of 2008.

The state's national parks will be extended, including the creation of the Great Victorian Alpine National Park. More park rangers will also be engaged.

A sustainable timber industry will be supported, coastal regions protected and biodiversity enhanced through an extensive initiative to protect Victoria from noxious weeds and pests.

The government will also continue to build on the initiatives from the environmental sustainability statement it released in its second term:

reducing the economic and environmental effects of salinity;

improving the health of Victoria's rivers;

improving air quality;

further protecting the Otway Ranges and green wedges;

increasing the usage of renewable electricity sources;

and increasing public transport usage.

Transport

Another major undertaking during this Parliament will be the implementation of the government's transport and livability action plan.

This \$10.5 billion initiative is the largest single investment in the transport system ever undertaken by a Victorian government.

During the life of this Parliament, the government will implement the first tranche of work under this initiative, including the upgrade of the North Melbourne station, the Clifton Hill rail junction and the first stage of the Dandenong triplication project.

There will be a major investment in roads to make the state's road network safer, more efficient and less congested — with 10 new road improvement packages delivered in outer Melbourne and the commencement of stage 4 of the Geelong bypass.

In addition, major investments will be made to ensure Victoria's public transport is more accessible. The Fare Go program will eliminate the metropolitan zone 3 and cut the cost of all regional and country V/Line train and bus tickets by an average of 20 per cent in March next year.

Health

In health, the government believes in a health system based on need, rather than the ability to pay, where every Victorian has access to first-class health services.

The government has already signalled its intention to focus on mental health services by appointing Victoria's first mental health minister.

The government is also aware major new investments and initiatives are needed to keep pace with the growing demands Victoria's ageing and growing population is placing on Victoria's health services.

During this term, Parliament will be presented with a major reform of the state's core public health arrangements, with the introduction of a Public Health and Wellbeing Bill.

The government will also:

invest in two new elective surgery centres;

expand outer suburban hospitals and modernise rural hospitals and nursing homes;

and continue to increase the number of patients being treated in public hospitals.

The government will also recruit 1000 extra nurses, doctors and health staff a year to respond to growth in demand.

A \$59.2 million boost in funding will extend the elective surgery blitz at Victoria's suburban and regional hospitals for the next four years.

Waiting times in emergency departments will be reduced, with major investment in the capacity of these departments to treat additional patients.

Mental health treatment teams will also be established in major hospital emergency departments.

Hospital outpatient clinics will be reformed, with an extra 200 000 Victorians to have opportunities for appointments with a specialist at the state's public hospitals.

The government will continue to give careful attention to health care needs in rural and regional Victoria.

Stage 1 of the Warrnambool hospital redevelopment will commence, and public hospitals in Alexandra, Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong upgraded — along with other hospitals, aged care facilities and community health centres in non-metropolitan Victoria.

The government will also invest \$24.7 million to retain and recruit more doctors to rural areas — including increased allowances for rural doctors who work on call in emergency departments and free training for 11 rural GPs to offer more services such as obstetrics, mental health, emergency medicine, surgery and anaesthetics.

Further investment will be made in the Metropolitan Ambulance Service to maintain fast response times, which are already among the best in the country.

Rural ambulance services will be expanded, with 12 rural ambulance stations being built or upgraded.

A new health and rehabilitation centre for veterans will be constructed at the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, as well as a major new mental health facility which will incorporate a specific veterans unit.

Preventative health will be a high priority for the government, with the Go for Your Life strategy being a major undertaking for the government in its third term.

People at risk of type 2 diabetes will be encouraged to change their lifestyle to help prevent illness. Newly diagnosed diabetics will also be assisted to manage their condition.

The government's Life! program will be based around accredited lifestyle and weight-loss support programs, to be delivered by community health centres and other suitable providers. The program will include a telephone support line and an interactive web site to assist people to assess their risk factors.

Free Fruit Friday will be introduced for Victorian school children, from prep to grade 2, to encourage consumption of fruit and vegetables. New canteen guidelines will also be introduced and schools assisted to phase in healthy foods and phase out unhealthy products.

The government will also continue to mandate weekly minimums of sport and physical education in schools.

The Premier's Family Fitness Challenge will be established to encourage Victorian families to exercise 30 minutes a day.

Substantial funding will be made available to local councils to build more community sport facilities. Funding will also be made available for sporting organisations to increase sports participation across the state.

Local communities

Building stronger communities — communities where individuals and families are supported by networks that provide support, create opportunities to participate, volunteer and get help when needed — has been a long-term goal of the government.

The government believes that strong families and strong communities are the bedrock of our state.

That is why the government has supported 473 grassroots projects through its community support grants, as well as 600 grants for volunteer organisations.

That is why the government has tripled funding for neighbourhood houses and is implementing neighbourhood renewal projects in 19 communities across the state.

That is why the government is investing \$146 million to support communities affected by the drought.

And that is why, during this term, the government will continue to invest in community assets, support community organisations, and fund community renewal through the Department for Victorian Communities.

In local government, during this term the government will implement the landmark Victorian state-local

government agreement to progress social, economic and environmental results for Victorian communities.

The government will also establish a new tribunal to arbitrate serious disputes in local government.

The relationship between state and local planning policies will be strengthened and clarified, and planning approvals will be streamlined through the exemption of planning permits for cubby houses, pergolas and tree pruning.

Housing affordability

Having access to affordable housing is crucial to Victorian families.

With that in mind, the government will, during this term, implement a package of reforms that will provide savings for 75 per cent of home buyers:

- stamp duty will be cut by 14 per cent on houses priced between \$115 000 and \$500 000;

- the first home bonus for first home buyers of existing properties will be extended until June 2009, and the bonus for first home buyers of new properties increased to \$5000;

- land will be made more affordable by providing a 25 years supply of land;

- 230 new rental homes for low-income families and 120 medium to long-term rental accommodation apartments will be provided;

- and the Victorian housing strategy, which responds to challenges ranging from social housing to private rental to affordable home ownership, will be implemented.

Addressing disadvantage

As well as ensuring Victorians can afford a place to live, the government is also committed to making Victoria a fairer place to live.

That is why, in its third term, the government will continue its record of practical and targeted measures to assist disadvantaged members of our community.

These measures will include:

- providing greater support and recognition for Victoria's 100 000 primary carers;

- creating new opportunities for people with a disability;

- improving services for homeless Victorians;

- addressing poverty and the cost of services;

- tackling drug and alcohol issues;

- increasing access to justice for victims of family violence;

- and revitalising indigenous communities.

Regional and rural Victoria

The government has stated it will continue to govern for all Victorians — in every region, every city and every suburb — and ensure rural and regional areas receive their fair share of growth and prosperity.

To this end, the government will seek to return Victoria's regional rail freight network — which was privatised in 1999 — to public ownership and delivering better freight rail services to farming communities.

There will also be a freight upgrade of the Mildura line and the Wodonga bypass.

In response to demand for the new regional fast rail services, the government will purchase 14 new V/Locity train carriages and two additional V/Locity trains to expand V/Line's capacity.

This Parliament will also see legislation to establish a Regional Aviation Fund to provide infrastructure upgrades in regional airports across Victoria.

The government will replace relocatable buildings at more than 40 small to medium rural schools with permanent, modern facilities.

There will also be substantial investment in new health facilities and better health treatment for provincial Victoria. A new dental school for regional Victoria will be established in Bendigo.

Legislation will be introduced into Parliament to establish a Clean Coal Authority in the Latrobe Valley to develop new clean coal industries for Victoria.

Measures will also be introduced to further protect Victorian farmers from pest animals and noxious weeds.

The government will implement the initiatives of the Premier's drought task force, to help farmers and farming communities through the drought.

And the government will continue to vigorously market Victoria's regional centres to the national and international tourist market and the regional population growth target of 1.25 per cent will be retained.

Police, emergency services and counter-terrorism

As the response to the ongoing bushfires demonstrate, Victorian families are served and protected by an army of dedicated police and emergency services personnel.

These men and women serve our community tirelessly, at great personal risk, and deserve our thanks and continued support.

During this term, the government will raise sworn police numbers to 11 250 by November 2010 — recruiting 350 general uniform members, with strengthened capacity in forensic investigation and specialised crime fighting.

Eight new police stations will also be built, the police vehicle fleet increased by 100, and substantial resources committed to ensure our police are equipped with the weapons necessary to carry out their important work.

Sixteen local Country Fire Authority stations and 11 VicSES units and training centres will also be replaced and upgraded.

And measures announced during 2006 in the fight against terrorism will be implemented.

Multicultural communities

Multiculturalism remains one of Victoria's greatest strengths and best protections against community disharmony.

The government will continue to vigorously promote and strengthen Victoria's multicultural identity and community harmony.

The multicultural precincts of Lonsdale Street, Lygon Street and Little Bourke Street will be revamped to showcase our Greek, Italian and Chinese communities.

The Victorian Multicultural Commission's community grants program will be expanded — with a focus on supporting new arrivals to Victoria and older Victorians and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The Victorian Office of Multicultural Affairs will be merged with the Victorian Multicultural Commission to improve the delivery of strategies, policies and services.

There will be further support for multicultural communities through the multicultural advisory unit within Victoria Police.

Government departments will also be required to develop cultural diversity plans to improve service delivery to Victoria's diverse cultural communities.

Justice

Access to justice for all Victorians has been a core principle of the government since 1999.

That commitment to 'justice for all' will continue during this Parliament with further investment made in community legal centres, including a network of dedicated family violence community lawyers.

Legislation will be introduced into the Parliament to increase pain and suffering compensation by 30 per cent, and improve access to compensation from offenders.

New, stand-alone family violence legislation will also be introduced, as part of the government's response to the Victorian Law Reform Commission's recommendations on family violence.

The government will complete reforms to the handling of sexual assault cases by the justice system, and implement the safe families training program for front-line professionals to deal with family violence.

Further action will also be taken to phase out suspended sentences, to further align sentencing outcomes with community expectations.

The government will also implement the next stage of the Aboriginal justice agreement during the life of this Parliament.

Work and family life

Finally, in industrial relations, the government has stated its strong intention to keep standing up for the rights of working Victorians.

Legislation will be introduced during this term to establish a Victorian workplace pay and conditions standard.

This standard will apply when vulnerable working Victorians are left with no award safety net as a result of recent changes to commonwealth law, to ensure that they receive fair and reasonable treatment.

Legislation will also be introduced to protect employees if they question their wages and conditions or raise safety issues, or suffer a workplace injury.

Legislation will also prevent employers making unauthorised deductions from employees' pay.

The government's ethical purchasing policy will continue to ensure that companies who supply goods and services to government comply with their legal obligations and do not undercut award entitlements.

The government will amend equal opportunity legislation to introduce 'family responsibility' as a ground of unlawful discrimination, and enable the Equal Opportunity Commission to proactively investigate discrimination against individuals or groups of workers.

A Working Families Council will be established to champion and promote employment practices that help balance work and family time.

The government will also strengthen the Returning to Earning program — helping parents to access training and jobs in areas with skills shortages.

Support will be given to financial literacy training to help women become financially secure, increase their earning, and plan for a more comfortable retirement.

The government will also extend superannuation contributions for women on maternity leave from the Victorian public service.

Conclusion

Honourable members, I have outlined for you the government's program for this Parliament.

It is an ambitious program designed to match the challenges we face as a state.

A program informed by the government's ambitions to govern for every Victorian, focus on the needs of Victorian families, and make our state a better place to live, work and raise a family.

A program that builds on the progress of the past seven years.

I now formally open this Parliament, and pray that God may guide your deliberations.

Copies of speech handed to President and Speaker.

The Governor and suite withdrew.

Members of the Legislative Assembly retired from chamber.

Sitting suspended 3.22 p.m. until 5.05 p.m.

The PRESIDENT resumed the chair.

PRESENTATION OF PRESIDENT TO GOVERNOR

The PRESIDENT — Order! I have to report that, accompanied by members of the Council, I presented myself to the Governor this day as the choice of the Council for its President, and he was pleased to address me in the following terms:

President,

I have pleasure in congratulating you on your election to the high and distinguished office of President of the Legislative Council.

The able manner in which you have discharged the duties you have undertaken during your parliamentary career is recognised by the members of the Legislative Council who in their wisdom have selected you as their President.

I have confidence that you will fulfil the duties of this important office and hold fast to its traditions and customs.

David de Kretser,
Governor of Victoria.

CONDOLENCES

Donald Neville Saltmarsh

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I move:

That this house expresses its sincere sorrow at the death, on 3 November 2006, of Donald Neville Saltmarsh, and places on record its acknowledgment of the valuable services rendered by him to the Parliament and the people of Victoria as a member of the Legislative Council for Waverley Province from 1976 to 1982 and as a member of the Legislative Assembly for the electoral district of Wantirna from 1982 to 1985.

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

COMMISSION TO ADMINISTER OATH OR AFFIRMATION TO MEMBERS

The PRESIDENT announced receipt from Governor of commission authorising him to administer oath or affirmation of allegiance to

members who have not taken and subscribed same since election.

MINISTRY

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) (*By leave*) — I wish to advise the house formally of the ministerial arrangements that have been circulated. I particularly wish to advise the house of the ministerial responsibilities in this chamber. I have the roles as Leader of the Government and Minister for Education. I also represent the Premier, the Treasurer, the Minister for the Arts and the Minister for Finance and Minister for Information and Communication Technology.

The Deputy Leader of the Government, Mr Jennings, is Minister for Community Services and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. He represents in this chamber the Minister for Victorian Communities, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Veterans' Affairs, the Minister for Women's Affairs, the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs, the Minister for Housing and Minister for Local Government, the Minister for Health, the Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Children, and the Minister for Aged Care. Mr Jennings will be very busy.

My colleague Mr Madden is the Minister for Planning. He represents in this chamber the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change, the Attorney-General and Minister for Racing, the Minister for Gaming and Minister for Consumer Affairs, and the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and Minister for Corrections.

Mr Theophanous is the Minister for Industry and State Development, the Minister for Major Projects and the Minister for Small Business. He represents in this chamber the Minister for Regional and Rural Development and Minister for Innovation, the Minister for Tourism, the Minister for Industrial Relations, the Minister for Public Transport, the Minister for Roads and Ports, the Minister for Agriculture, the Minister for Energy and Resources, and the Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment. Mr Viney is the Government Whip.

SHADOW MINISTRY

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) (*By leave*) — I advise the house that I have been appointed Leader of the Opposition and my dear friend, Mrs Coote, has been appointed Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The portfolio responsibilities are as follows: I have

responsibility for education, Mrs Coote has community services, Aboriginal affairs and children, my colleague Mr David Davis has industry and state development, major projects and small business, Mr Guy has planning, Mr Rich-Phillips has finance, TAC and WorkCover, Ms Lovell has tourism, women's affairs, consumer affairs, housing and country Victoria, and Mr Vogels has responsibility for agriculture. I will circulate to the house later the responsibilities in respect of portfolios held in the other place. The Opposition Whip is Mr Koch.

THE NATIONALS: LEADERSHIP

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) (*By leave*) — I have the pleasure of advising the chamber that I have been returned and that I have also been re-elected as Leader of The Nationals in this chamber. My colleague Mr Drum has been re-elected —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Mr HALL — We had no problem with the numbers in our party. Mr Drum has been re-elected as deputy leader and party whip. I advise the house that our duties are numerous, perhaps too many to mention at this point in time, but I am happy to provide members with further information, if required.

GREENS: OFFICE-HOLDERS

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) (*By leave*) — I advise the house that I am the whip for the Greens. We have not divided up our portfolio responsibilities yet, but we will advise the house when we have.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I appreciate that.

STATUTE LAW REVISION BILL

Introduction and first reading

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — In order to preserve the privileges of this house and in accordance with the standing orders, I move:

That I have leave to bring in a bill to revise the statute law of Victoria.

Motion agreed to.

Read first time

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Schools: funding

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Education. I refer the minister to Labor’s election commitment to undertake rebuilding or modernisation projects in 500 schools at a cost of \$1.9 billion. Given that the pre-election budget update released on 6 November 2006 detailed a total of \$2.9 billion in unallocated provision for future capital investment, compared to Labor’s promised election capital commitments of \$3.3 billion, I ask: what commitments does the minister expect to break to pay for the \$400 million blow-out in election promises?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I am delighted to receive the first question in this 56th Parliament on what is the government’s no. 1 priority — that is, education — which we heard the Governor so eloquently outline in his speech to the house today. I am delighted that Mr Davis has asked the question, and I hope during the four-year life of this Parliament we can have multiple questions on education, because education is the one gift that stays with us for life. It is the one thing that a society can do that stays with us for life. I am absolutely thrilled and privileged that the Premier invited me to take on this very important portfolio.

It is sad in a way that the Leader of the Opposition, who feels the need to oppose things, asks about this great good news story for students, families and communities in Victoria — this great news story that the government is actually prepared to commit \$1.9 billion worth of capital plus what has already been committed in this year to this revitalising, rebuilding and modernisation of schools — but all we hear is his nay saying view of why it cannot happen. I had hoped the opposition would have embraced this proposition.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LENDERS — Mr Davis says, ‘Where’s the money?’. I advise Mr Davis — and it is a shame that my friend Mr Eren has gone to the Legislative Assembly — that the government has one slogan: AAA, here to stay! This government has managed its budget well. It has had a surplus in seven of its seven yearly budgets; in the forward estimates it has a surplus; and this government is committed to sound financial management and to delivering services to Victorians.

As I said, education is the one gift that stays with a student for life. Given it is my first opportunity to talk

of this great portfolio, I had hoped Mr Davis and the opposition would judge what an education system does. Many members of this chamber are parents, all of us have been students, and all of us have been involved in our communities.

I hope Mr Davis and this house will reflect on five things we can expect from students. One is that you would certainly hope students would be literate. You would hope they would be numerate. You would also hope they would be curious, because curiosity in a student is exactly the sort of thing that fosters a willingness, a need to know and which brings innovative society in place; it questions those things. So curiosity would be the third thing.

The fourth thing that I would hope for is that students would be articulate — that they could use their numeracy, curiosity and literacy and be articulate. The fifth thing is that they have a social conscience, a caring for the community, those civic and important things such as a willingness to make a better society. Many of those things fit in, and that is what I hope for.

I will welcome Mr Davis’s supplementary question, but I can assure him that by our reinvesting in schools and fixing the damage that was done, and through investing in our future, we will have better educational opportunities for young Victorians, and that will be the lasting legacy of the 56th Parliament to the future of this state.

Supplementary question

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I thank the minister for his expansive answer. I would like to pick up on his point about being numerate. I wonder if he would like to iterate in what manner he intends to find the \$400 million to fill the black hole in the government’s capital commitments?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I would like to share with the house four items relating to numeracy. Firstly, the Bracks government has put 7300 new teachers into place; the Kennett government slashed 9000. Secondly, the Bracks government has brought primary class sizes down to 22.4; the Kennett government left them at 25.4. Thirdly, the Bracks government has prep to grade 2 class sizes at 20.8; it inherited class sizes at 24.3. Finally, under this government the year 12 completion rate is 85 per cent; it inherited a completion rate of 82 per cent. All of these achievements are heading in the right direction. This government will invest in students because education is the one gift you can give for a lifetime.

Bushfires: government assistance

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — For the very first time in seven years in this place it gives me great pleasure to direct a question to the government, in particular to the Minister for Community Services. I take this opportunity to congratulate him on his new portfolio and you, President, as well. The minister and all other members of this chamber will be aware of the very great hardship being faced at this time by many families across Victoria as a result of bushfires. I ask the minister to inform the house about the range of personal hardship grants that have been made available by the Bracks government to assist Victorians who have been forced out of their homes by bushfires in Gippsland, the south-west and especially the north-east, which is in my own electorate.

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — I thank Ms Broad for her question and for her ongoing contribution to the wellbeing of the Victorian community, particularly her ongoing presence through the role she plays within the Bracks government. I appreciate her commitment to the wellbeing of Victorians as indicated by her question and her regard for the wellbeing of members of her community who are at risk at this moment — those members of the community who may be vulnerable or anxious about their ongoing security and wellbeing.

All members of this chamber will have taken note that in his speech the Governor gave due attention to the current emergency circumstances that people around Victoria are experiencing and the bravery and courage that have been shown by firefighters and those communities who have stood up against adversity, supported one another, dug deep in a time of strife and pulled together in the name of keeping communities together, keeping families strong and keeping families and individuals supported in a time of crisis. Certainly the Bracks government recognises the importance of that work and congratulates our firefighters and other emergency services personnel — those members of the community who are rising up right across this state each and every day during the bushfire season to support one another.

The Bracks government recognises that we have an obligation to provide that degree of support, whether it be to firefighters, to emergency services personnel or to the individuals who may be affected by those emergency circumstances and adversity. I am very pleased to say that recently the commonwealth government recognised that it has a role to play in supporting those communities and individuals. Last week the Premier and the Prime Minister announced a

new range of community support programs and allocated \$700 000 to provide support to individuals and communities across this state. That builds on a solid foundation within the Department of Human Services for which I have had the good fortune as Minister for Community Services to be responsible, and that general provision is available to Victorian citizens who have been subjected to emergency situations, which in this case are bushfires. Those services are available during times of flood, drought, bushfires and other emergency circumstances.

I refer to the emergency grants programs, which provide immediate relief to individuals and families to a maximum of \$900. Allocations under the grants programs are not means tested and provide food, clothing and shelter. They build on allocations for temporary living expenses, which are available for up to 10 weeks and which are provided on a means-tested basis to families across the Victorian community who do not have sufficient insurance cover. Some \$730 is provided each week for 10 weeks to provide support to enable people to find temporary living arrangements. They build on the provision of up to \$7300, which is also available and is subject to means and income testing and a decision whether insurance will cover relocation and re-establishment costs.

These programs are available through municipal emergency coordination centres right across Victoria. I encourage people in the Victorian community who may feel stress and strain to track down this information through the Department of Human Services web site or through the bushfire hotline on 1800 240 667. Many people have sought that assistance — 17 000 people have contacted that hotline during the bushfire period. We will stand by to support Victorians at a time of crisis.

Disability services: supported accommodation

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — I also direct my question without notice to the Minister for Community Services, Mr Jennings. People with disabilities are waiting up to 15 years for residential services. They are cared for by parents in their 70s and 80s, who are desperately worried about what will happen when they are no longer around. In Labor's election policy it committed to an additional 75 supported accommodation places. I spoke to one 94-year-old woman who said she could not die because there is no-one to look after her 52-year-old, severely disabled son, Ross. With 3900 people waiting, how will the minister allocate those 75 additional places?

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — I thank the shadow Minister for Community Services for this question. I know it is not a one-off event for the member to express concern about the wellbeing of those in our community who experience disability and their carers. We have spent some time, both within the chamber and within the community, discussing these very important issues. This is not just a moment of fancy or the random coming across of a 94-year-old who is experiencing some anxiety. I know it is a heartfelt concern. I share that heartfelt concern. One of my responsibilities in this portfolio is to ensure that within the budget of more than \$1 billion the state of Victoria provides to the area of disability services we rise up and meet the expectations, now and into the future, of people in our community who are enduring life with disability. In particular we have to provide comfort and support to those who at the moment feel they may be carrying the caring role disproportionately given the amount of effort that comes through the provision of state-based services.

I suggest this is something the Victorian community has not paid sufficient attention to over successive decades. I can absolutely assure this house that the Bracks government's commitment to increasing funding throughout its seven years in office and the challenges that remain within the funding of disability services mean I will leave no stone unturned in trying to address this very protracted issue of the anxiety experienced by many ageing parents and their confidence that those services will be available when they are no longer able to provide for their loved ones. It is a major challenge. On any given day we house in excess of 4600 people through the services we provide. We provide independent living support to the best part of 8000 people. We provide a range of day programs, other support services and respite services. During the course of a year over 14 000 people receive respite services — 19 000 individual cases of respite are provided. This is the cumulative effort we provide. Over 400 people live in congregate care at the moment.

I am outlining to the house the range of these services because it is important that we provide a range of services to address the care needs of individuals, whether they be living at home in the care of their carer, whether they live in community residential units — all too often community residential units have been seen as a one-size-fits-all mechanism of providing residential care — or whether they live in congregate care. We need to explore options to provide the range of services they need.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — I know Mr Drum is a bit of an astute observer of these issues, too. I know from his intervention but also from his experience that he is concerned about this matter.

Mrs Coote — It was my question.

Mr JENNINGS — I am happy for us to be an inclusive chamber and to have inclusive community discussion about these issues. At the heart of my answer it means that we have to provide the appropriate range of services, whether they be home based, through community residential units or through congregate care, to account for the demand pressures that exist within the disability area now and into the future and to provide comfort and support to those carers in the later years of their lives.

Supplementary question

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — Specifically, in the next four years what will the minister do with people like Ross when his mother dies?

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — Specifically I will run through exactly the range of issues that I have described. I will come back to this Parliament on any number of occasions in the course of the next four years and outline a strategy and approach to provide for sustainability within this sector, to account for the range of needs across the community and the growth demands in this sector, and to account as much as I can for the individual concerns raised by carers and those who are committed to providing for the care of their loved ones in the community — community members who have to live through their lives with disabilities — and provide for confidence and certainty that their needs will be catered for in the years to come.

Schools: government policy

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — President, I will take this first opportunity to congratulate you on your election this morning to President of this chamber.

My question is to the Minister for Education, whom I also congratulate on his portfolio. The Bracks government's no. 1 priority for the 56th Parliament is education. Can the minister advise the house of the plans to improve education and his vision for ensuring Victorian children get the best possible start in life?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I thank Mr Scheffer for his question and what I know is his ongoing interest in education. It is always difficult to

ask a person what their vision is. I have a vision. I have had 18 days in the portfolio so the vision has obviously been partly formed by the 18 days but probably more formed, as I said in response to Mr Davis's question, in that all of us have been students, many of us have been parents, and so we have a vision.

I also have had the privilege of being a trained teacher, although my experience in teaching was part time for six months back in the mid-1980s, so I will not go far down that path. But in the chamber are others, like Mr Elasmor or Mr Kavanagh, who have spent more parts of their lives teaching and are probably better informed on those areas than I am.

As to where the Bracks government stands, our plans for improving education are that we have to make an extraordinary commitment in resources to actually facilitate the educational outcomes that we expect for our young people. It is an investment in resources as we have not seen in this state since probably the heady postwar days of extraordinary growth. Those resources were more focused on school buildings rather than on a combination of professional development of staff, curriculum and the facilities that help the educational outcomes to come forward.

What we are proposing, as announced by the Premier during the election campaign, is to have an injection of \$1.9 billion in capital over the next few years to add to the schools we have already rebuilt or modernised so that we can rebuild and modernise our schools in Victoria. We have 1606 schools in the state system, so it is a huge task, but it is a task we are committed to because that modernisation of schools, that investment in capital will leverage and add to and help facilitate the educational outcomes that our community calls out for.

I will talk about the other thing about vision. I mentioned before, in response to the Leader of the Opposition, five things that I would hope every student would aspire to, and I reiterate them: they are literacy, numeracy, curiosity, being articulate and being a good citizen or someone with a social conscience, compassion to change the world and have some values, the sorts of issues which every parent would hope that their child has, and I would also certainly hope that every child in our system does their personal best. It is up to us as a system to facilitate the best of educational opportunities but within that you also expect each student to do their absolute personal best. That is the vision I have that our education system can achieve.

I note that in his speech today the Governor actually mentioned the words I have often used in this place, that we want to make Victoria a better place to live,

work and raise a family, and I share the Governor's aspirations in those areas. They are the things that are important to all Victorians. I believe if our education system can add to the ability to make Victoria a better place to live, work and raise a family, we can all be very proud.

Major projects: management

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — President, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment to your esteemed office.

I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Major Projects, the Honourable Theo Theophanous. Will the minister explain to the house what procedures and systems he has in place to ensure that each major project under his responsibility is delivered on time and on budget and meets the highest standards?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Major Projects) — Before answering my first question in this Parliament, I also wish to congratulate you, President, on your appointment as the President of this place. It would be interesting for the clerks to check the record and see whether you are the member who was kicked out of the house the most by the President in the last Parliament. You will have obviously gained experience from that even though you are not listening to a word I am saying. Nevertheless I am sure you will read it in *Hansard* with great humour.

I thank the member for his question. This is the first question I have received from Mr Davis who of course is my shadow minister. I have two shadow ministers in this place, and I do not know why that is. Mr Dalla-Riva is also my shadow minister. I want to say to both members that I welcome them to the front bench, particularly Mr Dalla-Riva who has come from the back bench to the front bench. I am very pleased that both members are on the other side of the chamber and not on this side.

In responding to Mr David Davis's question, I think his leader's assessment of his character is very harsh and unwarranted. Nevertheless we all have these happenings in our party rooms.

Mr Vogels — You would be used to a few like that, Theo!

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I do not think anybody has accused me of being some of the things I have heard Mr Davis being accused of. Nevertheless we welcome him, and I welcome him as my shadow minister. He has come up with a question — —

Mr Jennings — And you're coming up with an answer!

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I will eventually come up with an answer to Mr Davis's question, but it did not make much sense. Let me put this to him: major projects are a driving force in the economy. Our major projects division and the way in which we deal with major projects is something which will determine the economic growth of this state in the long term. It will assist in creating jobs in this state and in drawing investment to this state and all of the flow-on effects which come from major projects in the state.

Do members know what the main issue in major projects is? It is to ensure that you have the jobs and the projects that are going to create wealth in this state and then to get them delivered on time and on budget. I can assure you, President, and I can assure honourable members that I will be focused on getting these big projects and getting them delivered. The way we in the major projects unit will be doing that will be by ensuring we have systems that make sure these things happen.

The most important issue and the major focus I have as part of my portfolio is to actually get these major projects. We need to build more and we will build more. In terms of public sector investment we are at record levels in this state. This is part of what is driving the economy of this state. It is the reason why we can ultimately deliver to the people of Victoria.

Supplementary question

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I welcome the opportunity to question the minister, and I look forward to exchanges with him over the next few years. I note that he did not really respond to the question. It appears there are no major procedures or systems — —

Mr Jennings interjected.

Mr D. DAVIS — Not any serious response, as Mr Jennings knows. If the minister cannot outline any procedures or systems that he has in place to ensure major projects are on time and on budget to meet high standards, perhaps he might like to tell the house: will all current major projects under Major Projects Victoria's control be completed on time and on budget?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Major Projects) — I have been in this particular portfolio, which I am looking forward to handling, for a matter of days. Major Projects Victoria is going to be a big part of my portfolio. It has 84 staff, 55 of whom are

currently working as designers and scientists on the Australian Synchrotron, which is one of the projects that is on time and on budget.

We have a challenge to ensure that these projects are delivered on time and on budget. We will not wimp it. We are not like Mr Davis's side of the house, whose members walk in, vote against something, but then change their votes and their minds. I feel sorry for Mr David Davis, but I say to him: keep coming up with the questions — I am happy to respond to them because this is an important area of economic growth for this state.

Planning: building permits

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan) — President, I, too, take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election to the high office of President. I am sure you will prove to be a worthy President of this chamber, and I am sure you will do Senator Conroy proud.

My question is to the Minister for Planning. Can the minister update the house on the latest figures for building permits issued in Victoria?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I thank the member for his question. President, I congratulate you on assuming the position of President, and look forward to working with you over the next four years.

We in this chamber should all appreciate the importance of the building industry in Victoria as an economic driver across the state. It is one of the great economic success stories of the Bracks government. I shall refer to a few of the figures which speak for themselves. We have had a particularly impressive result in recent months. It is worth appreciating that in November \$1.5 billion worth of work took place through building permits issued, and this year's September was the best one ever with a total of \$4.46 billion worth of building permits issued.

Mr D. Davis interjected.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — They are fantastic results. Mr David Davis interjects and suggests I might take credit for it. I would like to do so, but I give that credit to the former Minister for Planning in the other place, Minister Hulls because he did an outstanding job in the portfolio. I have assumed responsibility for this portfolio when it is in very good condition. Building permit numbers are in very good condition as well because of the outstanding job that Minister Hulls has done. I pay tribute to him.

It does not stop there, because we have outstanding figures across the board. We should not be surprised that the value of building permits has topped \$15 billion in Victoria for the last three financial years. It is a great generator of not only economic activity but jobs. It is worth appreciating that today the Building Commission has released these figures, and as Minister for Planning, they are my responsibility. It is great to know that these figures reflect on the great work that is taking place across Victoria in relation to building permit requests and permits issued.

It is worth appreciating that there are a lot of other things on the horizon when it comes to this portfolio. Not only is it about economic management — a reflection of the endorsement of the Bracks Labor government's economic management is that people are prepared to invest — but it is also an investment which is a key driver to many other critical and priority issues of this government, whether they be health, education or infrastructure, or all those critical policy-related issues. Building and building performance is a key driver for those.

As well as that, we take great pride not only in Melbourne 2030 and the urban growth boundaries but also in the protection of green wedges and the new rural zones. All of these are forming the right balance and the right confidence needed in the building sector to make sure we continue the great work right across the board, to make sure we continue to support the industry, the sector and the jobs that make this state a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Manufacturing: ministerial responsibility

Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — I also join in congratulating you, President, on your elevation and look forward to working with you over the next number of years.

My question without notice is to the Minister for Industry and State Development, the Honourable Theo Theophanous. I refer the minister to the Australian Industry Group media release of 1 December entitled 'Government downgrades commitment to manufacturing in new ministry'. In part it states:

The AIG believes the decision to absorb the manufacturing portfolio within the new industry and state development ministry ... is a short-sighted downgrading of the government's commitment to Victorian manufacturers.

Is that not an admission by a powerful industry group that the minister is not up to the job in handling the complexities of manufacturing in this state?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and State Development) — Mr Dalla-Riva is so predictable. He has not learnt a thing since he was up on the backbench in opposition. He was grubby when he was there, and he has not changed since coming onto the — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister should withdraw.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — Of course I withdraw in deference to your authority, President. The honourable member comes in here knowing nothing about the Australian Industry Group's priorities. He has probably not spoken to the AIG in the time he has been the shadow minister for manufacturing and exports.

Let me tell you what I have done, President. Not only have I spoken to Tim Piper but I have been a guest of the AIG. I spoke to them at length about the future of manufacturing in this state. Unlike the opposition, the AIG is excited about the prospects, because under the Kennett government — under this opposition when it was in government — manufacturing was down at the bottom of the list. The Bracks government has elevated manufacturing to become one of its most important areas.

Let me make these points. Firstly, I consider that the government's emphasis on manufacturing and on financial services has been upgraded, not downgraded, and let me explain the new structure that has been developed by the Premier on this issue.

For the first time the Premier has decided to appoint me as the lead minister for the whole of the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development and has given me the title of Minister for Industry and State Development — and 'industry' includes manufacturing. The AIG itself includes manufacturing as part of industry. It is a bigger and broader issue than a simple and narrow one which the opposition is trying to make some political capital out of. The fact of the matter is that manufacturing needs to be addressed from a broader industry perspective.

Let me give an example. As Minister for Industry and State Development it will be my job to try to bring big state development projects, such as the extension of the Alcoa facility or other big state investment projects, into this state. Guess what? When these big projects come in, they also help manufacturing, and is it not smart to have the minister who negotiates and brings in these big state development projects also responsible for the manufacturing industry?

Let me tell you that when I addressed members of the Australian Industry Group they were very impressed with the way the title was put together.

Mr Dalla-Riva interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — The other aspect is the machinery of government — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Dalla-Riva's comment referring to the minister as a fool is unacceptable, and I ask him to withdraw.

Mr Dalla-Riva — I withdraw.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister, to continue.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — It is important for the house to know that the new structure of the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development also includes the incorporation of the Office of Training and Tertiary Education. This is a very important initiative, because it will allow us to, in effect, also address the skills issues surrounding manufacturing and the rest of industry. I look forward as part of my job to rapid growth in this sector.

Supplementary question

Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — That was a woeful answer to a serious question, and it is going to be a pleasure over the years to do you slowly, Mr Theophanous, because clearly this is — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member should get to his supplementary question.

Mr DALLA-RIVA — This is clearly hurting the minister's government. Given that the government has downgraded the importance of manufacturing to Victoria, does it have any intention of re-establishing a position of manufacturing minister in the state of Victoria?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and State Development) — I have already explained to the house and to the member the way this government is addressing the issue of manufacturing, but let me make the point that we are addressing it as part of a comprehensive approach. We are addressing it through innovation. We have reduced payroll tax, we have reduced WorkCover premiums and we have maintained the AAA credit rating of this government. The economy going ahead so people are able to buy manufactured goods is the most important thing for the manufacturing sector in this state — and the fact is that

this government has been very successful in maintaining that momentum in the economy. I look forward to being able to deliver on the part of the Bracks government in respect of the very broad range of responsibilities that have been given to me.

Docklands: development

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — President, I take this opportunity also to congratulate you on your elevation. I know you will always conduct yourself in a very professional, dignified and capable manner; of course I will miss the many conversations we had during question times.

My question is to the Minister for Major Projects, the Honourable Theo Theophanous. Can the minister advise the house of recent developments at Docklands and of how the Bracks government is ensuring that the precinct is now one of Australia's emerging financial services hubs?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Major Projects) — I thank the member for her question. The Docklands project is part of my responsibilities as the minister with responsibility for VicUrban. The Docklands development is an exciting project. It covers 200 hectares. It is estimated that \$10 billion of public and private partnership investment will take place in that precinct; 6500 people are now employed in its daily work force, and that is going to grow to around 17 000 by 2009; more than 7.3 million people visit the precinct every year; and the Docklands has generated \$3.7 billion of investment in this state to date.

Importantly Melbourne Docklands is emerging as the new financial services hub of Australia. The latest evidence of this is the building by ANZ of a \$478 million building with a 5-green-star rating. It will be the largest commercial building in Victoria and will be completed in 2009. About 5500 ANZ staff will move to the Docklands, and the development is expected to generate up to 1800 additional jobs. This is in addition to the development that has already taken place at the Docklands by the National Australia Bank, which provided 3500 jobs, as well as the Bendigo Bank with 450 jobs.

Nine thousand five hundred people will be employed directly in the financial services industry at Docklands. What a difference from the Kennett years, when less than 100 people worked in that sector at the Docklands. Jeff Kennett gave up on the financial services sector and conceded defeat to New South Wales without even putting up a fight. Members might be interested in the

following quote from the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 31 December 2003:

It is five years since then Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett enraged Victorian patriots by suggesting that Melbourne should abandon any grand ideas of its own and back Sydney's drive to become the financial powerhouse of the Asia-Pacific region.

That was the attitude adopted by the Kennett government — to give up on Victoria and Melbourne as the financial centre of Australia, to give it to Sydney and to go on to other things that Jeff Kennett thought might be appropriate in this state. This is the difference between the opposition and the government. We know that to get the business requires drive. We know that to get the business you have to go out and want to get it, to negotiate the agreements and get people to come and build in this state.

The development of the Docklands and getting ANZ to build in the Docklands and employ thousands of people there in the financial services sector is something we are very proud of. We want to see the sector develop in this state, to expand even further, to employ Victorians and to make this economy even bigger and better than it has been before so that we can do things like meet our no. 1 priority of education as part of our government responsibilities.

I am very pleased to inform the house that the Docklands development is something that I will be looking after in the future, and the financial sector is part of that as well.

Metropolitan Ambulance Service: community hero awards

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — President, I would like to join with my parliamentary colleagues in taking this opportunity to congratulate you on being appointed to the position of President.

Mr Viney interjected.

Ms DARVENIZA — No, I am not relieved at all. I am missing him already. I know that the President will bring both a sense of authority and style to his new office.

My question is to the Minister for Community Services, Mr Jennings. Can the minister inform the house how members of Victoria's community who perform heroic acts to help and assist others in need are recognised and respected?

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — Thank you, President, for providing me

with an open-ended opportunity to respond to Ms Darveniza's question. You have demonstrated a generosity of spirit by allowing me to jump the queue to get this question. I thank Ms Darveniza for taking that opportunity to jump the queue and providing me with an opportunity to repeat the Bracks government's commitment to supporting those in our community who do the hard yards by providing emergency support, standing up in times of crisis to intervene in drastic circumstances to provide comfort and support to people who are experiencing a crisis. In fact last week in Queen's Hall at Parliament House I had the opportunity to pay due respect to Victorian citizens who have actually stepped up at those times and provided great care to others in the Victorian community. Sometimes they provide care to their loved ones and family members, and sometimes they do it in the name of protecting the lives of total strangers.

There were many heroic acts undertaken by members of the Victorian community. Last week I participated with Greg Sassella, the chief executive officer of the Metropolitan Ambulance Service, in an awards ceremony which for seven years in a row has provided encouragement and support in recognising the acts of heroism of members of the community who have provided that emergency service. The awards are based on the nominations of paramedics in the Metropolitan Ambulance Service, experts in the field who actually know what it is like to step into emergency situations. They recognise the courage and heroism that are required to meet these emergency situations.

Last year they nominated 70 Victorian citizens for their great acts. There were 10 award recipients last week.

For the benefit of the house I will run through the names of those 10 heroes who were recognised in Queen's Hall last week: Sally Ahmed, Melissa Blackburn, Ahmed Elhelou, Ron Gallard, Katia Cianchi, Judith Roberts, Ethan Prentice, Trudi Vanos, Matt Vongsykeo and Lauren Hall. These heroes were of all ages. Young Ethan Prentice became well known within the Victorian community because, as a four-year-old, when his mum collapsed, he dialled 000, made the connection with the emergency services and told them where to go and the situation that his mum was in. Ethan was an absolute superstar four-year-old to get that emergency service to provide support to his mother. His mother has made a full recovery. Ethan was a superhero, but he was not alone; there were others. Melissa Blackburn also saved her mum's life. Other people stepped up to car accidents and saved total strangers during times of great adversity.

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

Schools: reporting system

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — My question without notice is directed to the Leader of the Government in his capacity as Minister for Education. I refer the minister to the new student achievement reporting system, and I ask: what research and evaluation has been undertaken on the effectiveness and acceptance of this new reporting system?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I thank Mr Hall for his interest. I was remiss before when acknowledging other teachers in the chamber that I did not actually acknowledge Mr Hall, who also comes from a teaching background, and I should have been more aware of it. Mr Hall has asked a particularly good question about reporting. I have a very strong view that I should respond to every question in the detail that I can. I will take some of the details of his question about reporting on notice and get back to him.

Mr P. Davis interjected.

Mr LENDERS — I take up the Leader of the Opposition's interjection and Mr Hall's question simultaneously. Reporting is an issue on which there is obviously a huge debate within communities, within the educational sector and between jurisdictions. Parents certainly expect a level of reporting so they know where their student is at the various levels of primary or secondary education where national reporting is starting to take place. If their child changes school, they want to know what level they are at, benchmarked against others. It is something that the parents and the school communities want to know.

Adequate benchmarking across all jurisdictions and across the 1606 government schools, let alone the other schools in the state that are not run by the government, is an area which we need to get right. We need to be wary of politicians making far too many value-laden comments, which often happens. I am not suggesting that of Mr Hall; I accept it as a genuine question from a former teacher who has an interest in these areas.

On the issue of reporting, on the day before I became education minister my predecessor did some consolidation on A to E reporting and the issue of whether it should be a 12-month or an 18-month report; Mr Hall would certainly know about the technical issues there. We are following that with interest. I look forward to a dialogue on these issues with my federal colleague, Mrs Bishop, about how we can do this. Our

no. 1 goal in this state is good educational outcomes. Part of those outcomes within the community — and to give a degree of confidence — is obviously reporting that teachers, students, parents and the community all have confidence in. I look forward to working with Mr Hall and others and making sure Victoria takes the lead in this debate and gives confidence to all those four stakeholders — that is, parents, teachers, students and the community as a whole.

Supplementary question

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — I assure the minister that my interest in this is genuine: I want to see a proper and effective reporting system for both students and parents. By way of supplementary question, is it true that a government-commissioned report conducted by the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals was very critical of the new reporting system; and in light of those critical comments, is the government intending to change the system? If so, when and how?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I became education minister 18 days ago, and 19 days ago the then Minister for Education and Training in the other place, Ms Kosky, made an adjustment to the reporting system that the principals were concerned about. That was about the A category and whether you are a year or a year-and-a-half ahead of your equivalent. That got changed from the broader area that I believe is in the order of a year-and-a-half or longer than a year. Some amendments were made by my predecessor 19 days ago to that particular reporting area in the A category of the A to E band. In that area the government has certainly acted after hearing some of the concerns from our stakeholders.

I appreciate Mr Hall's genuine ongoing concern in education. My barbed reference before was to the federal minister, Mrs Bishop, and not to Mr Hall, so he should not take that as anything other than my accepting that as a former teacher, he is genuine in his concern about this area. But the particular reporting area was dealt with by my predecessor 19 days ago.

LAW REFORM COMMITTEE

De novo appeals to the County Court

The Clerk, pursuant to the Parliamentary Committees Act, presented report, including appendices, together with minutes of evidence.

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Production and/or use of biofuels in Victoria

**The Clerk, pursuant to the Parliamentary
Committees Act, presented report, including
appendices, together with minutes of evidence.**

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Report 2005–06

**The Clerk, pursuant to the Parliamentary
Committees Act, presented report, including
appendices.**

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Anderson's Creek Cemetery Trust —

Minister's report of failure to submit report for 2005–06 to the Minister within the prescribed period and the reasons therefor.

Minister's report of receipt of 2005–06 report.

Bendigo Cemeteries Trust —

Minister's report of failure to submit report for 2005–06 to the Minister within the prescribed period and the reasons therefor.

Minister's report of receipt of 2005–06 report.

Confiscation Act 1997 — Report, 2005–06, from the Chief Commissioner of Police pursuant to section 139A of the Act.

Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981 — Standard for the Uniform Scheduling of Drugs and Poisons — Minister's Notice and amendments to the Poisons Code, 1 October 2006.

Gene Technology Act 2001 — Statutory Review, August 2006.

Intellectual Disability Review Panel — Report, 2005–06.

Legal Ombudsman's Office — Report for the period from 1 July 2005 to 11 December 2005.

Legal Profession Act 2004 — Practitioner Remuneration Order, 5 October 2006.

Legal Services Board — Report, 2005–06.

Legal Services Commissioner — Report, 2005–06.

Lilydale Memorial Park and Cemeteries Trust —

Minister's report of failure to submit report for 2005–06 to the Minister within the prescribed period and the reasons therefor.

Minister's report of receipt of 2005–06 report.

Necropolis Springvale —

Minister's report of failure to submit report for 2005–06 to the Minister within the prescribed period and the reasons therefor.

Report, 2005–06.

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

Alpine Resorts Planning Scheme — Amendments C17 Part 1 and C18.

Ballarat Planning Scheme — Amendments C58, C84, C88 part 1, C105 and C112.

Bass Coast Planning Scheme — Amendment C43.

Baw Baw Planning Scheme — Amendments C37 and C39.

Bayside Planning Scheme — Amendment C39 Part 3.

Boroondara Planning Scheme — Amendments C58, C62 and C70.

Brimbank Planning Scheme — Amendments C80 Part 2 and C91.

Buloke Planning Scheme — Amendment C10.

Campaspe Planning Scheme — Amendment C47.

Cardinia Planning Scheme — Amendments C59, C76 and C87 Part 2.

Casey Planning Scheme — Amendments, C52 Part 1, C80 Part 1, C82, C86 and C97.

Central Gold Fields Planning Scheme — Amendment C8.

Colac Otway Planning Scheme — Amendment C46.

Frankston Planning Scheme — Amendment C37.

Glen Eira Planning Scheme — Amendment C53.

Glenelg Planning Scheme — Amendments C31 and C32.

Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme — Amendments C63 Part 1 and C90.

Greater Dandenong Planning Scheme — Amendments C55 and C84.

Greater Geelong Planning Scheme — Amendments C101 Part 2, C113 and C142.

Greater Shepparton Planning Scheme — Amendments C33 and C72.

Hobsons Bay Planning Scheme — Amendment C61.

Hindmarsh Planning Scheme — Amendment C3.
 Horsham Planning Scheme — Amendment C29.
 Hume Planning Scheme — Amendments C65, C73 and C78.
 Kingston Planning Scheme — Amendments C54, C58 and C69.
 Knox Planning Scheme — Amendments C40, C46 and C52.
 Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme — Amendments C25 and C39.
 Manningham Planning Scheme — Amendment C25.
 Maribyrnong Planning Scheme — Amendments C31 and C61.
 Maroondah Planning Scheme — Amendment C57.
 Melbourne Planning Scheme — Amendment C115 and C120.
 Melton Planning Scheme — Amendment C62.
 Mildura Planning Scheme — Amendment C20.
 Moira Planning Scheme — Amendments C20 Part 1, C21 and C29.
 Monash Planning Scheme — Amendment C67.
 Moreland Planning Scheme — Amendments C35, C37, C64, C73 and C75.
 Mount Alexander Planning Scheme — Amendment C32.
 Moyne Planning Scheme — Amendments C20 and C22.
 Nillumbik Planning Scheme — Amendments C42 and C44.
 Port Phillip Planning Scheme — Amendment C58.
 Pyrenees Planning Scheme — Amendment C15.
 South Gippsland Planning Scheme — Amendment C39.
 Stonnington Planning Scheme — Amendments C62 and C66.
 Strathbogie Planning Scheme — Amendment C23.
 Surf Coast Planning Scheme — Amendments C15 Part 2, C18 and C29.
 Swan Hill Planning Scheme — Amendment C23.
 Victoria Planning Provisions — Amendments VC39, VC42, VC43 and VC44.
 Wellington Planning Scheme — Amendment C23 Parts 1 and 2.
 West Wimmera Planning Scheme — Amendment C7.

Whitehorse Planning Scheme — Amendments C41, C50 Part 2 and C64.
 Wodonga Planning Scheme — Amendments C39 and C48.
 Wyndham Planning Scheme — Amendments C51 and C89.
 Yarra Planning Scheme — Amendments C75 and C86.
 Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme — Amendment C33.
 Yarriambiack Planning Scheme — Amendment C6.
 Preston Cemetery Trust —
 Minister's report of failure to submit report for 2005–06 to the Minister within the prescribed period and the reasons therefor.
 Minister's report of receipt of 2005–06 report.
 Professional Standards Council Victoria —
 Report, 2003–04.
 Report, 2004–05.
 Statutory Rules under the following Acts of Parliament:
 Australian Grands Prix Act 1994 — No. 157.
 Building Act 1993 — Nos. 136 and 154.
 Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 — Nos. 149 and 151.
 Conservation, Forests and Lands Act 1987 — Nos. 134, 140, 141 and 150.
 Corrections Act 1986 — No. 132.
 County Court Act 1958 — Nos. 166, 167 and 168.
 Financial Management Act 1994 — No. 152.
 Heritage Act 1995 — No. 137.
 Infringements Act 2006 — No. 145.
 Magistrates' Court Act 1989 — No. 164.
 Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958 — No. 142.
 Motor Car Traders Act 1986 — No. 148.
 Owner Drivers and Forestry Contractors Act 2005 — No. 153.
 Parliamentary Salaries and Superannuation Act 1968 — No. 155.
 Planning and Environment Act 1987 — No. 135.
 Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 — No. 143.
 Road Safety Act 1986 — No. 158.
 Sentencing Act 1991 — No. 144.

Serious Sex Offenders Monitoring Act 2005 — No. 133.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 — Nos. 131, 147 and 160.

Supreme Court Act 1986 — Nos. 162, 163 and 169.

Supreme Court Act 1986 — Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 — No. 161.

Trade Measurement Act 1995 — Trade Measurement (Administration) Act 1995 — No. 146.

Transport Act 1983 — Nos. 138 and 139.

Victoria State Emergency Service Act 2005 — No. 130.

Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998 — No. 165.

Water Industry Act 1994 — No. 159.

World Swimming Championships Act 2004 — No. 156.

Subordinate Legislation Act 1994 —

Ministers' exception certificates under section 8(4) in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 131, 142, 147, 149, 150, 161 to 169.

Ministers' exemption certificates under section 9(6) in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 132 to 141, 144 to 146, 148, 151, 155 and 158.

Ministers' infringements offence consultation certificates under section 6A(3) in respect of Statutory Rule Nos. 138 and 146.

Templestowe Cemetery Trust —

Minister's report of failure to submit report for 2005–06 to the Minister within the prescribed period and the reasons therefor.

Minister's report of receipt of 2005–06 report.

VicFleet Pty Ltd — Minister's report of receipt of 2005–06 report.

Victoria Grants Commission — Report for the year ended 31 August 2006.

Victoria Law Foundation — Report, 2005–06.

Victorian Relief Committee — Report, 2005–06.

Water Act 1989 — Minister's Orders of 2 and 12 October 2006 declaring water supply protection areas for the Avon River, Woori Yallock Creek and Little Yarra and Don River Catchments.

The following proclamations fixing operative dates were laid upon the table by the Clerk:

Catchment and Land Protection (Further Amendment) Act 2006 — sections 3, 4, 5(1), 5(3), 7, 8, 13, 16(1), 21, 23 and 25 — 24 October 2006 (*Gazette No. S284, 24 October 2006*).

Courts Legislation (Jurisdiction) Act 2006 — section 10 — 1 November 2006 — Part 2 — 1 January 2007 (*Gazette No. G40, 5 October 2006*).

Groundwater (Border Agreement) (Amendment) Act 2005 — 31 October 2006 (*Gazette No. G43, 26 October 2006*).

Health Services (Supported Residential Services) Act 2006 — sections 9 and 17 — 12 October 2006 (*Gazette No. G41, 12 October 2006*).

Justice Legislation (Further Amendment) Act 2006 — remaining provisions (except Part 4) — 18 October 2006 (*Gazette No. S273, 17 October 2006*).

National Parks and Crown Land (Reserves) Acts (Amendment) Act 2006 — sections 13(2) and 16(2) and Part 3 (except section 26(6)) — 19 October 2006 (*Gazette No. G42, 19 October 2006*).

National Parks (Otways and Other Amendments) Act 2005 — Part 4 — 24 October 2006 (*Gazette No. S285, 24 October 2006*).

Water (Governance) Act 2006 — Part 3 — 31 October 2006 (*Gazette No. G43, 26 October 2006*).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Sessional orders

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — By leave, I move:

That —

- (1) the Clerk of the Parliaments be authorised to alter the title appearing before the enacting words (or, if there is a preamble, before the preamble) in a bill that is to be presented to the Governor for royal assent by substituting the word 'Act' for the word 'Bill'; and
- (2) the statement of compatibility required to be tabled pursuant to the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 when a member introduces a bill into the Council be incorporated into *Hansard* together with the second-reading speech.

I have moved that way to enable the Parliament to operate more effectively and in particular to incorporate the amendment in relation to statements of compatibility to ensure that any motion before the chamber accords with section 28 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006, which requires a member introducing a bill to table a statement of compatibility before making a second-reading speech. If the statement is merely tabled, it will only be available in hard copy as a tabled document. The proposed sessional order that is the subject of the motion will ensure that statements will be incorporated into *Hansard*, forming part of the records relating to the house, and that they will also be available online.

In relation to the first matter regarding substituting the word ‘Act’ for the word ‘Bill’, I have moved that way because the format of the front pages of bills has been slightly changed. Up until now bills introduced have included a short title — for example, ‘XXX Act 2006’. The view has been taken that the title should more properly use the description ‘Bill’, as in fact all of us who actually operate within the second-reading debates on bills understand they are bills before they receive the assent of the Parliament and are proclaimed. When a bill has passed both houses and is ready to be presented to the Governor for royal assent, it will be necessary for the short title to be altered to reflect this changed status of a bill to an act. The proposed sessional order authorises the Clerk of the Parliaments to make that alteration.

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — I want to make a comment with respect to the second part of the motion regarding the incorporation of the statement into *Hansard*. While the opposition does not have any difficulty with that proposal in its present form, it seems to be inconsistent with what we do as a matter of practice in this place in respect to statements under section 85 of the Constitution Act when the constitution is being amended. It would seem to the opposition that it would be a more appropriate practice, and we are surprised the government has not instituted this practice as a matter of course, that such statements relating to the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act be a requirement of second-reading speeches. That would deal with the incorporation far more effectively than the mechanism which is proposed here.

While the opposition is not opposing the motion, we are putting on the record that we do not believe this is a satisfactory mechanism and that the house will need to revisit this at a later date for consistency and proper procedural reasons.

Motion agreed to.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Membership

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — By leave, I move:

That Mr Elasmr, Mr Eideh, Ms Pulford and Mr Dalla-Riva be members of the Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee until 28 February 2007.

Motion agreed to.

GOVERNOR’S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

The PRESIDENT — Order! I have to report that the Governor attended the house this day and was pleased to make a speech, of which, for greater accuracy, I have obtained a copy. As the speech is printed, I take it that members do not desire that I should read it to them.

Sitting suspended 6.20 p.m. until 8.01 p.m.

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I move:

That the Council agree to the following address to the Governor in reply to the Governor’s opening speech:

May it please the Governor:

We, the Legislative Council of Victoria assembled in Parliament, express our loyalty to Australia and the people of Victoria and thank you for the speech which you have made to the Parliament. We declare that we will faithfully carry out the important duties entrusted to us by the people of Victoria to advance the best interests of all sections of the community.

Let me begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we stand here today, the Kulin nation. I pay my respects to their elders.

I would like to commence by congratulating you, President, on your new role. I would also like to congratulate the Premier on his re-election and the new ministers, in particular the member for Ripon, Joe Helper, and the member for Bellarine, Lisa Neville, in the other place, who both come from western Victoria. They are now representing regional Victoria at the highest level of government. I would also like to congratulate all Legislative Council members on their election to this place and be the first to welcome the new members from the minor parties as well as all ALP, Liberal and Nationals members.

The new upper house region of Western Victoria has no previous members as such, but I would like to wish Ms Elaine Carbines well, she having narrowly missed out on the third spot for the ALP in the Western Victoria Region. Elaine’s commitment to the Geelong area has been terrific, and it is a shame that she will not be able to continue to participate here in her previous capacity.

I would also like to sincerely thank the electors of Western Victoria Region for entrusting me with the special responsibility of representing them in this place. I would like to thank the Australian Labor Party for providing support, not only during the most recent

election but also over the last 16 years that I have been a member of the party.

It is an incredible honour to have been elected to this place — more so as I am the first member to make an inaugural speech in the newly constituted Legislative Council. It has long been held that democracy works best when it involves the greatest number of interests and viewpoints. The recent reforms have achieved precisely this outcome. As we can see by looking around us, there are now more varied interests and viewpoints being represented in this place than ever before. The reforms mean it is unlikely that a government will again enjoy a majority in both houses, and never again will a single party be able to implement an agenda that does not enjoy the support of more than its own members. This will offer some challenges to government, but I believe history will judge these reforms kindly. Not very long ago the people of Victoria were electing members for eight years. Rarely did the composition of this place reflect the mood of the electorate; if it did, it was more coincidence than planning.

Basically Parliament is responsible for ensuring that the will of the electors is implemented by passing the agenda of the government of the day. This place must be a house of review, but in seeking to do this it is critical that the house does not become obstructive to the delivery of good government in Victoria. This place must remain a mechanism for the review and enactment of legislation and must not be sidetracked into meaningless processes which do not enhance legislative outcomes. It will be a testing time for all members, and it will present some unique challenges to us all.

My region of Western Victoria covers a unique part of Victoria. It has some of the largest cities outside Melbourne and many of the state's smallest communities. The electorate is extremely large, spanning from Melton to the South Australian border. I shudder to think how many kilometres I will drive in the coming years. It is also a region of natural attractions, with some of Australia's most beautiful areas contained within it, from the Twelve Apostles to the natural grandeur of the Grampians. It is a region of terrific wealth in terms of farming and natural resources.

I have been privileged in the past to visit many of those places in my previous professional capacity, and I have also spent much recreation time at some of those stunning places. It is a region that I am extremely proud to be representing.

In standing for Parliament I expected that my opponents would seek to do everything in their power to prevent my election, but I did not expect to have my heritage as a child of regional Victoria called into question. A curious feature of politics is how a seemingly impersonal attack can cause much angst. According to my opponents, I have never set foot out of the National Union of Workers, the CBD or, more likely, a latte-dispensing cafe! Of course the details of my story are closely aligned with those of many children of country Victoria.

I grew up at South Muckleford, 10 kilometres out of Castlemaine. One of my earliest memories is playing on the granite boulders at the back of mum and dad's house. There were no town services, and on occasion we swam in the dam, although I can only imagine that it is dry this summer. As is the central Victorian way, I grew up with a healthy respect for disused mine shafts.

My strongest childhood memories consist of time spent at the local community radio station 3CCC, where I had my first lessons in meeting procedures, committees and standing orders mainly around the big issue of the day — that is, whether or not to move the radio station to the big smoke in Bendigo — and staying up late talking about politics with dad, and the music.

Sadly my share of the artistic talent gene went to my sister, Melina, a music therapist and my brother, Jamie, an actor. I was always relegated to the 'girly chorus' or rhythm section. In my fondest memory of the family music nights there are the songs of the finest troubadour traditions — songs about refugees, travellers and working people's battles against adversity. I thank Melina, and her husband, Sam, Jamie and, most of all, Kerry and Brenda for never conceding that the harmonies and rhythm section were less important and for all the love, encouragement and support that has helped me in my journey to this place today.

In 1991 I finished school at Bendigo Senior Secondary College, an outstanding state school by any measure, and along with many of my classmates moved to Melbourne to go to university. I was of course disappointed when with one stroke of the advertising pen my political opponents chose to paint me as a city person and a stranger to regional Victoria. My family were most upset by this. My aunt Wendy, the family historian, was inspired to remind me of my great-great-grandfather, Patrick Brennan, of Wolf Hill, west of Dublin. Family tradition records that he came out to Australia on a boat with the father of former Labor Prime Minister James Scullin in the 1850s. They went to the Ballarat goldfields, sent for their sweethearts and the families settled around Ballarat, the

same place where my husband and two young children have now settled. Patrick Brennan married Anne Browne, and they settled at Middle Creek. They went on to have 12 children — this is an ambition I do not share!

Patrick and Anne now rest at the old Ballarat cemetery, just a couple of kilometres from where we live. My approach is more philosophical. Fortunately the electors have chosen to welcome me back to regional Victoria. My mum and dad, and my grandfather who will turn 86 later this week, all took great pleasure in handing out how-to-vote cards at Kyneton, where they live.

However, I find it curious that when it comes to politics there are some people who believe the young people of regional Victoria are not welcome to return when the opportunity arises. Personally I think we should roll out the welcome mat to the sons and daughters of regional Victoria. I think that we as a society need to focus on building our regional communities. The Bracks government has done terrific things for regional Victoria — the list of achievements is extensive.

I would like to focus on just one aspect of what the government has done for regional communities and that is in the area of regional rail services. Over the past four months I have been catching the train from Ballarat to Melbourne about once a week. We all get on in a mood faintly resembling the airline travel of yore — people are smiling and filled with a sense of journey. An hour or thereabouts later we get off in Melbourne in a modern and space-age transport hub. I tell this story because it illustrates the vision I have for regional Victoria: not just a set of toenails to be clipped at will but a number of satellite hearts beating and sustaining the greater part of Melbourne. I am committed to acting as a voice for the regional vision, helping to make sure that young people are welcomed back to the communities that nurtured them as children, and that the Bracks government articulates a vision for regional communities that will continue to build on the population growth achieved in recent years.

These population shifts are called sea changes and tree changes, but those phrases do not do justice to the very conscious decisions being made by ever-increasing numbers of people to relocate in search of a better lifestyle. Of course I am not rejecting the benefits of the big city. Instead I am supporting the concept of doing things in a different way, of returning to regional Victoria where many of the sharper edges of modern society have been softened. The benefits of bringing up a young family in a regional centre are substantial. As we know, Victoria has a fantastic health system, our educational opportunities are second to none and our

natural environment is exquisite. I want more people to make the switch, to return to regional Victoria, to seize the opportunities provided by our increasingly sophisticated regional centres and to make the regions their home.

As I mentioned earlier, I left Castlemaine to go to university but I always had a desire to return to regional Victoria when the opportunity arose. However, university led me to enter into a career in the trade union movement. It was this opportunity which ultimately led me to this place. It provided a source of motivation which I hope will continue to provide direction to me in future years.

I started my career in 1994, having been selected to take part in the inaugural intake of the Organising Works program conducted by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). Just as here I am the youngest on this side of the chamber, I was the youngest participant in that year's intake. In Organising Works I was not required to make the first speech as a consequence, but the rules in this place are different and I am delighted to have been accorded the honour of speaking first today. Organising Works was an innovative program. The traineeship was one part classroom and four parts on-the-job training. In the classroom we were taught by now ACTU assistant secretary Chris Walton. The program sought to train young unionists.

As an Organising Works trainee I remember learning at an early age some of the harsher realities of life. There are some stories which almost 13 years later are very fresh in my mind. There were the workers in a paint manufacturing company who all had terrible rashes and difficulty breathing, and the poultry workers in a small rural community where a creative award interpretation had them being paid \$2 an hour less than the appropriate rate for the work they were doing. There was an electrical appliance manufacturer whose work force comprised about 100 workers, all of whom were women aged between about 15 and 25 and very few of whom spoke English as their first language.

The employer had some rules: no talking in the workplace at all; no reporting of injuries; casual employment for everyone, so no sick pay, no superannuation and most definitely no job satisfaction; no trips to the toilet outside of the lunch break under any circumstances; and those who became pregnant really were not welcome to stay. All this for \$10 an hour! They joined the union and the four leaders were sacked. In most cases we were able to provide a better deal — a safer workplace, better job security and an improved hourly rate. In some cases we were not

successful. I remain concerned for the underclass that exists in our society, those people who are exploited by unscrupulous employers who are more concerned with profit than people.

Industrial relations represents a threshold issue for us in this place. I firmly believe that government has a duty to protect people who for whatever reason are unable to negotiate a better deal at work. I reject absolutely the notion that if you do not like the contract you can just go and find another job, particularly as I represent a regional and rural electorate where often there is nowhere else to go.

I learnt some lessons during that period which have stayed with me. A safety net of decent conditions is critical; an independent umpire is too. Any decent society needs strong laws providing for safe workplaces and fair compensation for injured workers. The right to join a union must always be protected by law. The assault on the safety net of work conditions by the federal government horrifies me, with its potential to create a permanent underclass of Australian working poor.

Many of the years I worked as a union official were spent assisting injured workers. I attended their workplaces and their homes, assisted them in their technical arguments with their WorkCover agents and negotiated their return to work with their employers. The time I spent specialising in this area spanned 1996 to 2002. It was a period of significant change driven by the then government. I will resist dwelling on the motivations and will instead dwell on the reality of a WorkCover claimant. Many were people with simple aspirations in life — to have a decent home and to ensure that their children were afforded every opportunity to get on in life. All their plans were changed in an instant when they suffered an injury at work. For some it was a wrecked back, for others chronic recurrent injuries in their hands or arms. For some it was a total and permanent incapacity. My role was to represent them when myriad medico-legal activity determined that they were no longer qualified to receive benefits. For some this meant losing their homes, uprooting their children and becoming unable to provide for themselves and their families. On many occasions we were able to help these people by having their benefits reinstated or enabling them to continue in work, putting them back in control of their own destiny and income, dignity intact.

For me that is what unions are about — protecting those members of our society who have fallen on very bad times. I know from an ideological point of view some members in this place will not agree with trade

unionism, but I hope that all of us can agree with the notion that we do not throw people on the scrapheap if they are unfortunate enough to be badly injured at work. The Bracks government has a strong record in terms of supporting a system that provides people with a certain level of support should they be unlucky enough to be injured at work. The reinstatement of common-law rights remains for me a major achievement of this government. Countless people have benefited from these improvements. I am certain that a fair system like the one we have now has a real flow-on in terms of reducing the likelihood of family crisis and devastation that can be caused by workplace injury.

I had the privilege of working for 12 years at the National Union of Workers. The NUW has many proud traditions and some connections with this place. Indeed the previous President, Monica Gould, hailed from the NUW. Monica achieved many firsts in her career, particularly for women, in her time at the union and in this place. She has been a great support to me and a friend for many years and I wish her well in her retirement. Other NUW officials in whose footsteps I follow in this place include Esmond Curnow, who was a member here back in the 1970s. The Honourable Bill Landeryou and Freddie Van Buren can be traced back to the NUW. In the other place the former member for Tarneit, Mary Gillett, and Gordon Stirling have served this Parliament with distinction. This week Martin Pakula in this house and the Minister for Roads and Ports, Tim Pallas, in the other place will join me in making our inaugural speeches. I am sure the lessons learnt through their service at the NUW will assist in guiding them in their future labours.

I and those I have named share a thing that is not unique to the NUW but is perhaps unique to those who have represented working people — a passion that government must represent all interests, not just those who can navigate the structures of government and authority alone. In this place we can and we will make laws. I know that if ever I am looking for guidance and inspiration I will think of the dairy workers in the Western District making the milk and cheese, the poultry workers in Geelong helping with the Christmas turkey preparations and the mill workers in north-western Victoria doing their bit so we can bake our Christmas cakes.

For me, coming to this place is an extension of the work I have been doing since 1994 to enable working people to have a better deal and have government representatives who understand their issues and their needs. With your indulgence, President, I would like to pay tribute to the fine leadership of the National Union of Workers I have learnt under for the last 12 years. As

a young person at the NUW I was privileged to observe closely the dynamic leadership of Charlie Donnelly as the Victorian secretary and Greg Sword as the national secretary. Greg Sword has been a force on the national union and political stage for the last 20 years. He was unstinting in his willingness to act as a guide and mentor to me. He always seemed to be able to find the time to provide a bit of advice, though I am sure a conversation with a 20-year-old who had just started was not always at the top of his to-do list. Greg is a passionate advocate for working people. He continues his life's work these days in the most important area of all — ensuring a decent retirement income for working families.

Charlie Donnelly was the Victorian secretary and is now the national secretary. Charlie is a remarkable union leader. He has assembled an incredibly talented group of people around him. They continue every day at the forefront of an increasingly hostile industrial relations battle. He is simply an inspiration to me.

I must also note that for some years I worked to a union secretary who joins me in this place today. Martin Pakula will introduce himself to this place later this week, but Martin has also been a fantastic union leader, a supporter and a good friend. I wish him well in his new career and fully expect that he will make a great impact in Victorian politics. Greg, Charlie, Martin and the new state secretary, Antony Thow, must all be thanked for the encouragement and support they have shown me. I hope to fully live up to their expectations.

Strong representation is important at any level: at the workplace, in the courts and indeed in the Parliament. As I stated earlier, I know that many in this place may not share my method to achieve these outcomes, but I am also certain that collectively we all hold dearly the value of the rule of law and the quintessential Australian concept of a fair go for all.

I joined the Labor Party when I was 16. The 1990 federal election had just passed. I remember vividly being dropped off at the neighbourhood house in Castlemaine on a cold winter's night for my first branch meeting. I remember chocolate cake and a long debate on uranium policy. Not long after, I was selling fundraising wines by the dozen to my schoolteachers — and not long after that I went to my first Young Labor conference in Melbourne, which was certainly an eye-opener. To explain to someone outside politics the thrill of first laying eyes on the thing you have been looking for — in my case politics, pure and unadulterated — is almost impossible. Needless to say I then and there determined that this was what I wanted

to do in life — to argue about issues which I believe in and to do so to the limit of my abilities and energies.

During that time I made friendships with people who remain a strong influence in my personal and political life to this day. In particular I would like to thank my campaign manager, Sebastian Zwalf, and Rachel Dapiran and James McGarvey for their support, wise counsel and friendship over many years.

I also met Jeff Pulford in Young Labor, spying him across the room at a policy forum. With your indulgence, President, I would like to pay a special tribute. Now I know that all political spouses make great sacrifices and provide great support; not many of them, though, are called to move away from career, friends and family and then be bounced out of bed at six o'clock every morning by an adorable five-year-old and an adorable two-year-old and confronted with the question, 'Is Mummy home from the election yet?'. To Jeff, thanks for all your love and support. To Sinéad and Hamish, thank you for your patience.

I have already outlined my motivations in choosing politics as a career. They are all directly linked to ensuring that all members of our community have access to the rights and privileges of our society, irrespective of where they live, who they are or what they do not know.

My other vision of course is to be part of building Victoria's Western Victoria Region as a great place to live, work and raise a family. We all know that the fortune of regional Victoria lies at the heart of the state's future prosperity. The challenge for us in this place and those in the other place is to ensure that we govern for all Victorians: that any person in Western Victoria Region should have access to the same services as people in Melbourne enjoy; that the parents of children growing up in regional Victoria can hope for a future for their children that is as rich and as privileged as that of children raised in Melbourne — that they have access to good quality, affordable child care that suits their work needs and a choice about what type of child care they can use; that all our schools are great irrespective of where they are; that we continue to build our regional universities so that studying and obtaining a degree at a regional campus is seen as every bit as good as obtaining a degree in Melbourne; that our health system continues to offer world-class treatment and that our regional centres become hubs of healing and continue to develop as centres of teaching for health professionals; and that our youth in the regions perceive a future for themselves in regional Victoria — that we reverse the drain of our youngest and brightest to the city and that we offer these young people a place

in our communities which includes proper and gainful employment and a path to future prosperity.

I note in ending that I am entering into a vocation which has a long and honourable tradition. I was interested to note in researching this contribution that the Honourable Peter Lalor, MLC, had been a previous member for the Ballarat region. He has left an indelible mark on Australian culture and society, along with a good number of commemorative plaques. Seeing his name reminded me of the place in history that we as members of Parliament occupy and that future generations will at times stumble across the things that we do in this place and outside. It reminds me that we must focus not only on the imperatives of the now but also be mindful of how the things we do in this place will be viewed in time to come. Our responsibility is to always stand for what we believe is right. In my case it will be to represent the interests of the people I have mentioned today — the people of Western Victoria Region, people who have been wronged, and people who demand and who have a right to receive fair and just treatment at the hands of society.

It is my solemn hope and ambition that everything I do in this place reflects well upon myself, my community and my party, not only at the time I do it but also in the future, when it might be reviewed by a nervous new member researching how they might introduce themselves to this place.

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I was pleased to second the address-in-reply motion. I am also extremely proud and honoured to be part of the re-elected Bracks government — being in this house is the culmination of a long-held ambition.

The opening of Parliament today marks a milestone for democracy in Victoria as 25 November, some three weeks ago, was not only the date of the state election but also was the 150th anniversary of the opening of the first Parliament in Victoria, in 1856. While the opening of the first Parliament was a significant step for democracy in this state, it is fair to say that initially this chamber was autocratic and a bastion of wealth and privilege. It is also true to say that change in this house has been gradual. It was not until 1950 that full adult suffrage and the abolition of membership qualifications were adopted, and it was not until 1979 that the first woman was elected as a member of this place. Now, 150 years later, we are at the opening of the 56th Parliament, which is a result of the far-reaching reforms passed by the 55th Parliament.

These reforms mean that we are now entering uncharted and unknown waters, which makes it an

exciting time for me to have been elected. The reforms include the creation of the new electorates to which we have all been elected. I am proud to have been elected to the new Eastern Metropolitan Region. The new electorates are significantly larger than those previously in existence. Whilst the last Parliament had 22 Legislative Council electorates, there are now eight electorates covering all of Victoria.

The increase in size of the electorates helps to address issues which are important to my electorate such as public transport, which needs an approach that takes into account the needs of a number of communities. Effective public transportation is the cornerstone of a functioning community which helps the disadvantaged and the young. It gets cars off our roads and in doing so, it reduces the harmful carbon dioxide levels that cause global warming. I am pleased that the Bracks government has committed significant funding to public transport.

One of the other areas of concern for my constituents is the current drought and the long-term prognosis regarding water shortages brought about by climate change. My constituents are seeking advice and guidance from government on how they can continue to play their part in saving water. Already we have seen a 22 per cent reduction in water usage, but the community knows that more can and must be done. I will work with the government and my constituents to find and promote innovative ways that households can save water.

The new Legislative Council electorates are but one of the reforms that will change the character of this place. The other principal reform is the enshrinement of the fundamental democratic principle of one vote, one value. As we have already seen, proportional representation means that a broader range of political parties are represented. Together these reforms, I believe, are a coming-of-age for this house. The reforms provide us as members with a unique opportunity and a responsibility to make this place a vibrant, exciting and dynamic chamber and a place where the challenges facing Victorian communities can be addressed.

I fundamentally believe that we can judge the health, maturity and decency of a community by how it treats its most vulnerable. A measure of society is how it responds and protects the desperate — that is, those who are most in need. A society is measured by how it advocates for the justice of its citizens, including those who are locked away without trial in Guantanamo Bay. I am keen to work with my colleagues and with those from other parties to ensure that we have debates and

outcomes in this house which contribute positively to the Victorian community — debates that reflect and help frame the values of the society in which we live.

I am also very conscious that the debates we have and the laws we support impact on the lives of Victorians. My own experience has taught me how important legal rights are for the vulnerable in our society. As a former solicitor and union official, I have had the privilege of representing people who have left an indelible impression on me. Their circumstances and struggles have played a large part in my ambition to be in this place.

Years ago I recall meeting a group of older migrant women who worked long hours cleaning and folding cloth nappies. After a full week of work these women were exhausted. They would spend their Saturdays, when they were not working, in each other's homes. All they could do was rest, make each other cups of tea and support each other until they had recovered sufficient energy to continue with their day. I was struck by their vulnerability. They could have easily been replaced by a multitude of other unskilled workers desperate to earn a wage to pay their bills. I was struck by the pittance of the wages they earned and by their inability to negotiate better wages and conditions. I was also struck by their dignity, stoic determination and good humour.

I remember the migrant women who worked at a racecourse for 20 or more years, doing the same work, week in and week out. They were told they were not entitled to long service leave because they were classified as casual employees and that only full-time and part-time employees were entitled to long service leave. A seemingly arbitrary decision made about their employment status ripped away their right to have a break after many years of loyal service.

In these and many, many other cases what stayed in my mind was the lack of control these workers had — their rights at work were limited to their legal rights. Their lack of recognised skills and non-English-speaking backgrounds meant they had very limited opportunities to negotiate working entitlements above the legal minimums. They were in the eyes of their employer and the eyes of the law easily replaced.

It was because of these workers that I became passionate about working to protect and enhance the legal rights of the most vulnerable. It was this drive that sparked my interest in working for the Victorian government and saw me work for nearly four years with the Attorney-General and Minister for Industrial Relations, Rob Hulls. As a senior adviser to the

industrial relations minister, it was with great pleasure that I saw reforms to the Long Service Leave Act — reforms that ensured that casual workers, such as those I met who were working at racecourses, would receive their long service leave. For me this was a real example of where changes to the law could improve the lives of ordinary working Victorians. I also had the privilege to see minimum legislative protections being delivered for other groups, such as owner-drivers and outworkers. As industrial relations minister and Attorney-General, Rob Hulls has shown me how a Victorian government can show leadership in representing those in need.

Looking forward over the next four years, those in need will include the victims of a labour market that is increasingly deregulated by WorkChoices. Those at risk include vulnerable workers, often without recognised skills, often from non-English-speaking backgrounds, who have little or no power in the job market — workers who have nothing but the legal minimums to determine how much they will receive in their pay packets. Those workers rely on us, their elected representatives, to provide them with a decent standard of living. I look forward to working to deliver on the Bracks government commitment to do what it can to protect workers from the excesses of WorkChoices.

In 150 years when our successors celebrate the 300th anniversary of this Parliament, I wonder how they will reflect on our contribution in this chamber. I hope we will be seen to have made a positive contribution to the debate about the rights of the workplace versus the rights of workers and their families. I hope in 150 years we will be seen as having contributed to an outcome that gets the balance right between time at work and time with friends and family. I hope we have contributed to a community where children have enough time with their parents and where there is enough money to pay the bills and have a decent standard of living.

I would like to thank the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union for their support and assistance. They are organisations that are at the coalface of the debate about work-life balance. WorkChoices is but one of a number of significant challenges facing us.

I have no doubt that in 150 years we will be judged harshly if we fail to reduce the production of carbon dioxide which will impact on the world we leave our successors. We may well be judged on how we respond to the obesity epidemic, an epidemic which means that, for the first time in 300 years, we have a generation

who may have a lower life expectancy than their parents. In an increasingly turbulent world with progressively more levels of uncertainty and change, I hope we commit to ensuring that basic standards and services, such as housing, are available to all. I hope we will be judged to have made a positive contribution to the creation of a society where people have the same rights and access to justice, health services and education regardless of wealth or background.

I would like to thank my parents who are in the gallery today for making the trip from Perth to share this occasion. And, most emphatically, I would like to thank my partner, Louise, for her ongoing and unwavering confidence in my ability to reach this place and make a contribution. Her confidence kept me strong when I wavered. I also have two beautiful young children whom I love dearly. They are a constant reminder of how privileged we all are because we have a chance to make a positive contribution to the type of society they will inherit.

Mr O'DONOHUE (Eastern Victoria) — It is an honour to stand here today. I am proud and humbled to be a Liberal Party representative, together with the Leader of the Opposition in this chamber, Mr Philip Davis, of the rich and diverse new electorate that is the Eastern Victoria Region. But perhaps the greatest privilege and the greatest responsibility for all members, regardless of political persuasion, is to be an active participant in the continuation of the great tradition that is our Victorian and Australian democracy.

This legislature is lucky to have inherited and continue what is perhaps the best democratic model the world has known, the Westminster system of government — a system of government that has been refined and improved over hundreds of years, a system which we inherited from England without having to go to war, a system which creates a framework for economic opportunity and individual liberty in this great state, and more broadly this great country. We have a responsibility to ensure these traditions continue so that future generations also enjoy the independence that we are so lucky to have. I am proud of the values of our society. It is not something from which we should resile.

It is easy to forget that countless people have died and continue to die for the right to vote and to enjoy the individual liberty that democracy provides. We only have to look at our immediate region, in Asia and the Pacific, to realise how fragile democracy can be. For that reason I lament the many thousands of people who decide either to not vote or to vote in an informal

fashion. One of our responsibilities as members is to teach an appreciation of our system and to behave in a fashion that is worthy of the responsible position we hold.

A key component of a successful democracy is the separation of powers between the Parliament, the executive and the judiciary. It is critical that the judiciary always remains free and independent from the influence of the government of the day. A feature of the independent judiciary is the security of tenure granted to them which helps to ensure their independence, but the judiciary cannot perform its job effectively without a well-resourced legal system. Individuals must have the capacity to defend themselves against the power of the state if they have been aggrieved or charged with a crime. I have worked as a lawyer in the criminal courts and have seen how the system works and treats people. The presumption of innocence for all, regardless of background or wealth, is critical to the interests of justice being served.

I take this opportunity to thank the many people who have assisted me throughout my life to enable me to be here today, in particular my family, my friends and the Liberal Party. My ancestors arrived in Victoria in 1855 on the *Atalanta* with the hopes and dreams of all migrants. In Victoria they found a land of opportunity where they were able to grow and to prosper. My parents, Clare and John O'Donohue, have lived a full life based around family, community and hard work. They have taught me the values of compassion, self-reliance and individual responsibility, but perhaps most importantly they have taught me the value of education, and, through education, the ability to think for oneself and to be able to make a contribution. I thank them for all the love and support they have shown me throughout my life.

I also thank my broader family and my friends, many of whom are here today, for their guidance over both recent and past times and in the long term. I am indeed lucky to have the support of so many loyal, intelligent and good people.

Finally, I thank the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party is a great volunteer organisation. By and large, its many thousands of members do not come from big business or from the top end of town, as some in our community believe. Like its members of Parliament, the party draws its membership from a wide diversity of backgrounds. It is this diversity of knowledge and life experience that gives it such strength. What draws us together is a belief in a core set of values and ideals. I thank all the party staff, the members of the Eastern Victoria Region council and all the volunteers who,

without reward or favour, give their time to support candidates and members of Parliament like me.

I want to thank the preselectors and the voters in Eastern Victoria for their faith in me. I will do everything I am able to repay that faith with hard work and results for the betterment of our community.

I also want to say that I am proud to be a Liberal, to be a member of a party which believes in individual liberty over collectivism, which encourages people to grow and aim for success rather than mediocrity and which believes it is through the encouragement of individual performance that prosperity for all can be achieved. Words such as 'excellence' and 'achievement' are not words of derision but rather qualities for which we can all strive. History clearly demonstrates that poverty and economic hardship are alleviated in society when markets are able to operate freely, when people are rewarded for their efforts and encouraged to be self-reliant.

The European social model of high regulation, high taxation and labour force rigidity, as evidenced in countries such as France, Germany and Italy, has resulted in many millions joining the ranks of the long-term unemployed. Conversely it is the introduction of free markets in China since the late 1970s and more recently in India that has resulted in the biggest mass movement of people out of poverty that the world has ever seen.

In the Australian context the economic liberalisation of the last 20 years has resulted in increased prosperity and record employment. When markets are able to operate freely, productivity increases, the economy prospers and the government's tax receipts consequently increase, providing the resources for a good health system, a good education system and the other services and infrastructure that Victorians rightly expect.

As a Liberal and as an Australian I also understand that at times the extremes of the market need to be tempered and that an effective social welfare system is important not only for social cohesion but also to protect those who are most vulnerable in our society. But of course it is difficult to provide opportunity for people without first giving them the tools for personal advancement. This is why it is critical we have a well-resourced education system which provides all young people with the skills they need to reach their full potential. This has to start with a good grounding in English and mathematics. I believe in selective schools for those who are gifted, as it is only equitable that they too are given the opportunity to reach their full potential.

If we look around the world we can see that a good education system is the foundation of virtually all successful and prosperous countries. One of the greatest achievements of Western society over the last century has been the emancipation and recognition of women as equals in every aspect of life. This has primarily been delivered through universal education. There is a correlation between those countries enjoying the greatest individual prosperity and liberty and those that treat all members of society as equals. In that context, I am proud of my late grandmother, Margot O'Donohue, who in 1933 was the first married woman in Victoria to graduate from Melbourne University with a bachelor of laws.

The amendments to the Victorian constitution made by the previous Parliament have created the new Eastern Victoria Region — a region and community in which I was born, was raised and have lived for most of my life. Eastern Victoria is lucky to encompass the Mornington Peninsula, parts of the Yarra Ranges, the Bass Coast, the Latrobe Valley and Gippsland. Eastern Victoria is blessed with an abundance of natural resources. Its agricultural produce, whether it be fruit and vegetables, dairy goods, beef, lamb or fish, provides the food for our cities and many of the export dollars required to maintain our high standard of living. It supplies the water for the homes and businesses of Melbourne, the timber with which we build, and the electricity which lights our industry, cities and towns. It supplies many of the wines we drink and some of the most beautiful and popular tourist destinations that Australia has to offer.

What makes Australia great is its many communities and the people and small businesses that make up those communities. Eastern Victoria is a microcosm of this, whether it is the retail shop proprietor, the nurse, teacher or tradesperson, the motel owner, the farmer, the sawlogger or restaurateur. It is these people who by and large generate the income and wealth for our communities and, in turn, for our families to grow and prosper.

But in spite of having many natural competitive advantages there are significant challenges which face the region. The Bass Coast and areas of the urban rural interface — such as Pakenham, Lilydale, Langwarrin and Somerville — are all experiencing rapid population growth. It is the responsibility of government to provide the health, police, transport, education and other services and infrastructure to allow these areas to grow and reach their potential. However, it is also important to have the right planning framework so that these communities which are growing do so in a way which provides clarity and confidence to all stakeholders and which recognises the needs of individual communities.

In other parts of the region we cannot allow short-term thinking to undermine the economic viability and vitality of our communities. People who rely on timber, coal, fish and other natural resources for employment need to be provided with the certainty to invest for the future so as to provide for themselves and their families. Their livelihoods should not be compromised because of the lobbying of the noisy few, nor should we, their representatives, make long-term decisions about their futures based on the electoral cycle.

It is a fact that Victoria's base load power for the foreseeable future will come from the Latrobe Valley's brown coal industry. This resource gives Victoria a great competitive advantage. The challenge for us is to make this resource cleaner and more efficient so as to reduce its environmental footprint. Taxation and artificial renewable energy quotas are not the answer to addressing greenhouse gas emissions. They will merely drive up the cost of power, hurting disproportionately the poor and the vulnerable. Rather we need to work with the coal industry and the communities that it supports to encourage the development of technologies that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Science and technology, when properly encouraged with the appropriate market signals, will deliver the efficiencies required.

Water and its scarcity is the issue of our time. The Eastern Victoria Region is at the heart of the water debate and water scarcity. The rivers and catchment of Eastern Victoria provide most of the water for the homes and industry of Melbourne. The irrigated farms of Gippsland, the Mornington Peninsula and the Yarra Ranges produce much of the state's agricultural output, and the Latrobe River provides the water to cool the Latrobe Valley's power stations. These resources are overstretched.

This is partly a result of the drought, but it is also a product of the inability to use our water more carefully. For example, it is disgraceful that whilst our dams are emptying and our paddocks are parched, an average of 430 million litres of partially treated sewage is discharged every day at Gunnamatta Beach on the Mornington Peninsula. This represents 42 per cent of Melbourne's wastewater. This is not only environmental vandalism but a tragic waste of a precious resource. Water infrastructure and its upgrade is only one of many areas that need attention in the region. The Bass Coast and Western Port highways need further duplication to Wonthaggi and Hastings respectively, the Lilydale bypass needs to be constructed, and our rural roads and bridges require proper maintenance.

There has been too much cost shifting to local councils at a time when the farmer ratepayers of rural councils are struggling with drought. Long-term growth that is economically and environmentally sustainable and evenly spread requires long-term commitment and the courage to develop a plan that lasts beyond the next electoral cycle.

For a predominantly rural region such as Eastern Victoria natural disasters are a fact of life. Sadly, flood, drought and fire are well known to its people and to its environment. In recent weeks much of eastern Victoria has been on fire or is currently alight. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to all the firefighters and other volunteers who have done such a wonderful job in the face of such adversity. These fires are a reminder to us all of the complexity involved in properly managing our forests.

I believe that it is not responsible conservation to declare a new park, evict the people who have made their livelihood from the land and then lock it up until the noxious weeds and undergrowth have developed to such an extent that when fires start, they burn uncontrollably for weeks. Nor is it responsible conservation to ban logging in Victoria's forests, then source our timber needs from countries that practise logging with little or no government regulation and little or no concern for the environment. Surely a responsible environmentalist would advocate that Australia be self sufficient in all its timber requirements. Our challenge is to not accept fashionable orthodoxies.

I look forward to working with the Liberal team to hold the government to account and to present the people of Victoria with an alternative government led by the Leader of the Opposition in the other place, Ted Baillieu. I welcome the opportunity that being a member of this chamber provides me to work for the betterment of all the people of Eastern Victoria Region on these and all issues of concern.

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — Mr President, I would like to begin by congratulating you on your election as President of this house. Election to this parliamentary chamber is a great privilege for any Victorian, but the further election as Presiding Officer of the Legislative Council is a great honour, one that I am sure you are most worthy of and will carry out with great distinction.

It is a tremendous honour for me to stand here tonight and deliver this inaugural speech to the Parliament of Victoria. Ever since I was a boy I have loved state politics and had a deep desire to participate in it as a

state parliamentarian. Indeed it is a tremendous honour for all of us here in this Parliament because from almost 5.25 million Victorians, only 128 people are elected to manage the affairs of this state.

I believe that state politics is by far the most representative level of government in Australia and by far the most 'in-touch' level of government and the most representative of our community. At the state political level you do not just talk about facilitating a project or planning a project, you can do the lot — plan it, build it, open it and run it. State politics is about the full governance of communities. It is a perfect example of how people can directly govern their own affairs, including from tiny micro issues to major macro affairs. As I said, it is a tremendous honour for me to be able to be in this chamber tonight in this capacity.

I joined the Liberal Party in 1990 as an ordinary, suburban high school boy who had a deep affection for his state and a great desire to better its position in our country and in the world. I believed then and I believe now that Victorians should not just accept that, like other first-world, cool-climate states or provinces, we are bound to eventually be surpassed economically and in numbers by sun-drenched states to our north and west. I have never believed that being second best or just near the top is good enough for Victoria. Our state has a proud history, and I believe it can have a dynamic future, too.

When I joined the Liberal Party in 1990 Victoria was a mess. One in eight people were unemployed, and we had government debt of over \$30 billion. Financial collapses in Pyramid Building Society, the State Bank of Victoria, the Victorian Economic Development Corporation, Tricontinental and others devastated our economy and left a deep scar on the psyche and reputation of Victorian business. Thousands of Victorian families were ruined, and I for one remember wondering in year 12 how I would ever get a job. These events spurred me on to get active in politics, as it was clear that if our state continued along the path it was going, indeed Victoria's best days would be behind us for good.

The early 1990s had a profound political impact on many, particularly on me. With total financial collapse of the state not an unrealistic situation it became obvious that our state had learnt the hard way about the absolute necessity for good financial management. Only through a successful economy can government pay for better transport services, better health care and education and emergency services, and have the capital to provide improved long-term environmental outcomes. The responsible management of taxpayers'

money must be the primary goal of every government. Every politician must remember that government money is indeed taxpayers' money and this money does not grow on a magic cash tree.

I believed in 1990, and I still believe today, that only the Liberal philosophy truly respects that any moneys spent by government are moneys attained through taxes on a hardworking community. To treat taxpayers' money with frivolous disregard is to treat Victorians with contempt. I am proud to say that my first full-time job in politics was with former Premier Jeff Kennett. He and his government worked exceptionally hard to restore the confidence of a beaten and comatose economy.

Despite the Liberal-National government of the 1990s facing exceptionally difficult circumstances, it dramatically turned around the condition of our economy and, importantly, gave Victorians hope that our state's best days were not behind us.

As Victorian governments of the 21st century approach the future, I believe the acceptance as the norm of high taxation, both commercial and personal, must end. A government that prides itself on maintaining huge budget surpluses without making any real effort to reduce the taxation burden is engaging in the boast of a thief. A simple, basic rule for every Victorian government should be that it makes every effort not to tax the community more than is necessary to run the affairs of the state — that is the Liberal way.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr GUY — The Liberal philosophy is and always has been about reducing the taxation burden, reducing taxes on families, on singles — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member will address his contribution through the Chair; he will not provoke asides. I ask the minister to cease interjecting.

Mr GUY — The Liberal philosophy is and always has been about reducing the taxation burden — reducing tax on families, on singles, on those on a fixed income and on business. Victoria will not maintain a competitive position as a desirable destination for migrants, for new business, for new investment or for those who are already here if we continue to trundle along as a cool climate, highly taxed and over-regulated economy.

Our state is facing significant long-term challenges as a desirable location for business and migration, not just from our old sparring partner New South Wales but now from Queensland and Western Australia as well.

One view is that we should choose not to compete with other states in this commonwealth for investment, jobs and new citizens, but unfortunately some other states do not share this approach. I believe that as we start to move into the 21st century, Victoria should be aiming to be the lowest taxing state in Australia and as such to use low taxation as a key weapon in maintaining an economic edge over other states and indeed other economies in the Asia-Pacific region.

If we were to provide future generations with just one tool for long-term social and economic success, it would be an all-party agreement on keeping Victoria the lowest taxing state in Australia — an agreement that all Victorian governments would whenever practicable maintain this competitive edge for Victoria. This would provide a huge incentive for new investment, for new jobs, for new research, for new migrants to come to Victoria and for us to continue to grow our state.

I am an average suburban boy. I was raised in a typical three-bedroom house in the suburbs of Melbourne. I went to the local high school, I rode my bike up and down the hills of Montmorency and I played street cricket — poorly — with the other kids in the court where we lived. Over the last few years some have begun to assert that this way of life, the life of suburban or township Australia, is somehow dated or totally unsustainable — that our cities and towns are somehow examples of indulgent excess. I believe otherwise. In the suburbs of our cities — Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo — and in towns across Victoria lie hundreds of thousands of success stories: Victorians who have found their patch of land and built the dream on which they wish to raise their families. Suburban life and town life is something that we should cherish. It is an endearing image of Australia and a powerful image of why so many have come and others still want to come to live in Australia.

Population and planning policy is not just about drawing lines on a map or the arbitrary limitation of the growth of our cities and towns. While all growth should be appropriate and sustainable, I believe that government should be standing up for the way of life that so many Australians have and want to continue to have, not seeking to limit it. There is no doubt that locking up a lot of land around our cities has added to the recent massive rises in property values. While this may be good for some — for young families, young couples or other people seeking to get a start in life — it is making the great Australian dream unaffordable for many.

In my time in this Parliament I hope to stand out as a staunch defender of the suburban or town life that so

many of us know. I hope to be able to provide new opportunities for other Victorians to continue that style of family life and to ensure that if people want to live the great Australian dream, they have the opportunity to do so. Further, I hope to be able to contribute to population and planning policy that is not just about maps or numbers but is also about the preservation and expansion of the Australian way of life and giving more Victorians the chance to live the great Australian dream.

As a newly elected parliamentarian I want to state loudly and proudly to this chamber that I am a Christian. My faith has always been something that has given me personal strength and guidance, and it has always been a powerfully positive force in my life. My newish local church, Scots Presbyterian in the city, is one of the few places I can go and completely unwind — and it is not just because I can turn off my mobile phone for an hour on Sundays. The church engages in many activities that help those less fortunate, preaching tolerance and respect and working for good in our community. But what has concerned me over a number of years is the growing acceptance of ridicule and denigration of the Christian church in sections of the entertainment industry, the media and even sections within government.

It astounds me that the desecration of the crucifix can be considered art. I am dumbfounded that some contemporary movies scripted with no basis of evidence and questioning the authenticity of the Bible can be painted off as reasoned fact. Christianity, and indeed all religions, should be treated with reverence and respect. In Australia our society has prospered and succeeded with the help of others but particularly with the help of the church. Over many years churches within Australia have provided a strong community focal point. They have been a help to people who are less fortunate or in trouble and have helped to give many thousands of kids a terrific upbringing through Sunday schools. As we approach Christmas I would just remind this house and all Victorians that what we are taking holidays to celebrate or to recognise is the birth of Jesus Christ. While the chance to give presents and to be around family is a wonderful gift in itself, I hope the teaching to our young of the true meaning of Christmas is never lost or banned by overzealous, politically correct politicians or bureaucrats. I for one will be most vocal against any moves to lessen the significance of the church within our society.

I hope that as a member of this Parliament I will be part of an elected group of people who always stand up for the three powerful things that unite our nation and our state: democracy, the rule of law and having respect for

all people. These three institutions are the principles of a decent society and are principles which we should export with pride. Australia has accepted more people from more parts of the world than almost any other nation on earth, many of them settling here in Victoria — and we have built a successful society from many different peoples because of the institutions that underpin that society. However, in our world today no-one can deny that there are new tensions emerging which have profound ramifications, particularly for settler nations like Australia.

As the son of a post-war migrant I would simply say to anyone coming to this fabulous country, and more particularly to this wonderful state, that we believe in democracy and the rule of law. Australia believes in tolerance and respect for everyone's religion, for the total equality of both genders and for all our people's freedoms and liberties.

I would like to draw to the end of my inaugural speech by expressing my deep thanks to the people of the new Northern Metropolitan Region. While the sheer size of the new upper house regions will undoubtedly present all of us as Legislative Councillors with some challenges, given each new region has a population of over 630 000 people, I am truly grateful for the opportunity to represent an area of Melbourne that I was born in and still live in. Further, I am honoured to be the first person to represent the Liberal Party in suburbs that have never before had a local Liberal member of Parliament.

Democracy is a wonderful thing and being elected to serve as a representative of the people is most humbling. So to all my new constituents I say thank you for the chance to be one of your local members. I am also indebted to a number of my good friends, many of whom are here tonight, for their help and advice. While I cannot acknowledge them all, I would particularly like to mention Nick McGowan, Scott Ryan, Stuart Eaton, Scott Pearce, Michael Brennan, Amanda Lean and Sally Carrick.

I also acknowledge the tireless work done by all members of the Northern Metropolitan Region Liberal campaign team led by Stuart McCraith, David Taylor, Nick Bromhead and Tony Snell, and to the two other Liberal candidates for the region, Dino De Marchi and Emilia Arnus for their hard work. Further, I would like to pass on my thanks to Bill Forwood, Peter McKenna, Wayne Phillips, Peter McWilliam and the member for South-West Coast in the other place, Denis Napthine, for their many years of friendship, political advice and support.

Like many people who have been successful in being elected to public office I have done so with the very strong support of my family. I would like to place on record my deep gratitude to my parents, Vera and Chris, and my brother, Darren, for the love and support they have shown me, particularly over the 16 years that I have been active in the Liberal Party. My parents gave my brother and me the best gift possible: a loving, caring, stable family home in which to grow up. For the sacrifices they made so that they could achieve this I am eternally grateful, as I am for their constant love, support and tolerance.

On 31 March next year I will acquire another set of parents and a sister-in-law in Steve, Lorraine and Chelsea Stoikos. I am sure there is some residual doubt about their daughter and sister marrying a politician, but they have been totally supportive over a period of time, for which I am very appreciative. Like my parents, my soon-to-be in-laws, Steve and Lorraine, have worked hard in their lives to raise their two daughters and, again like my parents, they are exceptional role models in family life for me to follow.

I would also like to mention my grandparents who have always been very supportive of everything I have done in life. I would like to pass on my thanks to my paternal grandfather, Tom Guy, and also to my grandmother, Lola, who only very recently passed away. My maternal grandparents, Ivan and Maree Naumenko, have also been wonderful to me. They endured so much to come to this country with a young family, to leave their lives behind and start all over again. It is a common but amazing story for so many Australians who came here after World War II. While my grandfather passed away some time ago, I know he would be proud of the fact that one of his grandsons has been elected to Parliament and as such has the chance to be the first person to utter some brief words in an Australian Parliament in his native tongue, Ukrainian. So with your indulgence, President:

Як Австралієць із Українського похереження я є дуже горди бути тут звами.

Українська спільнота спричинилась до розвитку культурного і господапського жиммья в Абстралії.

Хаї наші дві країну далі будуть блиські дружі.

And in English: I am exceptionally proud to be here as an Australian with Ukrainian heritage. The Ukrainian community has contributed much to the culture and development of Australia and today our two nations are great friends.

Finally, but most importantly, I would like to acknowledge and thank my soon-to-be wife, Renae. In the time she has known me I have stood for two preselections, which I have won, and two elections, where I have lost one and won one, and throughout these events and many others she has been there as an unwavering support and strength. I love her very much and cannot wait to get married in March next year.

I am proud to stand here as a Liberal member of Parliament. I am doubly proud that the Liberal Party has never shifted from its founding ideology to achieve electoral success or community acceptance. What Liberals believe in our heads is what we believe in our hearts. The Liberal Party stands as a beacon of hope to all those Victorians who know that we will not succeed by being a high-taxing, overregulated, cool-climate economy near the bottom of the world, and that a vibrant and dynamic community in the 21st century will not be sustained with complacency in government. During this past election I believe that many Victorians saw the Liberal Party reclaim the title as the party of ideas. We reclaimed our vibrancy and the hunger for government.

If I may conclude with a quote from a politician whom I regard with great esteem, the former Quebec Premier, Rene Levesque. He said to the people under similar circumstances:

If I understand you well, you're saying, 'Until the next time'.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan).

Debate adjourned until next day.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Punt Road: clearway

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — Before I begin I would like to congratulate all those who have made their inaugural speeches today. I think we have heard speeches of a very high calibre, which augurs well for what is to come in debate in this chamber. My congratulations to all who spoke this evening.

My question is directed to the Minister for Roads and Ports in another place. The traffic congestion along Punt Road is a problem that affects thousands of commuters every day. Local residents and business traders alike know the daily frustration of travelling along Punt

Road. Vehicles travelling in both directions remain at a standstill in heavily congested traffic during the non-peak periods. This is an ongoing problem that could be easily solved if the state government would act and make this road a clearway at all times. For months now I have called on the state government to make Punt Road a clearway at all times, but still no action has been taken.

We now have a new minister for roads and I hope she does something constructive about it as a matter of urgency. Each day this major arterial causes time-consuming delays for people on their way to and from work, yet the state government has done nothing. It continually fails to address this issue, let alone implement a strategy to solve it. People living or working in the area should not be restricted by the Bracks government's inability to resolve this very simple problem. I ask the minister to implement a clearway in Punt Road in both directions at all times as a matter of urgency.

Schools: relocatable classrooms

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, Mr Lenders, and I take this opportunity to congratulate the minister on his elevation to the education portfolio. The matter I raise concerns the recent government policy announcement to replace relocatable school buildings with permanent buildings. The government has made a \$1.9 billion commitment over the next four years to deliver a modern school system for Victorian children. This has been highlighted by the Bracks government's commitment to rebuilding Victorian schools. This commitment to education spreads far and wide across Victoria and impacts on many areas of the state.

What this commitment will do is ensure that those schools that have not had the opportunity to replace relocatables, have not had the benefit of having permanent buildings and have not had the necessary capital investment will see big changes in this term of the Bracks government. I am particularly pleased that some of the schools that will benefit from this are in my electorate. Harcourt Primary School, where the Premier made this announcement during the campaign, is in my electorate of Northern Victoria Region. Mooroopna North Primary School is also in my electorate, and it is one with which my nieces and nephews who live in Mooroopna have been associated.

The action that I am asking the minister to take is to ensure that these schools and others in rural and regional areas get the recognition and investment they

deserve and ensure that this term of government sees these schools receive funding for permanent buildings.

Total fire bans: departmental advice

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — Tonight I wish to raise for the attention of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in another place an issue that was brought to my attention by a constituent, Mr Bob Hepe, of Buldah. For the convenience of members, Buldah is a small settlement in far East Gippsland. It is about 48 kilometres from the East Gippsland town of Cann River, close to the New South Wales border and very close to the Croajingalong National Park, which is a heavily forested area, with both plantation and native forest.

Mr Hepe emailed me on Tuesday, 7 November, reporting an incident that he came across the day before, 6 November — I might add, a day of total fire ban. He left his property to travel to New South Wales on that morning and came across a group of people in four-wheel-drives who were employed by the local catchment management authority to conduct willow tree damage prevention activities around the Buldah area. He returned home to Buldah at about 11.30 p.m. that day and saw the vehicles and men in them camped on private property, just below a low bridge close to the Buldah River. I quote from his 7 November email to me:

At that time they were in the bush with a large fire blazing. The fire consisted of approximately seven or eight logs sawed into lengths about a metre or longer piled up into a triangle with the pointed end pointing skywards. The fire was well alight, with sparks and flames roaring into the air, despite it being located in relatively thick bushland and on private property at a time when a total fire ban was in place.

Of course Mr Hepe was aghast that a fire of this magnitude was lit on private land on a day of total fire ban. With some difficulty he finally made contact with people the next morning to report this particular incident and was assured by local authorities that it was illegal to have such a fire and that prosecution would take place. However, later that day he was notified by a Department of Sustainability and Environment official from Melbourne that no charges would be laid against the workers as they had lit the fire for warmth and comfort. He was assured that if somebody can prove that a fire has been lit for the purposes of providing warmth and comfort, despite it being a day of total fire ban, that is quite permissible.

The residents of East Gippsland, and I am sure those in much of the north-east as well, would be horrified to learn that it is legal to light a fire in the open on a total fire ban day if it can be proved that the fire is for

warmth and comfort. I think this particular ruling is absurd, and I ask the Minister for Police and Emergency Services to review this particular provision, because certainly in my mind and the minds of the many people I represent in bushfire prone areas, no such fires should be lit for any reason on any day of total fire ban.

Drought: bore water access

Mr VOGELS (Western Victoria) — I raise a matter for the Minister for Agriculture in the other place, the Honourable Joe Helper — and I congratulate him on his appointment to that portfolio responsibility. My issue concerns the devastating drought that is impacting and will continue to impact enormously on the viability of rural and regional Victoria. We know that hay, silage, feed grain et cetera are nearly impossible to access, even if you can afford it, but it will be the lack of access to water which will decimate many farmers. As we know, very little if any runoff took place over the last winter or last spring, and farm dams are fast depleting.

During the 1967–68 drought many drought relief bores and standpipes were opened across country Victoria to provide emergency water for farmers and local communities. Over the years most of these have been decommissioned, fallen into disrepair or had locks placed upon them, and are now recognised only as observation bores. In the lead-up to the election the Bracks government promised \$3 million for farmers and \$1 million for townships to access emergency bore water supplies.

The timing has become urgent. The time for more meetings, consultations and discussions about whose responsibility it is to actually open these bores is long past. In my area of south-west Victoria farmers are already de-stocking and, unless water can be sourced urgently, there is concern that the flow-on effect to rural townships, businesses, dairy factories et cetera will be irretrievable. It seems the Bracks government is prepared to put in so-called super-pipes and tap underground aquifers for major population centres, but at this stage it is unwilling to apply the same criteria for farmers and smaller local communities.

The action I seek from the minister is to protect Victoria's agricultural sector, which is worth billions of dollars to the state every year — shake the bureaucrats out of their trees and get our bores and standpipes opened. Every day lost will see another farmer shut the gate, and many of them will never return to their farms. I have no doubt that the biggest challenge for the minister will be getting approval from the

bureaucracy — the Department of Sustainability and Environment and water authorities. However, that is the urgent action I seek from the minister.

Beechworth Secondary College: funding

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — The adjournment matter I wish to raise tonight is with the Minister for Education, Mr Lenders, and it concerns the facilities at the Beechworth Secondary College. The action I seek from the minister is to provide capital funding to rebuild and modernise the education facilities at that school.

I recently visited staff, students and parents at the school. It is patently clear that it has served its community long and well, but it is very much in need of modernisation. The students, staff and parents at that school were very excited to hear about Labor's Victorian schools plan — a plan for the largest overhaul of schools in Victoria's history — which was announced by the Premier recently. It will provide improved, modern learning facilities for thousands of Victorian students. Through this plan Labor will invest an extra \$1.9 billion in education capital, boosting by 75 per cent the average expenditure on education facilities each year by the Bracks government to almost four times the average expenditure by the former Liberal government. Importantly, half the projects identified as a priority through Labor's plan are in country Victoria.

That brings me back to the education facilities at Beechworth Secondary College. I ask the education minister to provide capital funding for rebuilding and modernising education facilities at Beechworth Secondary College in my new electorate of Northern Victoria Region.

Schools: computer access

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — I would like to address my question to the Minister for Education. It goes to the Victorian schools plan launched by the Bracks government during the election campaign. It highlights the need for increased access to computers for Victorian schools. I am pleased to say this builds on the work of the government in its first two terms, where it met its commitment to deliver one computer for every five students. However, more needs to be done.

As members know, new technology is incredibly important today, and we need to ensure that children have access to that new technology in order to prepare themselves for the work force in the future. That is why part of the Victorian schools plan, which was launched

during the election campaign, provides a \$1.9 billion investment for school infrastructure. It also highlights the need to invest in computers and technology, and there is an allocation of \$28 million to ensure that more children have access over the next four years. This will provide more than 25 000 computers to our school system and double our commitment to computers to bring the computer-student ratio down even further.

I ask the minister to ensure that the new computers and technology are rolled out as soon as possible so that the maximum benefit for Victorian children is gained from this program.

Bushfires: government assistance

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment debate issue is for the attention of the Premier. It concerns the horrendous bushfires that have raged and continue to burn in north-east Victoria and Gippsland and the need for both short-term and long-term support for the affected communities. I know the Premier has visited the affected areas to show support for those communities, as have the Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Minister for Police and Emergency Services, the shadow Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change and local Liberal members, Mr Philip Davis, Mrs Petrovich, Mr Tilley and I. However, these communities need more than a show of support; they need real measures that will provide immediate and direct assistance to families and assistance for community recovery.

There will be no easy answer or a simple way to assist these families and communities to recover from the horror they have faced over the past 19 days and the threat they will face throughout the entire summer. Today is day 19, which means that currently the fires have been burning for 19 days. During bushfires local communities throw away their calendars and instead mark time by the number of days the fires have burnt. For many families under threat Christmas celebrations have had to be set aside. Community events have been cancelled, and Christmas Day this year will simply be known as 'day 25'.

Local councils in the region have been doing a marvellous job to hold communities together and will need assistance to continue to do so. During talks with communities some of the suggestions made for the government to give both immediate and long-term assistance include providing trauma and financial counselling, funding for the replacement of fences, including manpower for the construction of the fences, funding to local government for the replacement of infrastructure damaged by fire and firefighting efforts

and restoration of areas such as sporting grounds that have been used as staging areas for the Country Fire Authority, an immediate commitment to cover the running costs of the municipal emergency control centres, funding for a range of strategies for social and economic recovery through a community recovery strategy and the provision of recovery officers for the implementation of that plan, funding to attract tourists back to the region and sponsorship for festivals et cetera, as local businesses will not be in a position to sponsor them in the coming year.

My request of the Premier is for the government to implement and fund a range of strategies to assist the bushfire-affected communities to survive and recover from these horrendous fires.

Schools: relocatable classrooms

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — I also raise a matter for the consideration of the Minister for Education, Mr Lenders. During the election campaign the Premier announced that if re-elected a Labor government would guarantee the future of 40 small rural schools as part of a \$70 million commitment. These 40 schools currently comprise relocatable buildings, and the government is committed to replacing them with permanent buildings. This announcement was widely welcomed during the campaign, and I know the Drouin West Primary School and Eagle Point Primary School communities will appreciate further advice from the government as to when the promised upgrades are likely to be undertaken. I ask the minister to provide me with further details of when the planning will commence for the work to be undertaken and when relevant communities in eastern Victoria can expect the nominated schools to be upgraded.

Education is the Bracks government's no. 1 priority. Since 1999 Labor has invested an additional \$6.3 billion in education and training. That has paid for an extra 7300 teachers and staff in government schools and has reduced class sizes. The benefits have been clear, with Victorian students consistently improving their literacy and numeracy skills, especially in the prep to grade 2 levels. Since 1999 Labor has more than doubled education capital spending to an average of \$265 million per year. We have started or completed more than 400 school building projects, including 57 new or replacement schools, and in the current budget year the government increased education capital investment by almost 40 per cent on the last financial year to a record \$448 million.

During the election campaign Labor committed to continuing to rebuild our schools and acknowledged the vital role that small-to-medium-sized rural schools play in their communities. Labor recognises that there are many schools with stable, albeit small, enrolments that have very limited or no permanent facilities. Living schools are critical to the vitality of local communities, but local communities, especially those in rural and regional Victoria, also depend on the existence of other kinds of social and physical infrastructure. The government's commitment to replacing relocatable with permanent school buildings is part of a wider \$195 million investment across the regions.

The Provincial Victoria: Moving Forward — Not Back investment package also commits funds to the provision of two new V/Locity trains and 14 new carriages, a \$12.6 million investment for the resources industries, including the establishment of a clean coal authority in the Latrobe Valley, as well as funds to strengthen the agricultural sector. All this contributes to supporting the local regional communities, and schools are part of it. The redevelopment of these small primary schools will create local jobs that will also benefit families and children.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I am not aware of the question.

Mr SCHEFFER — I ask the minister to provide me with further details on when planning on the work to be undertaken will commence and when relevant communities in eastern Victoria can expect the nominated schools to be upgraded.

Building industry: warranty insurance

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission in the other place. It relates to the issue of builders warranty insurance. There is no doubt that the minister is aware — this issue would have come up in the first 18 days of his tenure as finance minister — that in 2002, following the failure in the insurance market, the government, his predecessor and the former Minister for Planning put in place a new form of builders warranty insurance. Many in the building industry have formed the view that that form of builders warranty insurance heavily favours the insurance companies while providing no protection for consumers. As a consequence of that an organisation known as the Builders Collective was formed to advocate for changes to the scheme that the government put in place. It includes people such as Mr Phil Dwyer

and Mr Andris Blums, who have advocated for changes to the builders warranty insurance scheme.

In 2005 the Treasurer initiated a Victorian Competition and Efficiency Commission inquiry into a number of issues in the building area, including builders warranty insurance. At that time Vero Insurance, which is one of the leading providers of builders warranty insurance in Victoria, threatened legal action against representatives of the Builders Collective in relation to the evidence that they were going to give before the VCEC inquiry. The Leader of the Opposition in the other place raised this matter with the Treasurer at the time. It is in a similar vein that I speak this evening and raise this matter for the attention of the finance minister.

Mr Blums, who has been a strong advocate on builders warranty insurance, has received a letter from Sparke Helmore, a legal firm acting on behalf of Paul Jamieson at Vero Insurance, raising the possibility of a defamation action as a consequence of emails that Mr Blums sent to the former Minister for Finance on the issue of builders warranty insurance. I am concerned that the previous action taken in relation to the VCEC inquiry and this letter to Mr Blums constitutes an attempt to intimidate builder advocates in terms of the information that they discuss and raise with the minister.

What I seek from the minister is that he acquaint himself with the history of this issue and these attempts by this insurance company to intimidate builders on this issue. There are previous records in *Hansard* and previous correspondence with the Treasurer and, I believe, his predecessor. I ask that the minister acquaint himself with that and be cognisant of this issue when he is in discussions with these companies on builders warranty insurance.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — On a point of order, President, I do not know if you heard the last question, but in the adjournment debate you do not normally get a matter raised where the member asks simply that the minister acquaint himself with an issue. There was no request for action other than that the minister acquaint himself with the issue. I do not believe it is within the standing orders of the house.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I think the minister is correct: the member has to ask for a specific result.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — I ask therefore that the minister investigate the matter and the way this insurance company has dealt with builder advocates in relation to correspondence sent to the former Minister

for Finance, and take that into account in his future dealings with this company.

Mrs Coote — On a point of order, President, standing order 4.11, 'Rules relating to the daily adjournment debate', states that members may:

- (a) make a complaint; or
- (b) make a request; or
- (c) pose a query.

I suggest the member has posed a query.

Mr Viney — On the point of order, President, there has been a practice in this place — and I and many others on all sides have been subject to it — that members seek action from a minister. The member clearly has not sought any particular action. By way of interjection I suggested that the member could ask the minister to have a cup of tea. What he sought was hardly action from the minister. It was for the minister to look at something, and looking into something is not action.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — On the point of order, President, the action I sought, in response to your question, was for the minister to investigate the matter and take it into account in his future dealings with this company.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Rich-Phillips is in order. However, I remind the house that in future, matters raised should be specific.

Rail: Noble Park station

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Public Transport in another place, Ms Kosky, concerning the Noble Park train station. Noble Park has been a community of need for a few years now but things are beginning to turn around in Noble Park. The advent of CityLink, for example, has inspired a lot of confidence in the people of Noble Park. It has enhanced the strategic importance of the suburb. Any Noble Parkian driving up Heatherton Road towards Endeavour Hills or along Railway Parade towards Dandenong could not help but be inspired by this massive project. The benefits of this are already beginning to flow through to this area in terms of infrastructure spending in the Noble Park region. The Noble Park infrastructure plan is being formulated at the moment. It has also inspired confidence in the people of Noble Park, as have projects such as the Paddy O'Donoghue Community Centre. This is a

fantastic, brand new community centre, a centre which Noble Park residents desperately needed.

Notwithstanding all this good news, Mr Rich-Phillips will back me up when I say that the Noble Park train station is not very commuter friendly. There are some security concerns in Noble Park, and there have been some issues around the train station over the past six months or so. In light of that, I ask that the minister look at upgrading the train station through better lighting and security.

Responses

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and State Development) — I received a query from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Mrs Coote. I am pleased to congratulate the member on still being the Deputy Leader of the Opposition — I do not think anyone else could do the job as well.

Mr Vogels — That's in *Hansard*!

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — Yes, it is. Mrs Coote asked a question for the Minister for Roads and Ports in the other place in relation to a clearway for Punt Road in both directions. I will pass that request on to the relevant minister for consideration.

Ms Darveniza asked a question for the Minister for Education in relation to relocatable school buildings in rural areas. She was seeking action in relation to that. I will pass that question on to the Minister for Education for direct response to the member.

Mr Hall asked a question for the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in another place. I think it was in relation to the community of Buldah.

Mr Hall — B-u-l-d-a-h.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I was wondering about the spelling — it is important that you spell that one correctly. The matter concerned a report the member received about a large fire blazing on a total fire ban day and the way that was handled by the relevant department. It sounds as though there is an issue there, and I am happy to pass that on to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services for response to the member.

Mr Vogels asked a question for the new Minister for Agriculture in another place. I too would like to congratulate that minister on his appointment and put that on the record. I am sure he will be a very good Minister for Agriculture. I will pass Mr Vogels's message in regard to opening bores in various parts of

regional Victoria on to the minister for response direct to the member.

Ms Broad asked a question for the Minister for Education in relation to Beechworth Secondary College and modernising its facilities. I am very happy to pass that on to the Minister for Education for response.

Mr David Davis was not here to ask his question when called by you, President, so I will not respond to him.

Mrs Coote — On a point of order, President, that was my mistake — I had listed him by mistake. I would like that recorded.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister, to continue.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I am very glad the member cleared that up — I would hate to see any tension between the two of them.

Mr Tee asked a question for the Minister for Education in relation to more computers in schools. That is a priority for the Bracks government, and I am certainly happy to pass that request on to the Minister for Education for response to the member.

Ms Lovell asked a question for the Premier in relation to bushfire assistance. She would be aware that a very significant package has been announced by the Premier for bushfire assistance, going to many millions of dollars. This is not an issue we want to play politics with — it is a responsibility of both the state and federal governments. However I will pass on the member's message in the spirit I hope the request was made, for response to her.

Mr Scheffer asked a question of the Minister for Education relating to the completion of the upgrade of 40 small rural schools. I am happy to pass that request on to the relevant minister.

Mr Rich-Phillips did not actually ask a question; he made a comment about wanting the Minister for Finance, WorkCover and the Transport Accident Commission in the other place to acquaint himself with builders warranty insurance. I am sure that the minister is already acquainted with it, but the member then corrected himself and asked some sort of question following the point of order that was raised. I will pass his revised question on to the Minister for Finance for him to respond to the honourable member.

Mr Somyurek asked a question of the Minister for Public Transport in the other place in relation to the upgrade of the Noble Park train station, and I will pass

ADJOURNMENT

Tuesday, 19 December 2006

COUNCIL

45

that request on to the relevant minister for response to the honourable member.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 9.51 p.m.

