

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

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

Wednesday, 20 December 2006

(Extract from book 1)

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The Lieutenant-Governor

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(*Assembly*): Mr Brooks, Mr Carli, Mr Jasper, Mr McIntosh and Mr Thompson.

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Assembly — Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Mr R. W. Purdey
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FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Mr PETER HALL

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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
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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
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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

WEDNESDAY, 20 DECEMBER 2006

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE	
<i>Photographing of proceedings</i>	47
RULING BY THE CHAIR	
<i>Inaugural speeches</i>	47
STATE TAXATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (HOUSING AFFORDABILITY) BILL	
<i>Introduction and first reading</i>	47
<i>Second reading</i>	120
ACTING PRESIDENTS.....	47
PAPERS.....	47
MEMBERS STATEMENTS	
<i>Liberal Party: election result</i>	47
<i>Australian Labor Party: election result</i>	48
<i>Bushfires: Gippsland and north-eastern Victoria</i>	48
<i>Bushfires: volunteers</i>	48
<i>Bushfires: fuel reduction</i>	49
<i>Bushfires: Gippsland</i>	49
<i>Bushfires: emergency services</i>	49
<i>Eastern Victoria Region: election result</i>	49
<i>Greens: leadership</i>	50
<i>Northern Metropolitan Region: election result</i>	50
<i>Bushfires: ABC radio</i>	50
<i>Western Victoria Region: election result</i>	51
<i>South Eastern Metropolitan Region: election result</i>	51
WATER: MANAGEMENT.....	51
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE	
<i>Disability services: supported accommodation</i>	79, 87
<i>Schools: Dandenong</i>	80
<i>Planning: Stonington Mansion</i>	81
<i>Bushfires: school closures</i>	82
<i>Planning: local government</i>	82
<i>Planning: government policy</i>	83
<i>Manufacturing: employment</i>	84
<i>Housing: affordability</i>	85
<i>Forests: threatened species</i>	86
<i>Aboriginals: government initiatives</i>	88
<i>Supplementary questions</i>	
<i>Disability services: supported accommodation</i>	79, 88
<i>Planning: Stonington Mansion</i>	81
<i>Planning: local government</i>	83
<i>Manufacturing: employment</i>	85
<i>Forests: threatened species</i>	86
GOVERNOR'S SPEECH	
<i>Address-in-reply</i>	89, 92, 122
PERSONAL EXPLANATION.....	92
ADJOURNMENT	
<i>Dartmoor Primary School: relocatable classroom</i>	137
<i>Bushfires: recovery strategy</i>	137
<i>Ajax Fasteners: employee entitlements</i>	138
<i>Rail: Epping–South Morang line</i>	138
<i>Blackburn High School: upgrade</i>	139
<i>Human Services: freedom of information request</i>	139
<i>Schools: ultranet</i>	139
<i>EastLink: tolls</i>	140
<i>Albert Park College: future</i>	140
<i>Responses</i>	141

Wednesday, 20 December 2006

The **PRESIDENT (Hon. R. F. Smith)** took the chair at 9.33 a.m. and read the prayer.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Photographing of proceedings

The **PRESIDENT** — Order! I wish to advise the house that photographer Brian Carr will take photographs of the chamber in action throughout the day. These photographs will be taken from various points in the public gallery and will be used for various official parliamentary publications.

RULING BY THE CHAIR

Inaugural speeches

The **PRESIDENT** — Order! Several members made inquiries yesterday and sought clarification on the issue of inaugural speeches. I wish to make a ruling on that matter. Several members have sought clarification as to whether they can participate in the proceedings of the house before making their inaugural speech. As members will be aware, it is a time-honoured convention in the house that members making their inaugural speech will be heard in silence; but in return for this courtesy, members should not be unduly provocative. As members are normally heard in silence, it is appropriate to consider whether they should be able to speak in any way prior to making their first speech.

In determining this matter consideration should be given to what constitutes a speech compared with the other opportunities members have to raise matters in the house. A speech is made in debate on a question before the Chair. In 2000 it was ruled in this house that a number of matters which are part of the normal routine of the house are excluded from the definition of debate even though a member may be speaking, because there is no motion before the house. At that time it was ruled that such matters included the asking and answering of questions, personal explanations and matters raised on the adjournment of the house. In 1999 certain newly elected ministers also answered questions without notice before making their inaugural speeches.

There is therefore a clear distinction between a speech and such other proceedings, which I believe provides a proper basis for determining whether members may raise certain matters without compromising the privileges attaching to their inaugural speeches. If a newly elected member makes his or her first speech on

a motion, whether it be for the adoption of the address-in-reply, a second reading of a bill or on an item of general business, it should be treated as the member's inaugural speech. However, if the member's first contribution in the house is to give notice of a motion or notice of an intention to make a statement on a report or paper, to ask or answer a question without notice, make a 90-second statement, make a statement on a report or paper or raise a matter on the adjournment, it is clearly not a speech. That contribution should therefore not be treated as the member's inaugural speech.

STATE TAXATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (HOUSING AFFORDABILITY) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

Read first time on motion of Mr **LENDERS (Minister for Education)**.

ACTING PRESIDENTS

The **PRESIDENT** laid on table warrant nominating Mr Finn, Ms Pennicuik, Mrs Peulich, Mr Somyurek and Mr Vogels to act as acting presidents whenever requested to do so by the President or Deputy President or whenever the Deputy President is absent.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 — Alpine Resorts Strategic Plan pursuant to Section 33E.

Budget Sector — Budget Update, 2006-07.

Geoffrey Gardiner Dairy Foundation Ltd — Report, 2005-06 (two papers).

Northern Victorian Fresh Tomato Industry Development Committee — Minister's report of receipt of 2005-06 report.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Liberal Party: election result

Mrs **COOTE** (Southern Metropolitan) — Victoria has just experienced an election and although the end result is not what everyone wanted, Victorians were

able to go to the polls in freedom and safety. We must never be complacent about our vote. We have to look no further than our region to appreciate that we do not have to have United Nations observers at our polls, nor do we have to be concerned about being coerced, and we can enter a polling booth freely and not at gunpoint. Our democracy is a unique and treasured gift.

I want to congratulate all candidates who offered themselves for election, and especially the numerous Liberal Party candidates and their families. They put their lives on hold for values they hold dear. We owe them a huge debt. It is always dangerous to single out individuals, but I want to especially pay tribute to David Southwick, my fellow Southern Metropolitan candidate. Not only did he run a professional, dedicated and effective campaign, together with his wife, Hayley, and with support from Frank Greenstein, but he was gracious and dignified in the narrow defeat he experienced. David is a most impressive person and one whom I believe will have a successful political future.

I also want to acknowledge the excellent campaign run by the Liberal Party's state director, Julian Sheezel, and his hardworking team. The work they did in running a smooth and professional campaign is not to be underestimated. The fact that we have six talented, well-qualified and enthusiastic Liberal Party upper house members is a testament to his efforts. The work of the 56th Parliament now begins, and I hope and expect that although we come from differing philosophical backgrounds, we can work constructively together.

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

Australian Labor Party: election result

Ms BROAD (Northern Victoria) — I wish to congratulate all of the successful candidates who are now members of this Parliament, and I wish to thank the people, particularly those of the Northern Victoria Region, for the hopes, wishes and trust they have placed in the Bracks government in this third term in office.

I also wish to acknowledge the efforts of unsuccessful Labor candidates and the Australian Labor Party members, supporters and volunteers who worked so tirelessly in the campaign. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank my former staff for their considerable efforts.

Finally I wish to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank the parliamentary staff for their work through the year, and particularly this parliamentary sitting week which is just a week before Christmas. I very much appreciate the efforts that the parliamentary staff in the dining room and in this chamber are making to support all of us through this week.

Bushfires: Gippsland and north-eastern Victoria

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — Yesterday I was pleased to note the Governor's acknowledgment of the army of volunteers currently fighting bushfires in Victoria's east and north. I also wish to acknowledge the magnificent efforts of those volunteers and also the paid officers of the various government departments who are involved in combating those fires.

Last Thursday morning I had the opportunity to visit the incident control centre and assembly area in Heyfield. It is only through first-hand experience that you can appreciate the enormous logistical exercise involved in assembling people to combat fires of the magnitude of those currently raging in Victoria, and the people involved in that deserve the strongest commendation of all members of this chamber for the efforts they are putting in.

On Thursday afternoon I was within an hour of fires racing through areas like Toongabbie, Cowwarr and Seaton, and we could all see the enormous ferocious winds that were brewing. The climatic conditions last Thursday made it an horrific experience. My heart goes out to those people who lost property during the course of the fires and in one case a family who unfortunately lost a life. All those combating the fires deserve our very best wishes and sincere gratitude for the efforts they are putting on. Let us realise these fires are still current, and tomorrow is another critical day for combating them. While some of us will be enjoying Christmas, many Victorians will be out there at the fire front, and let us not forget their magnificent efforts.

Bushfires: volunteers

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — I extend my congratulations to the many hundreds of volunteers in support of government agencies fighting the devastating fires in the north-east and in Gippsland. The immense contribution by volunteer Country Fire Authority firefighters in containment efforts and in protecting private property under such extreme conditions is to be highly commended, as indeed are the efforts of all community groups providing essential back-up services. But our volunteer firefighters and

government agencies continue to be hamstrung by the bad public policy of a government standing back instead of implementing policies that would reduce fire risk.

Bushfires: fuel reduction

Mr KOCH — There is little doubt that a lack of fuel reduction, access tracks and water storage facilities for firefighting purposes in national parks are contributing to more frequent and devastating fires. In my four years in Parliament we have witnessed huge areas destroyed by fire. In the summer of 2003, 1.2 million hectares were lost in the north-east, while in 2004 Wilson's Promontory was decimated. The summer of 2005–06 saw a huge area of the Grampians razed, and now we watch as the north-east and Gippsland burn again. While the Bracks government continues to demonstrate the total lack of concern for Victoria's national parks it has shown in the past in a bid to please the conservation movement so it could retain government, there is growing anxiety that we may well see another Ash Wednesday disaster in the Otways in 2007.

Bushfires: Gippsland

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — I wish to acknowledge the generosity of the mayor of the Shire of Wellington, Cr Beth Ripper, and Cr Peter Gault in briefing me last Friday on the Gippsland fires. I thank Cr Ripper for taking the time to show me first hand the impact of the fire in the Heyfield, Glenmaggie and Seaton areas.

I would like to place on record my deep appreciation for the work of many people who put in long hours at the Wellington shire fire relief centre and the Victoria Police municipal emergency coordination centre in Sale as well as the incident control centre at Heyfield which I visited last Friday. Everyone is focused on the movement of the fire and the sudden threat a change in wind direction can pose. Cr Ripper took me to the home of her brother, Trevor Ripper, and his wife, Michele, whose house had narrowly escaped the flames the previous Thursday. From their house we could see the ferocity of the fires more than 5 kilometres to the north-west.

So far one life has been lost, with the death of Mr Don Dosser from Gippsland, and I express my condolences to his family. Hopefully this will be the only fire-related death this season, but many people have been injured, including a number of firefighters from New Zealand, and many have lost their homes and property. The fires have already burnt some 700 000 hectares. I commend the Shire of Wellington and other shires throughout

Victoria on the phenomenal work they do to support their communities and other agencies at this time.

Bushfires: emergency services

Mr VOGELS (Western Victoria) — I take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt thanks to our wonderful emergency services — the Country Fire Authority, State Emergency Service and Red Cross — the volunteers from service clubs, the Department of Primary Industries, Parks Victoria, neighbours and friends who are once again risking their own lives to protect others. Tragically, once again human life has been lost and people have been injured.

Bushfires: fuel reduction

Mr VOGELS — The summer has barely started and already we have lost half a million hectares of state parks, forests and national parks. In the 2003 Gippsland and north-eastern fires we lost the equivalent of 50 years of logging, and I am informed that at present we have lost the equivalent of another 30 years of logging. Tragically our native flora and fauna are once again being decimated. I believe a full, independent inquiry into our public land management is needed, where all points of view can be aired, such as from those who say, 'Lock 'em up and let 'em burn' to those who support a new form of management. I live in country Victoria, and I fear for the safety of my community as the summer moves on.

I would also like to extend my sympathy to Graeme and Wendy Stoney, whose property burnt out a couple of days ago. We need to explore and investigate our core values. Victorians are prepared to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on all sorts of feelgood matters that are nice but not life-threatening issues while rural Victorians spend every summer wondering when it is their turn to be ravaged by wildfire. We can and must do better.

Eastern Victoria Region: election result

Mr VINEY (Eastern Victoria) — President, may I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment. I wish you well, and I am sure you will operate in the office of President extremely successfully.

I rise today to thank the people of Eastern Victoria Region for the opportunity to represent them in this place.

Mr D. Davis — At least you had the good grace to move into the electorate!

Mr VINEY — Thank you for your helpful interjection, Mr Davis. You will keep. You are the guy who thought he could count and then did not even get the support of his leader.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member will return to his statement.

Mr VINEY — I would like to say that it will be a privilege to represent the people of Eastern Victoria Region. It is a very diverse region, taking in all of the Dandenong, Gippsland and the Mornington Peninsula. Together with a number of other members in this house, I would like to thank all of the very brave people fighting fires in the Gippsland region. Whilst you wake up in the morning in the city and you get the smell of smoke, it is a very different and more ominous smell when you wake up to that smell of smoke in Gippsland each day. I wish all of the people of my region the very best for this fire season that is hitting the region right now.

Greens: leadership

Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — I would like to congratulate the leaders of the various parties in the house. In the Labor Party Mr Lenders is Leader of the Government and Minister for Education. Mr Philip Davis is the Leader of the Liberal Party. I congratulate Mr Hall as Leader of The Nationals. In the Democratic Labor Party we have Mr Kavanagh, who is there on his own.

If we go to the Greens it is pretty hard to work out who the leaders are. We saw yesterday a bit of a tussle and a power play. Ms Pennicuik and Mr Barber were toying about who was going to be taking the lead. But we need to understand that in Victoria the Australian Greens in fact do not have a leader. If you want to visit the leader you either have to head over the ocean to an electorate office in Tasmania or travel the other way up north, through the bushfires, to Canberra. It will be interesting over the next couple of years to see the tussle and the internal friction and fights that will undoubtedly occur as they all try and out-power play each other. Who will have the greatest motion? Who will have the greatest speech? Who will do the best in the media? Who will be the best deliverer of the Greens message for Victoria? And then they might start a book. Then what we will see is that eventually the leader of the Greens will be who it may be, and that is what we expect — that is, no-one.

Northern Metropolitan Region: election result

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I am honoured to have been elected to represent the people of the Northern Metropolitan Region. I want to take this opportunity to sincerely thank my electors. It is a region that encompasses Melbourne's central business district and takes in many inner and northern suburbs, extending north to beyond the Whittlesea township. These suburbs are home to many of Victoria's most disadvantaged families. They are families that I care greatly about and that the Bracks Labor government cares greatly about.

I know that improved community services and equality of opportunity are vital to all of these families. I am very proud of and grateful for the restoration of the services that have been under way over the last seven years under this government that have already delivered a great deal to these suburbs and to these families. These include a new Austin and Mercy hospital complex, the extended Northern Hospital, the new PANCH health service, the neighbourhood justice centre in Collingwood, the new Northcote and Preston police stations, improved roads and bus services and plans to relocate the wholesale fruit and vegetable market to Epping. The Bracks government has many plans as to what it wishes to do during the next four years to continue to improve services in this region.

I look forward to advocating for the many needs of the people of this diverse region over the next four years. I thank them again for that tremendous privilege and opportunity.

Bushfires: ABC radio

Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria) — This morning many of us would have woken up to the dulcet tones of the former member of this place, Graeme Stoney, talking on ABC 774 radio to another former member, Ian Cover, about the bushfires and their personal impact on him. It reminds me of something we should acknowledge in this place — the outstanding job ABC radio, particularly regional radio, has performed for Victorians suffering the effects of bushfires.

The main form of communication for communities affected by bushfires has been what I describe as a relentless war by ABC radio, being the official emergency services broadcaster for this crisis in eastern Victoria, which has been going to air every half hour, updating bulletins of local information to ensure there can be an effective response by people who are subject to ember attack, who need to be advised where and at what time briefings are during the day, changes to

weather conditions and changes to threat conditions; indeed, it amounts to advice literally minute by minute of the impending over-run of the fire front.

It is an outstanding service, and the ABC needs to be congratulated in providing this effort at this time to country Victorians.

Western Victoria Region: election result

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all the election candidates in the Western Victoria Region. I am sure Mr Koch, Mr Vogels, Ms Tierney and Mr Kavanagh would agree that the election in our area was conducted in a most professional manner, and everyone ought to be congratulated for their efforts and conduct.

I also acknowledge the tireless work of all the Labor Party volunteers in supporting the campaign and of course the staff at the Labor Party head office. I express my gratitude to the people of Western Victoria for electing me to this place. In my travels throughout the area I know they want us to work hard for them to continue the excellent level of service delivery in health and education and numerous other areas. There is in the community of western Victoria great concern about the impact of climate change and the drought, as well as a great concern about the future of water in that area.

South Eastern Metropolitan Region: election result

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all new members on their election to this place. I would also like to acknowledge the good work of members who were not fortunate enough to be re-elected. This chamber has lost some very good people from both sides of the house, and I am sure the new members coming in will be just as capable.

On a personal level, I am honoured to have been re-elected for my second term. From the Australian Labor Party perspective, I would like to thank the electors of South Eastern Metropolitan Region for electing three ALP members. The people of South Eastern Metropolitan are obviously satisfied with the government in its rebuilding of key community services such as health, education, community safety and protecting the environment while maintaining the state's financial budget surplus.

While the Bracks Labor government has delivered for the south-eastern region for the past seven years, there is much more to be done. Over the next four years the

Bracks government has a definite plan for the south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne. I am sure the local members will be doing their best to ensure some of these challenges are met.

WATER: MANAGEMENT

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — I move:

That this house condemns the state government's mismanagement of Victoria's water resources and in particular its failure to provide water certainty and to take adequate action on supply, recycling and infrastructure.

The supply of water is the most basic responsibility that a state government undertakes. Water is the most basic need for human survival and its supply is fundamental in government responsibilities. The Bracks government has failed in its most basic responsibility, leaving many Victorians with little or no water.

Victoria has a water crisis. Many Victorian towns are on the most severe water restrictions, and some of them are having to cart their own water. Major regional centres such as Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong are on level 4 water restrictions, and Melbourne is about to reach level 3 restrictions. Irrigators on the Campaspe and Loddon system have zero allocations this year. Those on the Goulburn system have the lowest allocation ever, of only 24 per cent, and those on the Broken system are on 66 per cent.

The Murray irrigators are little more fortunate, being on 95 per cent, but this is still less than half of what they are traditionally used to getting. Not only are they used to getting 100 per cent of their allocation, but they are also used to getting an allocation of sales water. Successive governments have encouraged irrigators to take up sales water and to gear their farms up to operate on that water. When we talk about irrigators receiving 95 per cent of their allocation, we have to realise that that is really only about 40 per cent of what they normally would receive.

The Bracks government is failing to address the water crisis. It is also failing in its duty of care to Victorians, to deliver to them the water they need for their basic survival. I have to admit that this year after the election I felt a certain sense of *deja vu*. In 2002, when I was first elected, shortly after the election the eastern side of my electorate was alight with the worst bushfires since 1939, the western side of my electorate was suffering the worst drought in 100 years, and for the first time in history our irrigators on the Goulburn system received less than 100 per cent of their water allocations.

In about February 2003 I was sitting in my office in Shepparton. I looked out of the window and saw a plume of smoke which looked like it was very close to my home. I left the office to go home and to see just how close it was; I found it was actually in our backyard. I live on the Goulburn River, and we are surrounded on three sides by state forest. Some kids had got onto the island behind our place and set fire to it.

The *deja vu* that I find myself feeling this year straight after the election is due to the fact that once again the north-east is alight with bushfires, the drought is everywhere, and our irrigators once again are receiving less than 100 per cent of their allocations — in fact, this year they have received their lowest allocations ever. To add to that, on Monday night I received a phone call to say there were 20 fire trucks in our backyard, because once again the river bank behind our house was alight. It is a feeling of *deja vu*, which I would rather not experience ever again, because Victoria cannot afford these events occurring on a regular basis.

Over the past seven years the Bracks government has failed to put in place a strategy for the replacement of infrastructure and the securing of Victoria's water supply. There has been plenty of spin. We have had \$13 million worth of advertising and the Premier flying around in a chopper, talking about water saving and so on. We have had a green paper on water, and we have had a white paper on water, but that has been all about water for the environment. It is all about support for the environment.

Of course we must not lose sight of that either. We all support water for the environment. In country areas people are very much aware of their environment. Farmers are great environmentalists. They have put an enormous amount of their own time and resources into Landcare to support the environment that supports them, but the government's lack of focus on water infrastructure is highlighted by its lack of expenditure on that infrastructure over the past seven years.

During its tenure the Bracks government has collected more than \$2.2 billion in water taxes, levies and dividends from water authorities. But if we look at the public sector asset investment program for 2006–07 that is outlined in budget paper 1 we see that during the same period in which the government collected \$2.2 billion in taxes, levies and dividends from water authorities it reinvested only \$141 646 million of that \$2.2 billion into water infrastructure — that is, less than 6 per cent of the taxes, levies and dividends collected is being reinvested into improving water infrastructure in this state. The government's failure to invest in

infrastructure has left towns in Victoria high and dry and irrigators with little or no water to produce the food that is needed to feed Victorians.

A recent article in the *Weekly Times* summarised a survey it conducted on water policies and how Victorians felt about them. I would like to read a few of the results. The survey asked readers whether they supported the construction of new dams on Victorian rivers. Sixty-nine per cent of people said no, they did not support new dams. The survey also asked whether farmers should have to pay for water they had not received during the drought. Ninety-seven per cent of Victorians said no, farmers should not have to pay for the water they are not receiving — yet the Bracks government is still sending them bills for 100 per cent of that water. The survey also asked whether readers supported town-city water authorities entering the water market to buy water from irrigators. Eight-two per cent of Victorians said no, they did not support the water authorities entering the market to buy irrigators water for urban supply. It also asked whether readers supported town-city water authorities buying irrigators water if it were created through savings. Fifty-four per cent of Victorians did support that — and most irrigators will also tell you that they have no problems with water going to other uses, such as the environment or urban supply, if it were created through savings. If the government invested in infrastructure to fix some of the leaking and seeping channels and stop some of the evaporation that is happening in the Goulburn-Murray water system, the water saved could then be used for other purposes.

The survey also asked whether readers supported the construction of the Goulburn pipeline to Bendigo. Sixty-eight per cent of Victorians did support that. It then went on to ask whether they supported the construction of the Goulburn pipeline to Ballarat. Seventy-nine per cent of Victorians said no. The reason they said no is that the proposal for Ballarat is absolutely ridiculous, and I will talk more about that later. The survey also asked readers whether they would drink recycled water. Fifty-two per cent actually said yes. I do not know whether we are quite ready for people to be drinking recycled water. There is no doubt that that will have to be reconsidered in the future. At this stage Victorians are probably not quite ready to use recycled water as drinking water, but certainly it should be used in industry and for other uses. The survey also asked readers whether they would eat produce grown with recycled water. Eighty-eight per cent of Victorians answered yes, they would — they had no problem with recycled water being used to grow produce. It also asked whether they would be willing to give on-farm water savings to the environment or water authorities.

Fifty-seven per cent answered yes, they would be willing to share their on-farm savings with the environment and water authorities.

The survey also asked whether the state and federal governments should enter water markets to boost environmental flows. Seventy-two per cent answered no. That is a telling figure. The problem with governments entering water markets is that a government cheque book in the water market will distort the price of water — and the price of water is already at an astronomical level now, at almost \$1000 a megalitre for temporary water and \$2000 a megalitre for permanent water.

The survey went on to ask whether the Victorian government was doing a good job based on a number of issues. It asked whether the Victorian government was doing a good job in managing drought issues. Sixteen per cent of Victorians thought the Victorian government was doing a good job and 81 per cent thought it was not. The survey asked whether the Victorian government was doing a good job managing water reforms. Eleven per cent thought it was doing a reasonable job and 84 per cent did not.

Mr Finn — How many?

Ms LOVELL — Eighty-four per cent of people surveyed thought the Bracks government was failing in managing water reforms.

The survey also asked whether the Victorian government was doing a good job in delivering water to the environment. Twenty-four per cent thought it was doing a reasonable job; 61 per cent thought the Bracks government was failing. It asked whether the Victorian government was doing a good job in building new irrigation infrastructure. Seventy-four per cent of respondents thought the Bracks government was failing in building new irrigation infrastructure. The survey also asked whether the Victorian government was doing a good job in regulating construction of farm dams, and 63 per cent of respondents thought the Bracks government was failing in that area. We can see that the Bracks government does not have a good report card when it comes to its management of water resources in Victoria over the past seven years.

We only have to look at the government's failures in Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong to see why Victorians feel that way. Bendigo has been on severe water restrictions for the past four years. Its residents have been on level 4 restrictions for several months. This means they cannot use water outside of their homes. There can be no watering of any sporting grounds,

including football ovals, cricket pitches, tennis courts and bowling greens. These level 4 water restrictions are severely impacting on those communities. Elderly people are under severe stress because their gardens are dying. We are seeing a lot of health issues arising from that. It is very sad to visit these communities and see gardens dying and people being impacted upon by these level 4 water restrictions.

Bendigo has the government to blame, but the Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Treasurer in another place should take responsibility for this. Bendigo has two cabinet ministers in Jacinta Allan, the Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment, and Bob Cameron, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. These two local representatives sit at the cabinet table. A former federal member for the area, John Brumby, is the Treasurer in this state. Three people who should know Bendigo well are sitting at the cabinet table but they have failed to address this water crisis in Bendigo over the past four years.

What did it take for the Bracks government to make any sort of announcement about securing water for Bendigo? It took the Liberal Party announcing its policy of building the Erskine pipeline connecting Lake Eppalock to the Goulburn system. That announcement was made in early May last year. It took that announcement for the Bracks government to make any commitment to securing additional water for Bendigo. Immediately after the Liberal Party's announcement the government came out and announced in the budget that it too would fund that pipeline. It was such a last-minute announcement that it was on a loose-leaf page included in the budget papers.

However, there is a flaw in the government's policy. The Liberal Party's policy was to supply water for Bendigo by using investment in infrastructure in the Goulburn system to find water savings. The government's policy is to buy water: it says it will buy water from willing sellers. I have news for the government — there is no such thing as a willing seller. Farmers are being forced to sell their water, they are not selling it willingly. Any water the government buys from so-called willing sellers will be water lost to production in this state. That is less food for the metropolitan areas and fewer exports for our state.

Having made the announcement that it would fund the Erskine pipeline, did the government treat it as a matter of urgency? No. Did we see any special legislation introduced into this place to fast track the construction of the pipeline? No. In fact seven months later not even

one sod of earth has been turned in construction of this pipeline. We are now looking at Lake Eildon being down to 3 per cent — the dead water level — by Easter. By the time the pipeline is finished there will be no water in Lake Eildon to pipe through it. The pipeline could end up being a white elephant.

What action have we seen from this government in trying to secure water for Ballarat? The only action we have seen was a knee-jerk reaction, when the Premier and the water minister said the Bendigo pipeline was such a good idea that they would take the pipeline from Lake Eppalock and over the Great Divide. The intention was to supply water for Ballarat; they thought they were on to a good thing. It was a knee-jerk reaction to announce that the pipeline be extended from Eppalock to Ballarat, but that pipeline is a stupid idea. For a start there is a golden rule that should never be broken: you do not take water from north of the Great Divide where rainfall is scarce and pump it to a high-rainfall area. But I wonder if the government even gave any thought to the energy it would take to pipe that water over the Great Divide and the greenhouse gas emissions such a pipeline would create.

The government does not even know when that pipeline is to be finished. On 17 October a press release from the Premier said the Ballarat section of the pipeline would cost approximately \$180 million and that it would be fast-tracked for completion by the end of 2008. However, the pre-election budget update, released after the Premier's 17 October media release, shows that the majority of the money put aside for the construction of the pipeline is to be spent in 2009–10. I do not know how the government can have it completed by the end of 2008 when \$40.7 million of the \$71 million is not to be allocated until 2009–10. The Bracks government is once again making it up as it goes along; it is having a lend of Victorians in making any sorts of statements it likes without backing them up.

The Liberal Party took to the election comprehensive policies to supply Ballarat and Geelong with water. This involved tapping into the Newlingrook aquifer, which is a vast untapped resource in the Otways, to supply Geelong with water. That would in turn free up Geelong's share of Lal Lal water to be supplied to Ballarat. That initiative, together with a whole suite of other initiatives including recycling of water, would have secured the water supply for both Geelong and Ballarat.

I would encourage the Bracks government to look at all the Liberal Party's policies, including the ones that the government ridiculed, such as the Arundel dam

proposal and the desalination plant. The Liberal Party was the only party to take to the election comprehensive plans to secure Victoria's water supply. We would be happy for the government to adopt these policies in the best interests of all Victorians.

On the subject of irrigation I mentioned earlier that irrigators are facing record low allocations with the Campaspe-Loddon system receiving a zero allocation, Goulburn being on 24 per cent, Broken being on 66 per cent and the Murray being on only 95 per cent. But during the Bracks government's term irrigators have felt that their water has been targeted for a variety of other uses, including the environment and urban supplies. The small investment that the government has made in irrigation infrastructure has all been done to supply water for the environment. As I said before, no-one argues with water being used for the environment, but we also need to secure the irrigators' future. The government's 80:20 sales deal, introduced in the last term of Parliament, has reduced irrigators' prospects of future sales water offers. That has certainly upset many irrigators.

The irrigators are doing it particularly hard. The government expects them to pay for 100 per cent of their water even though some are receiving nothing or only 24 per cent of their allocation. I have said in this house before that I know one irrigator on the Campaspe system who has received a water bill for \$27 000 but will receive no water this year; the government is putting out its hand for the \$27 000 but giving him nothing in return.

The government should also look at the Liberal Party's policy which was to waive all fixed water fees for irrigators. The government came up with a policy that it would pay the first \$5000 of irrigators' bills, but it has missed the mark. It has waived the water bills for hobby farmers and those who are just using stock and domestic supply. I know that in the city of Shepparton many people who live on the river have a 2-megalitre stock and domestic water supply; they also have use of town water, yet they will have their fees completely waived. But the larger water users such as irrigators, including the dairy irrigators, and horticulturists will only have the first \$5000 of their fees paid. As I mentioned, the irrigator in Campaspe will still have to fork out \$22 000 of his \$27 000 bill for receiving no water at all. The government would be wise to adopt the Liberal Party's policy of waiving all fixed water fees.

I would also like the government to look at the Liberal Party's policy regarding the introduction of a moratorium on the permanent water trade out of

districts for the duration of the drought. As I said before, there is no such thing as a willing seller but many irrigators are being forced to sell their water just to meet the requirements of the day-to-day running of their farms. The amount of water that has been sold out of districts is causing a loss of water in those areas, a loss of production ability and the leaving behind of stranded assets and other worries for those communities. The government should look at the moratorium on the permanent water trade out of districts until we can see the effects of some of the water reforms on existing districts.

An article on the front page of last Monday's *Shepparton News* states that water has now reached \$950 per megalitre and is expected to reach \$1000 per megalitre soon. That is an enormous price for our farmers to have to pay to secure water. This is especially the case for the horticulturists who have no other option but to water their trees; otherwise their trees will die. We are facing a water crisis within the irrigation district. The government must look at ways of investing in infrastructure to secure water for our irrigators in the future.

Our irrigation infrastructure is over 100 years old. We have seepage, leakage from cracks, damaged channels and evaporation that accounts for 30 per cent of the water in the Goulburn-Murray system being lost. Only a significant investment in infrastructure will address these losses.

We must use water savings wisely. Not all water savings are necessarily being made through infrastructure, as some savings are being achieved through automatic channel supply systems which have altered the delivery of a megalitre of water. Whether that measurement of the megalitre is now completely accurate is an argument between Goulburn Murray Water and its customers, but regardless of whether irrigators were previously receiving more than a megalitre and whether they are receiving a correct measurement, that water was still being used for production; it should not be taken away from production. If savings are made through an adjustment of a measurement of water, then those savings should go back into the irrigators pool to secure water for its future.

The Labor government has failed to invest in infrastructure and has failed to secure a more reliable water supply for Victorians; instead it has relied on spin, including a government-funded advertising campaign that places all the burden of saving water on Victorians. This government should take a good hard look at itself. It should look at what its basic

responsibilities are, and it should start to invest in infrastructure to secure water for the future of Victorians.

Mr VINEY (Eastern Victoria) — We know that the opposition is not serious in this chamber when it puts Ms Lovell forward to lead a debate. The people of Victoria know that the Liberal Party is not serious when it places someone like Ms Lovell on the front bench. In her fifth year in this place Ms Lovell still has to read her contribution and rhetoric.

Mrs Coote — On a point of order, President, I request that you ask Mr Viney to retract those statements. Ms Lovell was referring to references; she was referring to articles in her extensive notes.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The remark that has been made is not offensive. In addition, Ms Lovell is in the chamber to defend herself as she sees fit. I am ruling that the remarks made to date are not offensive.

Mr VINEY — Ms Lovell has to continually refer to her detailed and copious notes to present the rhetoric of the opposition on this issue.

Water is a very serious issue facing the community. It is an issue that the Victorian government has been substantially addressing for a considerable time. This stands in contrast to the Leader of the Opposition in the other place. In the four years prior to the election he referred to the issue of water in the other place only four times — and on one of those occasions his reference was to water polo!

The opposition has been absolutely asleep regarding water, it had no interest or concern about water in the four years up until the recent election, which is when it thought, 'What are we going to run on? We had better start talking about water because the resident parrot is talking about water but we are not'. Everyone in Victoria, except for the opposition, has been talking about water for years. The opposition woke up in the election campaign and said, 'We had better start talking about water. What are we going to do? We had better put forward a policy'. What does it come up with? It says, 'There is not enough water, perhaps we had better build a dam; now we should look for a place to put a dam'.

The real question is: why is there a water crisis in Victoria? Perhaps the opposition does not realise that it actually has not been raining, which is why Victoria has a water problem. Why has it not been raining? There are a whole raft of reasons, but one of them is climate change. What has the opposition's position been on climate change? We all know the position of the Liberal

Party: it absolutely denies the existence of climate change. It has not been prepared to lobby the Prime Minister to sign up to the Kyoto agreement.

Members of the Liberal Party have absolutely failed on the issue of climate change and on the issue of water. They desperately needed an issue during the recent election campaign, so now they are bringing the issue in here and saying, 'We had better do something about water'. But it is a little too late.

In the time I have remaining I want to put before the house — and I will not get through it all — a whole raft of issues that this government has been dealing with relating to water and investment in this area. When we were faced with the water crisis in Victoria we had to decide what to do and what the issues were. If it is not raining — and we cannot make it rain — what are we going to do? Basically two fundamental strategies need to be put in place. First of all we have to conserve the water we have and put in place policies and strategies to minimise water use and stop wastage. The second option available to us is to increase recycling.

For years we have been talking about building the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline, and where was the Howard government on that question? Nowhere! There was no money from the Howard government until just recently. That is one simple example of how this government started an initiative, at least six years ago. I recall debates in the other place. Opposition members were not even into it and did not think it was necessary. Obviously the issue in this state is the conservation of water through the use of methods such as pipelines so that we can minimise evaporation and water loss and increase the amount of recycling.

Mr Drum interjected.

Mr VINEY — Mr Drum is interjecting. I will be interested to see how The Nationals go. Its members were running out lines in the lead-up to and during the election campaign when I was travelling around Gippsland. They were saying that the Bracks government was stealing Gippsland's water and sending back its poo. That was the line run out by The Nationals' candidate for Gippsland East, so apparently that is The Nationals' attitude to recycling. We are talking about an absolutely fantastic project to take water from the eastern treatment plant in Melbourne and send it to the Latrobe Valley for industrial use, particularly in power stations, and thereby freeing up some 19 billion litres of water to go back into the Gippsland rivers and lakes. I think another 9 billion litres will go into Gippsland's water supplies.

These are examples of what this government has been putting in place as part of its strategies on water, yet we have the Liberal Party denying there is such a thing as climate change. I think the Prime Minister is reluctantly agreeing that it might be at play here. We have members of The Nationals wanting to play politics with the issue of recycling water so as to maximise their vote in that region, when it is obvious that recycling water is an absolutely rational thing to do. It is rational to use recycled water for industrial purposes, particularly in power generation. It is unfortunate that members of the opposition and The Nationals say things like, 'Melbourne is stealing Gippsland's water'. We are one community in Victoria, and we have to work together and collectively on this issue, and Gippsland, which I am proud to represent, is as dependent on Melbourne as Melbourne is on it. It is a co-dependency. Gippsland needs Melbourne's markets, and Melbourne needs Gippsland's produce — it is pretty simple — and we have to deal with our limited water resources, particularly at this time, in a sensible and rational way. It is incumbent upon all people in politics to deal with this in a rational and sensible way. We need to look at the water issues that confront us in this state and deal with them in a proper way that will benefit the entire community. It is absolutely pathetic that during the course of the election campaign members of the opposition decided that they wanted to play politics on this issue in such a way as to create wedges. Wedge politics on the issue of water is — —

Mr Guy interjected.

Mr VINEY — Mr Guy will have to interject louder than that. I cannot hear him, and I would be very pleased to respond. The government has been investing substantially in areas relating to the conservation of our water. We have had a 22 per cent per capita saving on water use compared to the 1990s. That is more than 100 billion litres of water a year. Since January 2003 more than 145 000 rebates have been claimed across the state on water-saving products, which has saved over 1200 megalitres of water a year. A raft of water-saving products have been introduced. As of 1 January there will be a \$1000 rebate on large rainwater tanks connected to toilets. Permanent water-saving rules were introduced in Melbourne in March 2005. We have introduced tiered pricing to reward water savers. In Melbourne industry has saved 24 per cent on a per capita basis since 1999–2000. We have had legislation requiring energy and water saving in major industries. We have been rolling out \$6.5 million-worth of water-efficient showerheads in an exchange program across the state — 180 000 showerheads — which are saving 2000 megalitres of water annually.

Mrs Coote — Have you got one?

Mr VINEY — Yes. And we have put in place legislation to introduce on-the-spot fines from 2007. Unfortunately there are a few Victorians who do not do the right thing in water, so we are increasing penalties associated with those offences.

In the area of recycling there is a \$160 million upgrade on the western treatment plant, which is helping to lift recycling in Melbourne to 14 per cent, and we are on track to recycle 20 per cent by 2010. There is the \$19 million Werribee recycling scheme, which provides 6000 megalitres to Werribee irrigators. As I mentioned a moment ago, there is the eastern recycling project on the Mornington Peninsula. There are schemes supplying C-class recycled water to open spaces and agriculture.

Ms Lovell — On a point of order, President, Mr Viney has not lifted his eyes from his notes for several minutes, and I believe he is slavishly reading from them.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I have to say that that is bordering on a frivolous interjection. However, I am sure Ms Lovell has achieved the objective of her interjection.

Mr VINEY — Ms Lovell has made her point. I am referring to some copious notes because there is so much that the government has done in water. I know that Hansard cannot record them, but for the benefit of the house I will show the many pages of water initiatives introduced by the government since it came to office. There are so many that I have made a note to leave whole slabs for subsequent speakers on the government side.

I will refer initially to the extent of the water crisis in Victoria. In my opening remarks I said that the fundamental problem is that it has not rained, and it is worth just going through what is happening in relation to the current inflows into our storage systems. In the Melbourne storages the long-term average inflow is 610 164 megalitres per year, and on a 10-year average it is 408 905 megalitres. But this year's inflow to the Melbourne storages is 70 655 — that is, only 11.6 per cent of the long-term average or 17.3 per cent of the 10-year average. In Geelong the long-term average inflows are approximately 27 000 megalitres and the 10-year average is approximately 11 000. But the inflow this year is 373 megalitres — that is, only 1.4 per cent of the long-term average or 3.2 per cent of the 10-year average. In Gippsland the long-term average inflow at the Blue Rock and Moondarra dams

is around 270 000 megalitres and the 10-year average is around 183 000, but this year it is 45 000 megalitres — that is, 16.7 per cent of the long-term inflow average or 24 per cent of the 10-year average. That gives a picture of the seriousness of the situation we are facing in Victoria.

This water crisis is not due to a lack of government initiative but simply a lack of rain. Critical here are the initiatives that this government has put in place, firstly, in relation to the preservation and conservation of our water supply — and I started to speak about that before Ms Lovell became concerned about how detailed my notes are — and secondly, improving recycling. In the Gippsland area — and members should recall what I have just said about the dramatically lower inflows to the system at around 16 per cent of the long-term average — we have delivered a range of initiatives, including 38 billion litres to the Snowy River as part of a \$250 million package to return that once mighty river to 21 per cent of its original flow — —

Mr Vogels — Is not that water running into the ocean now?

Mr VINEY — Are you against that?

Mr Vogels — At the moment I am, yes.

Mr VINEY — You are against putting environmental flows back into the rivers? That is good to know. It is good to get it on the record. Mr Vogels is against environmental flows into our rivers. We have \$50 million — —

Mr Vogels — On a point of order, President, I do not need Mr Viney to put words in my mouth. I never said I was against environmental flows — —

Mr VINEY — Is that a point of order or a point of debate?

Mr Vogels — I said I was against water going into the ocean.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There is no point of order. Mr Viney, to resume.

Mr Vogels — I know. I just wanted to make a point about it.

Mr VINEY — You are in your fifth year here, and you still do not know how to — no, you are actually in your eighth year here.

Mr Vogels — No, seventh.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Viney will address his comments through the Chair. He is not debating with Mr Vogels. And Mr Vogels will do the same!

Mr VINEY — Mr Vogels still does not know the difference between a point of order and a point of debate. If he is so concerned, he can get up and have a go in the debate a bit later.

We have made a \$50 million investment in the Gippsland Water Factory to use recycled water for industry in the Latrobe Valley. With the commonwealth we have delivered \$28 million for irrigation upgrades to save 15 billion litres of water in the Macalister irrigation district. We have introduced landmark legislation to protect the Mitchell River from damming, increased environmental flows in the Thomson River to 10 billion litres and given 6500 rebates for water-saving products to households in Gippsland. Of course there is more to do. We know there is more to do in this area. The eastern water recycling proposal that I mentioned before will deliver 9 billion litres of drinking water to Gippsland households and provide 39 billion litres to improve the health of Gippsland Lakes and local rivers. The Gippsland sustainable water strategy will build on the work already done in West Gippsland through the Central Region sustainable water strategy and secure the water future for the whole Gippsland region for the next 50 years.

As I said at the outset, one of the fundamental causes of these problems with water inflow to our catchment areas, dams and water resource facilities is that it has not been raining. In part we can be extremely confident that a significant cause of that lack of rain is the problem we have with climate change globally. That is clearly going to affect Australia and in particular Victoria very significantly into the future, so we need to look at what we are going to do in relation to climate change. Before the election we had a debate in this chamber on the issue of climate change, and I recall a member of the opposition saying that we did not need to do much in relation to climate change because anything we do here in Victoria in terms of reducing carbon emission into the atmosphere is minuscule compared to what is happening in China and India.

In my contribution to that debate I said what an appallingly morally bankrupt argument that is. It suggests that because other nations in the world are polluting the atmosphere with carbon more than we are, we do not need to do anything — that is, we in the developed world do not need to deal with the fact that we have been pumping carbon into the atmosphere for over 150 years because it is suddenly the fault of the

developing countries of the world when they start to catch up.

The critical issue is that we in this community have a moral responsibility to deal with climate change. Whether it is a substantial component of the problem or a minor component, we have our own obligations. As one of the per capita biggest carbon polluters in the world, we have double the moral responsibility to deal with it.

What have we in this government been doing? We have been putting in initiatives to increase the amount of wind power and sustainable energy that is available to consumers in Victoria. During the election campaign we announced plans to build in north-west Victoria one of the biggest solar plants in the history of this state and this country. As I understand it, it will also be one of the largest internationally. We have been putting in place strategies to reduce the carbon emissions from the Latrobe Valley. We have put in place initiatives to encourage the reduction of the release of carbon and greenhouse gases from the valley into the atmosphere as a result of processes like the drying of brown coal and gasification. These are all initiatives of this government to tackle the issue of climate change and to accept our part of the international responsibility for the problem all of humanity faces on this question. We as Victorians need to understand that we will be at the very forefront of the likely impact of climate change internationally, if we are not careful. We are experiencing right now — the thousands of volunteers fighting the bushfires in Victoria are experiencing right now what could be, if this is not dealt with — the substantial impact of climate change on this community.

What has been the opposition's position on climate change? It has been to put its head in the sand and to deny there is a problem — and certainly to deny that it is a problem that we in Victoria have to deal with. To suggest that this is a problem internationally that needs to be dealt with much more by China and India than by Victoria is absolutely morally bankrupt. It is an unsustainable argument. All of us need to be able to say to our children and grandchildren, 'This is what we did'. I am certainly proud to be part of a government that is trying to deal with this issue. I do not think members of the opposition will be able to say the same thing, because they should not be proud of their record on this. The opposition does not have a record of actually accepting responsibility for climate change and the subsequent impact on this community as a result of it. Reduced rainfall, water crises and bushfires are what the future will hold if we do not deal with this issue.

We must deal with it, and we are putting in place the policies to deal with it right now.

In the meantime the government accepts that there is a current crisis in Victoria — that is, the issue of water. Dealing with climate change is a medium to long-term issue, but we need to put in place some strategies to deal with the water crisis that we are facing. It comes down to two fundamental things: increasing the amount of conservation and savings in relation to the use of water and increasing the amount of commitment to recycling of water where and when we can. Those are the policies that this government has been putting in place. We have put hundreds of millions of dollars into all of those areas: dealing with climate change, increasing conservation of water and increasing recycling. They are things that we are proud of, and they are things that this entire chamber should be congratulating this government on. The motion moved by the opposition should say, ‘Well done, Bracks government. Perhaps we should collectively do a bit more’. We would then be happy to support the motion.

The opposition is belatedly making politics out of the water crisis when it is something that for four years it has completely ignored in this place. For a generation the Liberal Party has been denying that there is a climate change problem. These are the things that should be condemned in this chamber — the opposition’s failure on the issue of water and the capacity of the Leader of the Opposition in the other place to mention water four times in the last four years — on one occasion concerning water polo. These are the things that should be debated in this place — the opposition’s abject failure to deal with what is going to be a crisis for our community, a crisis for our children and our grandchildren, if we do not deal with these things properly. The opposition’s proposition in the heat of an election campaign was, ‘Heck, we had better talk about water because the resident parrot is talking about it and we have ignored it for four years. Gee, what policies might we come up with? Let’s build a dam’. That is the only policy it had in relation to water.

Ms Lovell — That is rubbish. You look at our policies.

Mr VINEY — All the other things you talked about in water, we are doing, Ms Lovell — increasing recycling, increasing the commitment to conservation and dealing with climate change. And that is certainly not something that you have been dealing with — the fundamental cause of the problem in the first place.

We cannot and will not support this motion, because it is deeply flawed. It is a motion that should be

congratulating this government for the leadership it has shown across the nation and, to some extent internationally, on the issue of water. For the opposition to be playing catch-up and base politics in the way that is is a complete joke.

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I find Mr Viney’s passion refreshing, because it is good to see that, having been so severely dealt with by his party and taken away from all those other positions that he was looking for, he is still able to get up and defend what I consider to be the indefensible. It is also interesting that he would take an opportunity to take a pot shot at Ms Lovell for talking as the lead speaker on this issue. It is also interesting that the former Parliamentary Secretary for Environment, Ms Elaine Carbines, did not get the opportunity to be re-elected here. The Labor Party did not think her position on its ticket was worthy of the no. 1 or no. 2 positions, so it put Elaine Carbines at no. 3, yet she had made an outstanding contribution for the Labor government —

Mr Jennings interjected.

Mr DRUM — You are probably right, Mr Jennings, Elaine Carbines made an outstanding contribution for your side, although we used to have many differences of opinion. Yet the Labor Party did not regard her contribution as worthy of a significant position on the electorate ticket.

It is also worth noting that we tend to rewrite history in a short time. Many of the projects or programs are claimed to be innovative and the different parties want to take credit for them. I will go through some of the ideas put up initially by The Nationals and which have been picked up by some of the other parties.

The idea of irrigators having to pay for water that they never received was put out on The Nationals web site as part of our policy about three or four months before the election. It was picked up by the government to the tune of \$5000 about three weeks before the election, and by the Liberal Party sometime between the three months and the three weeks.

The Labor government has a policy that, so long as they are on the reticulation water system, people will receive a rebate for installing a water tank; however, if they are not on the reticulated water system and are outside the town water supply area, there is nothing in it for them to go to the trouble of capturing more tank water from buildings on their properties.

The moratorium on water being traded from the Murray River is another initiative put forward by The Nationals because of the genuine concern about the amount of

water being transferred to areas like the Barmah Choke. The Nationals thought that issue was significant enough to have a moratorium placed on water trading until an environment effects study could be done on the impact on the Murray River while water is traded down the river.

There are other implications for water being traded out of the Murray system. There is a significant impact on some of our traditional irrigation areas in the Goulburn Valley and also through north-central Victoria where many people are being forced, due to debt reduction, to enter the water trading market and split their assets, so water has been traded at the maximum level of the regulations in play at the moment. That is causing serious concern to the irrigators remaining in the system who have been forced to cover most of the fixed costs.

The idea of infrastructure savings to secure the bulk water supplies of the city of Bendigo is another issue put forward first by The Nationals. You cannot just take water away from somebody. I note this particular issue has been plagiarised, mixed upside down and turned around by the former Minister for Agriculture in the other place, now the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Bob Cameron. He has played merry hell with this issue but has avoided the facts all the way through. I will talk about that later.

The Nationals have been pushing the initiative of using stormwater in a better way than that proposed at the moment by the government, certainly in cities, where it is appropriate that we capture our stormwater; the government should be concentrating on that issue.

We could also talk about pipelines. In Bendigo, in central Victoria, the main issue being pushed by the Labor government is in its trying to tell the people of Bendigo it is on the job dealing with the water crisis. Its flagship is centred around a pipeline linking the Campaspe irrigation system with the Goulburn irrigation system. In the next few minutes, however, I want to talk about the facts.

When this project was first announced by the Labor government in conjunction with the Coliban water authority, they spoke about a pipeline that would connect the Goulburn system to the Campaspe irrigation system. It had nothing to do with Bendigo. They were going to link up the Campaspe irrigation system to the Goulburn irrigation system. They ran with the program in the media for about three weeks. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment in the other place, and various others who make up Coliban Water, jumped up and down and told

the people of Bendigo that this pipeline would be the answer to all their problems.

The government said that months and months of research had led it to believe that constructing a pipeline to link the Goulburn irrigation system with the Campaspe irrigation system would cater for their needs. That would lead to a significant amount of water being put back into Lake Eppalock, which could then be pumped through to Bendigo. As I said earlier, the government ran with that project in the media for three weeks.

It was only after considerable community angst and some hastily arranged meetings by advisers that the government was forced to realise there may be better alternatives out there. It was then that they asked a consultant to investigate the best way to secure water for Bendigo. That inquiry was supposed to run for at least three or four months, but halfway through the preparation of that report the government came up with a plan to change its initial pipeline proposal and put in place the Colbinabbin pipeline through to Lake Eppalock.

I have since learnt that only weeks after that pipeline proposal was announced they were told by another adviser and several individuals in the Echuca-Rochester area that there was a better proposal — that is, to take the water not from Colbinabbin linked to the Eildon system but to consider a pipeline from the Murray River at Echuca, running up to the Campaspe system where water would be able to be dropped out of the Murray into the Campaspe weir, which could then cater for the Campaspe irrigators — about 20 gigalitres is needed there — and have a pipeline up the Campaspe River to Lake Eppalock where 20 gigalitres is needed with all the diverters on the Campaspe River.

Then you could have another 20 gigalitres supplied to Bendigo from the Hume system when Bendigo needs water; the Lake Eppalock, Upper Coliban and Lake Eildon systems do not have water, while the Hume and Dartmouth systems have adequate supplies. That proposal would cost an additional \$20 million to \$30 million but it was not taken up by the government.

One of the benefits of that project — although I have not had the opportunity to fully investigate it in its entirety because we do not have the resources that the government has — if we were to compare the benefits of that proposal with the current proposal is that if tomorrow we were to return to the good times with plentiful rain, the pipeline from Colbinabbin to Eppalock, linking the Goulburn and Campaspe systems, would serve no purpose at all in good times.

If you look at it the other way, where you have the pipeline linking Lake Eppalock to the Campaspe weir, it could be used each and every year by gravity feeding down through the pipeline in the Campaspe River. Irrigation water could be delivered without putting unnaturally high water flows down the Campaspe at times when it normally would be at low levels. You would have a system in place that would be used in difficult times, when we need water, and which could be moved between systems. But it would be an infrastructure system that could be used to save many thousands of megalitres of water each and every year in good times as we move our irrigation water around in a way that will be beneficial to everyone.

The government not only did not pick up on the issue but did not even want to have a public discussion about that proposal. It was picked up as one of the options that was put forward by the consultants. They investigated it, but that investigation was only halfway through when the Minister for Regional and Rural Development in the other place decided that the government would go with the Colbinabbin pipeline.

It is interesting also to look at the differences between The Nationals policy and that of the government in relation to the Campaspe–Goulburn link pipeline project. The government at the moment simply wants to go out into the market and buy the water it needs at the cheapest rate possible. As Ms Lovell said earlier, the existing rate is around \$1000 — it is getting up towards \$1000 per megalitre for temporary water, and it is about \$2000 a megalitre for permanent water — but that was not the price we were talking about six months ago. In fact the prices were then approximately half that — even less than half.

When Labor was calculating what it was going to cost to actually purchase the water, there was a difference between its calculations and those of The Nationals. The Nationals believe that if you are going to get water for cities you should be able to do so out of investing in infrastructure. You should be able to go into the inefficient systems, the inefficient channels that leak, and fix them up and pipe whenever you can. If there are people at the end of very long and inefficient channels who want to get off the system, then the government might be able to buy those operators out and save significant amounts of water. There are many ways in which you can go into the irrigation system throughout the Goulburn system and invest heavily in infrastructure to achieve savings. You can effectively create new water, but the government does not want to do that.

Effectively I am talking about a difference of \$30 million to \$50 million in the cost of securing 20 000 megalitres of water on a permanent basis. It might sound like a lot of money, \$30 million to \$50 million, arising from a difference in policies, but when you are looking at securing water for the long term and you take it over a 10-year period you will see every gigalitre of water that the government acquires, it will be able to sell in urban market for \$1 million each and every year. That is something that the government does not want to talk about. When it takes this water from the irrigation sector and puts it into the urban pipelines and into the houses of Bendigo, it will charge \$1 million a gigalitre for that water each and every year.

So whether it takes 2, 3 or 4 years for it to have its initial capital costs returned to it should not be the issue. What should be the issue is that you do not want to be driving one community against another community in the way you go about securing water initiatives. That is what this government has done. It has turned several communities against the urbans, and it has turned all the urbans against the regional communities, simply because it does not want to look at water solutions over the long term. It wants to look at the cheap and nasty option of purchasing the water in the most economical way that it can do so — that is, you go into the market and buy the water off the most desperate farmer you can find. That is with this government has done. This is the very issue that the former Minister for Agriculture in the other place, Bob Cameron, did not want to talk about in the election campaign. He was quite happy to turn his back on the agricultural sector. He was quite happy to make sure that if the irrigation sector had to lose out, it lost out, provided the people of Bendigo could somehow be the beneficiaries of all the cheap water they needed. There is a way to do this proposal properly, and there is the way the government is doing it. It is causing enormous angst by turning one community against another. That does not have to be done. All you need to do is simply to take a longer term vision as to how you acquire the amounts of water that are necessary for everybody.

It is interesting that Mr Viney started using the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline as some sort of flagship project that the Labor government has been driving. This project was being driven from its very origins by one bloke by the name of John Forrest, the federal member for The Nationals for Mallee, which includes Swan Hill. He has driven this proposal and this project for the last 10 years. He has been pushing and trying to embarrass the state government to pay its share. He has been pushing his own colleagues to make sure they see the benefits in this project. As some people might know, in delivering water to those areas out in the

Mallee and the Wimmera there is a loss of up to 90 per cent in the amount of water that actually reaches its destination. We simply cannot continue in this way. The ability to pipe the water means significantly less water will need to be sent down the pipeline than was previously sent down the open channel system. But certainly nobody should talk about taking credit for this over and above one individual by the name of John Forrest.

It must also be mentioned that there is still squabbling going on with the state Labor government here about whether the Bracks Labor government will actually pay its share should that project endure any cost overruns. That project is currently funded one-third by the state, one-third by the federal government and one-third by the water authorities, with the farmers taking care of their on-farm costs, which are not insignificant. But the Labor government in Victoria is effectively saying, 'Should there be any cost overruns we do not want to know about it, we have put in our \$167 million and that is all we are going to put in'. Again John Forrest will have to be out there working to make sure that when it comes to the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline, one of the greatest water-saving initiatives in this state, the Labor government in Victoria actually pays its share. If there are any overruns, hopefully that will be the case.

What we are looking for in relation to pipelines is a philosophy from this Labor government that it will invest in infrastructure to achieve savings. If the savings cannot be identified at the moment, we would expect the government to go looking for them in the future and that it will not look at any of the low-hanging fruit, any of the cheap infrastructure savings that may be available right at the very minute. We expect it to go into and investigate the system to look for some of the savings which might end up costing double what it would cost to simply buy the water off the most desperate farmer that it can find but which are simply the best way to do it — and in the long term the government will have its money returned to it 10 times over.

I mentioned previously that our water authority in Bendigo is Coliban Water. Mr Viney said we should not be playing politics with water. Nobody has played politics with water more than the Bracks Labor government. The former Minister for Agriculture has been moved sideways, or downwards. It is said he has been moved upwards, but I do not know how the worst Minister for Agriculture that this state has ever known could be moved anywhere but down. He has gone on to the police portfolio. I say good luck if you are a cop in this state!

Mr Jennings — It's a big wrap for you too.

Mr DRUM — Thank you. I want to talk about Coliban Water and the politicising of water authorities. As we know, since the Bracks Labor government has been in power in this state water authorities have had to pay \$1.8 billion to it in water dividends. The government has been making a nice, tidy profit of \$1.8 billion from the sale of water during its term in office, yet it wants to make a song and dance about spending \$167 million on the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline. You have to get a reasonable handle on these figures, but as the government has \$1.8 billion it obviously sees the water authorities as very much an arm of the government, that they are government water authorities. What concerns me is that during the election campaign, when the water authorities were coming under extreme criticism — they were six months ago and they still are — all of a sudden Coliban Water decided to put out some of the highest cost advertising projects you could ever imagine. It was spending enormous amounts of the proceeds of Bendigo and central Victoria's water accounts on a government advertising campaign that was designed simply to make the water authority look good during the election campaign.

Mr Hall — It's a bit of a coincidence that it was during the election campaign.

Mr DRUM — It was a coincidence. The ads had never been seen prior to the election campaign. They ran for the three or four weeks leading up to the election, and the day after the election they stopped. The water authority must have seen it as its duty to the Victorian people to make sure it made itself look good during the campaign. I do not know what the ads cost, but they were inundating our television viewing throughout the period of the election campaign, trying to tell us what a great job Coliban Water was doing — and everybody in Bendigo knows that is not exactly the case — in relation to building the pipeline to link the Campaspe with the Goulburn system.

It is interesting that the government stopped the TV advertising the second the election was over. It is also interesting that the advertising spiel had very little, if any, community information benefit. Now that the election is over the water authority is continuing on with a radio advertising campaign that has absolutely no community benefit. We have the situation where the people of Bendigo are going to be needing every dollar that can be saved so it can then be spent on infrastructure projects. They will need to have that money available to them so we can maximise the use of the recycle project that is going through Bendigo at the

moment. But instead of the authority being careful with its finances, what we are finding is that it spent that money on making itself look good in the eyes of the Bendigo public with an expensive advertising campaign during the election campaign, and it is now continuing with that radio advertising past the election campaign.

There is a \$30 million project going through Bendigo at the moment. It will take recycled water from the Epsom treatment plant back up to Spring Gully. That \$30 million project is jointly funded by the federal and state governments. That water has been labelled as being used for 'greening recreational reserves' — that is the way the authority advertised this project. It is only going to make green those recreational reserves which the pipeline runs directly past. Along a 16 to 17-kilometre trek it is only going to make green about three or four recreational reserves. A \$30 million project is going to get to three or four recreational reserves.

If this government were deadly serious about greening Bendigo's recreational reserves, fixing up our racecourses, golf courses, parks and gardens, ovals and reserves, it would only cost it an extra \$1 million. You could run the additional branch pipelines throughout the city of Bendigo, and you could create the situation that would best utilise the water that is going to be taken back to Spring Gully. The people of Bendigo are not aware that once the recycled water from Epsom is taken back to Spring Gully they will not be able to use it because the infrastructure is not available, except for those few instances where ovals will be directly past the pipeline route. We have the situation where the government is not taking the opportunity to best utilise the recycled water that is available to it. This leads us to Melbourne.

In Melbourne we have the situation where we have over 300 000 megalitres of high-quality, recycled water being pumped into Port Phillip Bay each and every year — 300 000 megalitres! You would think the government would be looking to find the best use for that. As Mr Viney said, the government's only project to use this water properly is to send it down to Gippsland and take Gippsland's fresh water in return. He thinks that is a fair deal. The Nationals say there is a better way to use that water in Melbourne. Melbourne has a whole range of sporting reserves, parks and gardens and golf courses that are all on the potable water supply. They have all been able to use the potable water supply while they have been on stage 1 and stage 2 restrictions.

If we want to take a long-term view of this and spend a considerable amount of money, why not link-up the eastern treatment plant at Carrum with the western treatment plant at Werribee? Why not link them up with a piping structure? Why not put in a series of branch lines for that recycled water? We should do it now so that when the rains return to normal — if they return to normal — we will have a lasting legacy that will benefit Victoria after the tough times that we are experiencing at the moment. It would be absolutely ridiculous if we were to return to normal rainfall patterns only to find that we had not acted on the infrastructure projects that we need. We should be able in this dry time to learn the lessons and take all of our parks and gardens and sport and recreational fields off the potable water supply. We have ample recycled water, and we should be able to get maximum use of that recycled water. Certainly that would mean using it for all of those recreational and sporting reserves.

The other issue in the Bendigo region I want to touch on is bore water. We have enormous quantities of water. We have spoken to one of central Victoria's leading hydrogeologists, Dr Phil McCumber, and a water boring expert, Mr John Watson, who has been putting in these bores for an enormous part of his life. Each of them has a lifetime of practical experience in water bores, and they claim that the Campaspe deep lead, which is to the east of Bendigo, has drinking-quality water available. They estimate that anywhere between 10 to 20 megalitres a day could be taken out of that Campaspe deep lead from as close to Bendigo as Barnadown — so we are talking about 10 kilometres from the proposed pipeline, which is going to be built soon. That would be a very quick way to secure Bendigo's water supply. Those same experts will also tell you that the Loddon deep lead could be tapped into as close to Bendigo as the Marong-Bridgewater area. That water has a salinity of over 1000 parts per million, but that would still be good enough for use in our parks and gardens and also for stock and domestic purposes.

We have been talking about using bore water for many months. It seems we cannot engage the government to do something to secure Bendigo's supply. Bendigo will run out — do not worry about that! If it does not rain, Bendigo will not have water to last until the pipeline to the Goulburn system is completed. Even if there is water in the Goulburn system and water can be secured to bring it through, if it does not rain Bendigo will have run out of water before that project is completed. We need people to think seriously about what they are going to do in the interim.

An announcement should have been made months ago, because the government will need to start putting some bores down and stressing out these deep leads to find

out what capacity the deep leads have. Until you start to pump and stress them you simply will not know. Everyone supposes that there is X amount in there, but the experts are telling us that what we actually have to the east and west of Bendigo is the equivalent of two Eildon dams at full capacity. We need to at least secure our city's water supply by tapping into that in the immediate term. If rainfall were to return to normal patterns, we would be able to cease extraction from those bores and let them replenish over a period of time.

The other issue I have spoken about many times in this chamber is the better use of stormwater. We have put proposals forward to the water authority about better utilising stormwater from the Bendigo Creek. Again the government does not want to know about it. What this government is saying is that it is already doing stormwater projects, like the \$5 million it spent on Melbourne zoo to catch 9 megalitres of water! That works out to be a bit over \$500 000 a megalitre. It is not a great case in economics. It is not a great investment. The hippos and elephants might love to roll around in water they know is not coming out of the potable water supply, but effectively this government is spending \$5 million at a rate of over \$500 000 a megalitre to catch stormwater. If it were serious about investigating what is happening at Werribee and Carrum in relation to the ability to catch stormwater, which simply runs straight into the bay, it would take advantage of the enormous opportunities there, which would not endanger any downstream users or the environment. If the government simply put the infrastructure in place and created the storages, I am sure we would get a much better effort than we are currently getting from this government.

The government should hang its head in shame about what it has done. I wish this motion was worded a little bit better. This motion should be all about the inaction of the Labor government in the worst water crisis we have ever had in this state. We have a government which has been content to put out spin and try to pull the wool over the eyes of Victorians by telling us it is doing something when we all know it is not doing enough.

Ms DARVENIZA (Northern Victoria) — I am very pleased to rise and make a contribution to this debate. I oppose the motion before the house. I can probably agree on one thing with Mr Drum and Ms Lovell. It is not often that I can agree with those members, particularly Ms Lovell — occasionally I agree with Mr Drum. That one thing would be that this is indeed the worst drought in living memory. It is having a

devastating effect on rural and regional Victoria. It is also impacting on our cities.

I have visited drought areas right across northern and western Victoria on many occasions and I could not help but be struck by the devastating impact the lack of water and the lack of rain is having. If you go out into the west where there is sheep farming and, predominantly, grain growing, they have not been able to put in their crops. Where growers have been able to put in crops, the crops have barely grown and they have had to make decisions about whether to allow animals to feed off them or simply leave them to die in the ground. That has a devastating impact on the farmers themselves financially and emotionally. It has a very real impact on the towns and the communities which service those farming communities. The funds are not coming into the towns, and there is not the same sort of participation in the many activities that normally take place in country life.

However, our government is absolutely committed to supporting families and communities in rural and regional Victoria through the drought. We are not about spin, as Mr Drum put forward in his contribution. We are certainly not about doing nothing, as Ms Lovell put forward in her contribution. In fact we have a very strong commitment to supporting our farming communities and those who live in our rural and regional areas. Members would be aware that the Premier has set up a drought task force, which he heads up. Senior ministers such as the Treasurer and Minister for Regional and Rural Development are on the task force. The Minister for Community Services is on the task force. The ministers for agriculture and mental health from the other place are also on the task force. I too am part of the task force. The task force is absolutely committed to supporting families and farmers in rural and regional areas.

To take up an issue raised by previous speakers — that is, that we are not committed to doing something long term — not only has the task force expanded its terms of reference to take in the issue of climate change, but we have also set up a new unit headed by the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change in the other place which is all about dealing with climate change. We have climate change upon us in addition to drought and a lack of rain.

The task force has put in place \$146 million in assistance packages for those who are affected by the drought. Of that, \$18 million is to assist farmers to make on-farm decisions about their crops and how they manage their farms. When I have spent time out there with the Premier and the Minister for Regional and

Rural Development one of the things farmers have said to us is that they need counselling and support through the Department of Primary Industries about how to manage their finances and how to manage their cropping and farming activities. We have put money into giving them that assistance. We have provided financial and technical support to allow them to improve their soil stability in dry areas, and to reduce overgrazing and the soil erosion that comes from that by building stock containment areas. There is a range of counselling and support services to deal with the stress and mental health issues affecting those in the community impacted on by the drought. In addition, fee relief has been put in place. There is kindergarten fee relief for families and there are small things like Christmas hampers to assist families. These are just a couple of the things that have come out of the task force.

I would like to talk about some of the larger areas and compare and contrast what the Bracks Labor government has been doing with what the Liberal opposition has put forward. Our government has introduced a range of measures to preserve water supplies. Permanent water-saving rules have been in place and are about to be increased. There have been 140 000 rebates on water-saving products such as tanks and trigger nozzles for hoses. A water restriction hotline has been established, and there are on-the-spot fines for breaches of the restrictions. A program to distribute 180 000 water-efficient showerheads will save 2 billion litres of water. Very significant measures have been put in place. Melbourne is now using 22 per cent less water per capita than in 1990. We have put in place new water-saving targets of 25 per cent by 2015 and 30 per cent by 2020.

The opposition has put nothing forward on water-saving plans or targets. We have not heard anything about what its plans would be or what its targets are. We are recycling 14.2 per cent of Melbourne's waste water and we are on track to reach our target of 20 per cent by 2010 through more industrial, agricultural and third pipeline systems. No water recycling target has been put forward by the opposition parties — not by the Liberals and not by The Nationals — in any of their policies or plans. They ask what we are doing. We have targets, we have a plan. That plan is in place and we are reaching our targets. We have new targets and new plans for how to reach those targets. What do they have? They have a wasteland — no targets and no plans.

We have introduced tiered water pricing to reward water savers through their bills. What was the opposition's view on this? It opposed the government's

water-pricing reforms. What about the five permanent water-saving rules introduced across the state with fines for people who breach the rules? Opposition members did not support those rules — in fact they opposed them — yet they come in here and put a motion before the chamber putting forward a view that we are doing nothing. The opposition has no policies or plans and has opposed the plans and programs that we, as a government, have put in place.

Under Labor, industry has already saved more than 20 per cent on its 1990 rate of water usage, and Labor will require industry to save a further 10 per cent by 2016. We have listed the top 200 water users, and the government passed legislation in the last Parliament to require the top 250 water and energy users to have water-saving plans. The Liberals had no plans to legislate for water-saving requirements or targets for industry, yet Liberal members stand up here and say, 'What is the government doing?'. The opposition has opposed what the government has done.

The government plans include reconnecting Tarago Reservoir by 2010 to boost Melbourne's water supply to 21 billion litres. The previous government decommissioned that reservoir, which shows how little foresight it had with respect to Melbourne's water needs.

The super-pipe project has been commissioned to connect Bendigo and Ballarat. Again the Liberals oppose the super-pipeline, so they would allow two major regional cities simply to dry up. The cities do not have enough water. We have put money behind that major infrastructure project, but the Liberals have opposed it.

Major recycling projects will see 4.2 billion litres of recycled water in Bendigo, and groundwater and recycling projects will provide extra water for Ballarat. What was the Liberals' plan? It was to take Geelong's water for Ballarat. There is not enough water to meet Ballarat's immediate or long-term needs, yet the Liberals failed to identify a source of replacement water for Geelong.

Ms Lovell — On a point of order, President, Ms Darveniza is inaccurately quoting Liberal Party policy. There were alternate supplies for Geelong identified through the Newlingbrook aquifer. If Ms Darveniza had read our policies, she would know that.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There is no point of order.

Ms DARVENIZA — I will continue to talk about what Labor has done, what achievements it has made or what it has put in place, what targets it has set, the sorts of support it is giving to those affected by the drought and the measures it is putting in place to preserve and recycle water. I will compare those with the policy vacuum and target vacuum from the other side of the chamber.

The Bracks Labor government has invested \$52 million to upgrade the Eildon Dam. This will assist in securing the safety of the dam's water supply for the Goulburn Valley community as it supports some \$1.4 billion worth of agricultural production. It is a very important project that will support the irrigation community in the Goulburn Valley. A \$167 million investment is being made in the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline in Victoria's drought-stricken western region. The opposition has no plan for and no policies in this area, yet it criticises the Bracks government. An amount of \$26 million will upgrade the Eildon Dam wall and irrigation infrastructure. There is a need to look at the way we upgrade that irrigation infrastructure. I understand \$86 million will be available for a sales water deal to increase water security for farmers and to upgrade the infrastructure in exchange for water for some of the river flows.

There are a range of important initiatives in rural and regional Victoria, some of which I have already spoken about. The goldfields pipeline is another one, as are the major Ballarat and Bendigo recycling projects that are under way. This is not spin: it is happening on the ground. There are major industry recycling projects through the Gippsland Water Factory — an infrastructure project that will cost the government some \$50 million. It is happening; it is not simply planned for.

The government will fund \$9 million for the Geelong Shell water recycling project to recycle 2 billion litres of water by 2010. Restoring the waters in Lake Wendouree will provide 600 megalitres a year recycled water from the Ballarat North wastewater treatment plant. Other projects in regional Victoria and rural areas will use recycled water to maintain the lakes in the Ballarat area. An investment of \$42 million through the country towns water and sewerage scheme will go towards improving water and sewerage services in small Victorian country towns. We are also spending significant amounts of money — some \$21 million — to explore underground water supplies which will assist the problem. We are distributing 180 000 water efficient shower heads throughout Victoria. We are providing rebates for up to 500 water-saving refitting devices that will save up to 18 000 litres of water.

There is also a significant investment in the Epsom-Spring Gully recycled water project. There is an investment of \$1 million towards the construction of a new recycled water pipeline which will save 1800 megalitres of water and which will include the construction of 7 kilometres of pipeline from Bendigo Mining operations to the Coliban Water treatment plants. The opposition's motion states that the government is not doing enough. There is always more that can be done. The government has targets. If the drought continues, we will need to continue to meet the challenges that are before us. That is why the Premier has set up a task force. It is also one of the reasons why the government has taken on board issues raised by the task force concerning climate change and the drought and why climate change is a new responsibility of Minister Thwaites in the other place.

The drought has heavily impacted on individuals who are running farms. It has also impacted on the communities which support those farmers. You only have to visit those areas and meet with those people to be inspired by their courage and their will to rise to the challenges of drought and climate change. As a government we have also provided the particular support that people have requested through Department of Primary Industries, like one-on-one counselling regarding farm management issues, including the cycle of farm crops and the management of soil erosion, which result from extended drought in this difficult time. There is an emotional side to the sorts of life crises that result when crops fail and when people are financially up against the wall. These issues impact on the mental health of people. We have ensured that support services and counselling services have been put in place to assist local governments which provide and design many services and programs. Local governments can rejig their services and programs to meet the challenges of the drought. Through the Department of Human Services the Victorian government has provided funding for counselling and support.

Community members have rallied around and are looking out for each other. They organise events that bring farmers off their properties and into the community so that people can socialise, keep an eye on each other and make sure they are travelling okay. If they are not travelling okay, the community can point people in the direction of support which is available. People from communities can suggest to the staff of services that somebody needs some assistance or the opportunity to talk about their particular situation. The drought is devastating. You do not have to move far into rural and regional Victoria to actually experience its devastating effects. The government is committed to

supporting families in rural communities. We have been to rural communities, we have listened to people and we have provided measures to assist people affected by the drought. We are also committed to ensuring the long-term security of a very precious resource. We have done that through the range of measures I have outlined.

This motion does not deserve the support of members of this chamber. I will not be supporting the motion; I oppose it. The opposition needs to consider what its policy and programs are rather than simply coming into this chamber and criticising the efforts that the government has made.

Mr VOGELS (Western Victoria) — I would like to repeat the motion, because I do not think Ms Darveniza has addressed it at all. The motion is:

That this house condemns the state government's mismanagement of Victoria's water resources and in particular its failure to provide water certainty and to take adequate action on supply, recycling and infrastructure.

I note with interest that there have been two members of the Labor Party who have spoken on this motion — the first speaker was Mr Viney. Australia has met the protocols of the Kyoto agreement without actually signing the document. We are meeting our targets.

Members have heard others speak about the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline. I know a little bit about the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline because it is in my region. I have been to two openings of the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline in the last six years. The first opening was four or five years ago. It was conducted by John Thwaites, a minister in the other place, and John Anderson, the former Deputy Prime Minister. They announced a joint funding of something like \$162 million for the start of the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline.

I went to another opening of the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline before the state election when Mr Bracks promised to start another section — the southern section — of the pipeline. The cost has blown out from \$162 million to \$510 million. Last week there was an announcement that the first 20 kilometres has been constructed — but that is after seven years! They said the cost would be approximately \$510 million, to be shared one-third each between the farmers, the state government and the federal government. We now hear that it will cost \$750 million. Neither the federal government nor the state government has said it will provide \$250 million. They are sitting on \$162 million, so the poor old farmer will have to pick up the tab.

There is talk about a 90 per cent saving in water, which is now being lost through evaporation, drainage, seepage, leakage or whatever. I have been told by Grampians Water that there would be no 90 per cent saving when the pipeline is built, that the 90 per cent was for the whole Wimmera–Mallee area. The northern part has been constructed under the Kennett government — finished and delivered, on time and on budget. The major seepage and leakage was in the northern Mallee area of the pipeline because the soil is sandy.

It is now being said that savings in the southern Mallee will be only about 40 per cent. I am not saying that that is not an enormous amount of saving, but if it is only a 40 per cent saving, where will the extra water come from? The figures are wrong. The Wimmera–Mallee pipeline is an absolute disgrace. People forget that we started with a Labor government in 1982 during the Cain and Kirner era and that now, after the recent election, the completion date will be taken out to 2010. Labor will have been in power for 21 of those 28 years — in other words, for three quarters of that time Victoria has had Labor governments. This Labor government says it was Kennett's fault, but he was only in power for seven years, and he spent the first half of that time regaining the AAA credit rating and fixing the mess left by Labor after the 1980s.

No-one can tell me that it is the fault of Jeff Kennett or of the Liberal Party, because the Liberal Party was in power for only 7 of the last 28 years. The Labor Party, which has run Victoria for that long, has been responsible for inaction on water.

Mr Viney criticised the Howard government. I remember that a couple of years ago the Howard government introduced \$2 billion worth of funding for water, which this government opposed because it wanted its national competition policy payment to spend on things it thought important. The federal government thought it was more important to say, 'Here is \$2 billion which will be spent on water', because it knew the states were not doing it.

We heard from Mr Drum that inflows in Gippsland are down to 11 per cent this year. We hear the Labor Party saying, 'No dams'. If no dams had been built by Liberal governments in the past, there would be no water in Melbourne. Mr Viney claims that I am against environmental flows. I am against environmental flows in times of drought, because water should be going to human beings — the tadpoles can wait until the rains come.

Thank goodness previous governments knew Australia was the driest continent in the world and constructed dams such as the Thomson, Eildon, Dartmouth and others. You could go on and on. Now environmentalists want this water to flow for the environment. If we had not had dams in the first place, there would be no water for the environment. How hypocritical is that!

Ms Darveniza spoke about super-pipelines. What a joke! These are the same people who say, 'Dams do not make it rain'. How will putting pipelines from one empty dam to another empty dam make it rain? Of course that will not make it rain. The infrastructure will be put in place so that when it rains, there will be some way of shifting the water, which is exactly the same as your building a dam so that in times of plenty there will be water in those dams for when there is less rainfall.

I know of a perfect example on a farm at Scotts Creek where a dam was put in some seven years ago. Over that seven years it has rained and the dam is now full. That is why that farm will stay viable throughout another drought year because there is water to be used.

The Liberal Party had a policy for the Western Victoria Region, the region I represent, for water. There is a real opportunity in south-west Victoria to use the water that is in that area but which is presently going to waste. Water in south-west Victoria is in abundance. It is not falling out of the sky but it is in abundance. Ms Lovell mentioned the Newlingbrook aquifer. I have been talking about that aquifer in this place for probably three or four years.

I turn to south-west Victoria with its Wannon Water and Barwon Water. The system that currently supplies Warrnambool, Camperdown, Terang, Mortlake and all the townships in between, including rural connections, delivers 13 500 megalitres of water and has not failed after seven years of drought. Current usage is about 10 500 megalitres per annum, so at the moment there is about 3000 megalitres in surplus.

Wannon Water has an aquifer at Curdievale which has a proven reserve of another 3500 megalitres, so we are talking about 7000 megalitres in reserve. The Newlingbrook aquifer is situated under the Gellibrand River at Carlisle River. That water in the aquifer is going to waste. From the figures supplied by the water authorities you can see that a permissible annual volume of about 70 000 megalitres could be taken out of that aquifer. It is not true when people say that that aquifer will be depleted and there will be no water. It will not deplete the aquifer because it feeds through springs in the bottom of Bass Strait.

If I hold up this glass of water, which is full, and imagine it is the aquifer, and if water is pouring out through a hole in the bottom into the ocean, then you may as well take enough water out of the top to ensure some still runs out of the bottom, so that the sea water does not come back and that the aquifer is not being depleted.

Geelong's water supply needs are about 35 000 megalitres a year, so this amount is double Geelong's water supply. The way the crow flies, the aquifer is 15 kilometres from the West Barwon reservoir. It is only a matter of taking water out of the aquifer and putting it into the West Barwon reservoir. The infrastructure is in place to supply Geelong. We said, very sensibly, that we would fix Geelong's water problems, then ensure that Lal Lal goes back to Ballarat. Geelong does not need Ballarat's water.

You must make sure that Geelong has water in the first place by tapping into the Newlingbrook aquifer and then releasing the water that is coming from Lal Lal and Central Highlands to Ballarat, where it rightfully belongs. That was an excellent policy. However, the Labor Party poo-pooed it and said it would not work. I will bet that in the next four years the Newlingbrook aquifer will supply water for Geelong. We know that, I know that and Labor knows it; but if Labor has to deliver it, Geelong will probably be on water restrictions for a long time yet, as will Ballarat, because we know the government does not deliver on time and on budget.

Currently Geelong or Ballarat are not nice places to live, work and raise a family because there is no water. The responsibility of government is to ensure that we do not run out of water.

If members lived in the Western District, as I do, they would be very concerned. As far as I am concerned the Western District is the dairy hub of Victoria. Usually there is reliable rainfall, and we live closer to the grain belt than the people of Gippsland, so we are able to have a viable dairy industry. But due to lack of water even the farmers down there are now in a lot of trouble, because a lot of them rely on run-off water from dams and, as we all know, there has not been much rain and the run-off has been basically non-existent, especially over the last year. Most of the dams are either empty or near empty, and dairy farmers are not able to cart water to operate their farms. They will have to shut the gate and sell the cows, and if they do that, they will probably not be able to start up again. That is a huge concern for me. I have raised this issue on a number of occasions, including yesterday over a cup of tea with the Minister for Agriculture in another place, and he agrees with me.

I know that he will try to do all he can, but he has to deal with water authorities. We need to reopen bores and put in standpipes so that water is available for local communities and farmers to use. There is not much point in having more and more meetings: the summer is upon us and we need water now, not in six months time. I believe that it will rain again and that they will be good rains. Things will change, but we need to get to that change in time. We need government help, and we do not want red tape and bureaucracy standing in the way. It is time for leadership and for people to cut through the red tape and get on with it. It is urgent. People's lives are at stake, and this issue is about their futures and their livelihoods. Strong ministers need to shake the bureaucrats out of the tree and say, 'I do not care what you say on this issue. Do it!'. We need to make sure that towns like Geelong and Ballarat in Western Victoria Region have water — and the water is there. If there were no water, I would say there was nothing we could do about it, but there is available water.

I ask the government to do something. The main issue in the Western Victoria Region is the Newlingbrook aquifer. I do not how many times I have to spell it out. The water is available; it is running into the ocean and the fish in the sea do not need any fresh water. At the moment most rain falls on the ocean. There is plenty of water in the ocean; it does not need any more! I ask the government not to let beautiful, fresh, potable water run into the ocean and then start talking about putting in a desalination plant, for God's sake! Why would you not tap the water before it runs into the ocean and turns to salt water?

I support the motion moved by Ms Lovell. It is an excellent motion, and hopefully some of the other parties might support us. I rest my case.

Mr HALL (Eastern Victoria) — I am also pleased to have the opportunity to speak on water issues today, so I thank Ms Lovell for bringing this motion before the chamber to give us that opportunity. When speaking on matters in this chamber I have always said that water has been the single most common issue raised with me by constituents during the time that I have served as a member of this house, whether it has been the lack of water, as is the situation now with the drought, or too much water, as with flood. There have been issues concerning sea water, underground water and a whole range of water issues, and they remain the most common subject raised with me by constituents. Currently the water supply situation we are facing right across Victoria is most parlous. Bushfires and water are the two most prominent issues that we need to look at and address.

It has been said before by other speakers, and it is common knowledge, that Victoria is experiencing one of its longest periods of prolonged drought. Many country communities, and indeed metropolitan areas, are facing water restrictions and feeling the impact of those restrictions. I for one am pleased that Melbourne will move to stage 3 water restrictions on 1 January. As a party, The Nationals have been saying that is well overdue and that we should have been implementing water restrictions sooner than we have to this point in time. It is a fact that many country communities have been on severe water restrictions for quite some time. My mother and father, who live in Castlemaine in the Bendigo region, are currently on stage 4 water restrictions, which means that they cannot water their garden in any form other than collecting some of their own wastewater. Many country communities have been experiencing drought for many years, and it now is starting to hit home and have an impact upon the people of our capital city, Melbourne.

This motion mentions a couple of aspects of the whole water debate, and I want to pick up on a few of those. Firstly, I want to pick up the issue of water supply. The supply and harvesting of water in this state is the collective responsibility of all of us, including current and previous governments. We all need to take collective responsibility for the parlous state of the water storages in the state of Victoria. We can all do more not only at an individual level by harvesting water through the use of rain tanks at home but also governments need to do more to harvest water when and where it falls. I am not saying that has to be to the detriment of a lot of associated environmental issues. Environmental flows can still be achieved in rivers. Water harvesting and the harvested water supply can help maintain environmental flows down rivers, and that is an argument that should not be ignored.

At this time of year there is low rainfall, so many of our rivers are under stress, and we are struggling to meet levels of what we regard as appropriate environmental flows. If we had harvested and stored some of that water years ago when there was good rainfall, we could be releasing some of that water now and improving environmental flows in our rivers. When people talk about water harvesting and suggest that putting in new dams will be detrimental to environmental flows of rivers, let me put the argument that quite the converse can be the case. A stored volume of water can be released at times such as now to maintain environmental flows, and that is an argument we do not hear very often.

This government's policy of building no new dams is absurd, and to suggest that we will never need new

water storages is simply inane. Indeed I know that The Nationals and the Liberals went to the election saying that we should be looking at increasing water storages. Although we did not nominate specific sites, we said that the general principle is that we should undertake a thorough accounting of potential water storage sites across Victoria, and in our view there are many. We were criticised very heavily in East Gippsland. People had the concept that we planned to build a major dam on the Mitchell River. Of course we should be looking to improve water storages for East Gippsland. East Gippsland Water is currently building an off-stream storage to supplement domestic supply in the Bairnsdale-Paynesville-Lakes Entrance area. It is a very sensible proposal that is going ahead at the moment. We also say that we need to increase storages to provide security to the irrigators on the Lindenow Flats, a multimillion-dollar industry in an area that supplies a good proportion of Victoria's fresh vegetables. The irrigators need some security of supply. That does not require having a major dam on the Mitchell River, but an off-stream storage area is needed to secure the reliability of water supply for agricultural purposes.

While I am talking about agriculture and water I want to make a couple of quick comments. People always accuse farmers, and irrigators in particular, of using the bulk of Victoria's water supplies, and indeed they do. There is no doubt that if you measured the amount of water going to domestic, agricultural and industrial purposes respectively, the majority does go to agriculture — there is no argument about that whatsoever — but the benefits of that flow to all of us. We all enjoy our fruit and vegetables and beef and other meats that are produced by farmers who need water to do so. We all rely on grains, wool, fabric and fibre, as well as timber for shelter. We all enjoy the benefits of water that is being used for agricultural purposes and without it we would be complaining. If all of our fruit were imported from overseas or all of our wool products came from overseas, we in this country would be in terrible strife. So yes, agriculture is the major user of water in this state, but it is not just country people who benefit from that fact; it is because we all have a need, and therefore the water is used for our mutual benefit.

I suggest that stormwater collection is another untapped resource, to use almost a pun in terms of collecting water, given the volume of water that flows through stormwater drains into the ocean or into rivers and streams. There is potential there for us as communities and as a state to harvest some of those stormwater flows. We have built ourselves possibly some of the best catchments for stormwater. The roads and concrete that we have laid across this state provide a natural

collection area for stormwater. Indeed the infrastructure is in place, and we should be harvesting more of that water, pumping it back to storage facilities and using it for our water needs.

I want to talk about recycling and in particular to take up some comments made by Mr Viney about The Nationals making political mileage out of recycled water projects in the Gippsland region. Yes, there are a couple of recycling projects. I want to talk about them briefly and explain our position, which I believe represents the opinions of the people of Gippsland, and the election results prove that. In particular I want to talk about two projects, those being the Gippsland Water Factory and the proposed eastern water treatment plant. I will talk about the Gippsland Water Factory firstly and give a few facts and figures, for the sake of new members at least and perhaps for others who are unaware of exactly what it encompasses.

Gippsland Water is the major water authority in the central Gippsland region. Currently something like 35 million litres of domestic and industrial wastewater goes daily by open sewer down to Dutson Downs and then to an ocean outfall at Delray Beach. The proposal is to build a major recycling facility called the Gippsland Water Factory in an area between Morwell and Traralgon. That will treat just part of that 35 million litres — about 8 million litres — of water per day and bring it to a standard suitable for industrial use in the Latrobe Valley. I applaud that; I think it is an excellent idea. We should all collectively take responsibility for the waste that we generate; if we can recycle and reuse it, that is terrific.

This particular project is costing \$140 million, \$50 million of which the government is contributing and \$90 million of which will come from the users of Gippsland Water services. The project is about to start; all the planning processes are under way. It will treat just 8 million of the 35 million litres of water per day to a standard usable by industry. When I was briefed about this a couple of months ago I asked the question of Gippsland Water and government representatives, 'What about the other 27 million litres of water? Can we not treat and reuse that as well?'. The answer was, 'Yes, there are no problems at all; it will simply cost us more money to do so'.

On the one hand I applaud water treatment facilities and water reuse as much as possible, but on the other hand we need to be serious about the issue. Before anyone takes some of Melbourne's treated water and sends it to Gippsland, our waste should be treated and reused in the first instance.

That brings me to my second point — that is, Melbourne's eastern treatment plant. We are told that that large facility will be capable of treating 115 billion litres of water per year, which is significantly more than the 35 million litres per day from the Gippsland Water Factory. We are told publicly that this \$300 million project can treat 115 billion litres of water per year. I was a maths teacher before I came into this place, so let me explain this: if you convert the 'millions' to 'billions', it will cost \$140 million to build the Gippsland Water Factory where 8 million litres of water per day is going to be treated — that is, the equivalent of just under 3 billion litres of water per year.

According to the government the eastern treatment plant is proposed to cost \$300 million, and that will treat 115 billion litres per year. The comparison is that the Gippsland Water Factory will cost \$140 million and treat 3 billion litres per year, and the eastern treatment plant will cost \$300 million and treat 115 billion litres per year. The two figures are simply not comparable. I have said all along to the government in public that that simply does not add up. There is a feasibility study being undertaken at the moment, but as I understand it, it is purely to pipe the treated water 135 kilometres up to Gippsland for use in the power stations.

This whole project literally has an odour about it because the financial figures simply do not add up. I and other Gippslanders would be the first to agree that we should be treating and reusing water; I have no problems with that whatsoever. We are happy to pay our fair share for treating and reusing water, but what we say about all of this is that it would be nice if Melbourne accepted a bit of responsibility for treating and reusing its own water. We in country Victoria cannot see any demonstrable effort by Melburnians or authorities based in Melbourne to reuse their own water. Some people say 115 billion litres per year is a lot to reuse. Yes, it is a lot to reuse, but even if you started using even a small portion of that, at least it would be a sign of goodwill to country people to show that Melburnians are prepared to reuse water.

During the election campaign I spent a bit of time on the Mornington Peninsula, a new part of my electorate, and I learnt about the Mornington Peninsula sustainable water initiative to upgrade the Boneo treatment plant to treat 4.5 megalitres of water per year. That could be used to assist vegetable growers and to water, I understand, about 21 golf courses on the Mornington Peninsula. I was told that local users have put up \$14 million per year; that the federal government, through the national water initiative, has put up \$12 million per year; and that the state has needed to match that

\$12 million federal grant. That project has stalled because the state contribution is just \$10 million, which means there is a \$2 million funding shortfall.

I thought that if this government were serious about reusing water it would at least start with a project like the Mornington Peninsula sustainable water initiative, where water usage is already planned to be put to a very good purpose. To get this project up and running it would cost the state government a miserly \$2 million more than what its contribution is already. Some of the vegetable growers on the Mornington Peninsula who are also members of the advisory committee are extremely frustrated that the government has refused to match the federal government's contribution and the significant financial contribution put forward by users. It seems that at this point the scheme is not a goer.

How could the government possibly think about pumping 115 billion litres per year 135 kilometres to the Latrobe Valley if it cannot even make the Mornington Peninsula sustainable water initiative work? It simply does not make sense. I use that to illustrate my point that if Melburnians could at least demonstrate that they are prepared to reuse, at least in part, their own recycled water, then country Victorians like the people that I represent might be more accommodating in their views and more sympathetic to the fact that they need water from the Gippsland region. Sixty per cent of Melbourne's water is already harvested from the Gippsland catchment areas. Yes, we will help out. We are happy to be working as one community, as Mr Viney says we should, but we want to see Melburnians demonstrate that they are prepared to accept at least some responsibility for reusing their own treated water.

The last comment I want to make concerns the water tank rebate. I know my colleague Mr Drum mentioned this in part. We think it is totally unfair and unrealistic for the government to discriminate against all of those people who are not on reticulated water supplies by refusing to give them any assistance whatsoever in water-saving initiatives. That includes the rebate on the purchase of a rainwater tank. People who are not on a reticulated system have even more desperate need to conserve water than those who are on reticulated systems, but there is no government help. I heard Mr Viney and others speak about water efficient shower heads being made freely available. That is not available to somebody who is not on a reticulation water system. Geographically, a greater part of Victoria is simply not eligible for these water rebate grants from the government simply because they are not on a reticulated system. That is discriminatory, that is not governing for all Victorians, and that is not being

responsible in terms of encouraging and facilitating better use of the precious resource of water.

There are a lot of other things that I could talk about because water is a very diverse subject. It is a very important subject and one that is now really hitting home to all Victorians, and so it should. It is an extremely precious commodity, and we need to do what we can to conserve it and use it wisely. I agree with the motion that this government has not done enough, and therefore The Nationals will be supporting this motion.

Ms MIKAKOS (Northern Metropolitan) — I am very pleased to be able to make a contribution to this debate. I want to say at the outset that, whilst I do not agree with the sentiment expressed in the motion, I certainly think it is very important that we have this debate today. It is important that the Victorian Parliament is able to debate what is one of the most pressing issues facing this country and this state at the moment. I see this issue as one that relates conclusively to the issue of global warming. It is a bit ironic to have the Liberal opposition move this motion today when until recently its members have been global warming sceptics. Certainly the Prime Minister has been a global warming sceptic for a very long time, and he still has not quite made up his mind as to whether he accepts that global warming is an inconclusive phenomenon or not. The Leader of the Opposition, Ted Baillieu, seemed to change his mind midway through the state election campaign, obviously in response to some Liberal Party polling. I find it interesting that members of the Liberal Party, who are Johnnies-come-lately in this debate about water, are moving this motion in Parliament today. As I said at the outset, I welcome this debate. I think it is a very important issue that we should be debating in the Parliament.

I categorically reject the sentiment expressed in the motion that we as a government have not been doing enough on the issue of water. In fact the Bracks Labor government has put water squarely on the agenda with the Premier establishing a water portfolio during the last term of government. I am very pleased that John Thwaites is continuing in that capacity during this term of government and has also taken on the very clearly linked portfolio responsibility of climate change. It is important that we talk about the issue of water in the context of climate change, particularly since all the data released by the CSIRO indicates that Melbourne can expect 8 per cent less water by 2020 and 20 per cent less water by 2050. Clearly, unless we as Victorians and Australians address the issue of climate change — and certainly this government has strategies in place to do that — we will be faced with even more drastic water shortages and crises in the future.

We are currently experiencing a very severe drought, which has already been commented on by previous speakers. I acknowledge and understand that many Victorian families, particularly those in regional areas, are suffering greatly at the moment as a result of the drought. My two colleagues in the government who represent regional electorates have outlined in some detail how this is impacting on farming communities and the strategies that the government has in place to deal with these issues. I do not intend to focus my contribution on our strategies in regional areas.

I want to take up the challenge Mr Hall posed in his contribution to focus on what Melburnians, city-based people, can do to address this issue. I agree with Mr Hall that all of us as residents and consumers of water have a responsibility to minimise our water usage. We have seen that clearly in that the levels of water consumption have been decreasing throughout Melbourne since permanent water restrictions were put in place and since the Bracks Labor government has engaged in a very extensive water conservation and education campaign about how we can all make a contribution by reducing our wastage of water and by saving water. That campaign has been well received and all the evidence, particularly as it relates to the suburbs of Melbourne, is showing that the campaign has had a significant impact.

We all need to take personal responsibility to see what we can do as consumers to preserve our scarce water resources. We need to work with government, because the government cannot address this issue alone. At a state level the Bracks Labor government outlined clear policies during the state election campaign. The time available to me will not allow me to go through those in great detail, but we have a comprehensive plan relating to the issues of water saving, water recycling and the finding and securing of our water supplies.

Members would be aware that in 2004 the government released its *Our Water Our Future* strategy. Since that time we have also released the central region strategy, which contains detailed plans for Melbourne, Geelong, Ballarat and West Gippsland and includes providing an additional 167 billion litres of water for Melbourne by 2015. We have also outlined future water conservation policies, and I want to focus on those because the Northern Metropolitan Region contains a great deal of Melbourne's industry and is very much an urban residential area, apart from the northern part of the region, which has regional communities.

I want to focus particularly on our strategies to reduce water usage by industry because industry is a significant user of water. We have proposed that the

pathways sustainability program will focus on Melbourne's 200 top businesses finding ways to reduce their water consumption — and we are hoping that will be expanded to target 1000 businesses that use more than 10 million litres a year. This program is aiming to achieve savings of 12 per cent through water audits, saving plans and efficiency measures. We will reach the top 1000 water-using businesses in the next three years, and the forecast is that it will save 6700 megalitres. We are encouraging industry to come to the party, so to speak, on addressing this critical issue for our nation, as we also have many strategies in place in relation to residential and urban consumers. Mr Viney has indicated many of those, such as rebates being offered for rainwater tanks, replacement of shower heads and water-efficient whitegoods.

In conclusion, I reject the motion but I welcome the debate today. All of us need to do what we can to save water, because it is a critical issue facing this state.

Mr D. DAVIS (Southern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to make a contribution to this debate on the motion moved by Ms Lovell:

That this house condemns the state government's mismanagement of Victoria's water resources and in particular its failure to provide water certainty and to take adequate action on supply, recycling and infrastructure.

The truth is that as the state election progressed the government's weaknesses on water policy became more and more manifest. The Leader of the Opposition in the other place, Mr Baillieu, went to Lake Eppalock and made some announcements in the dry basin that was Lake Eppalock. Within weeks the government had copied our announcements. Equally, as we made announcements about Ballarat and other significant regional cities in Victoria that face a tremendous challenge, the government again followed those announcements. The Nationals and Mr Drum were equally concerned about the state of country Victoria and the challenges faced by our major regional cities.

As the government progressed through the election campaign it made more and more announcements about its plan for water supplies for Victoria: the metropolitan area, regional areas and the country. The issue is that this state government, having been in power for seven years, was only then announcing its plans for country Victoria and metropolitan Melbourne. It begs the question of where the government has been on water policy for the last seven years. The answer is that the government has not delivered on water policy. The Wimmera–Mallee pipeline project was announced at the start of the election campaign. It is a joint project with the federal government, but this state government

has had seven years to get it in place. Equally key projects like the upgrade of the eastern treatment plant and consequent recycling of the enormous discharge of effluent that occurs every day through the Gunnamatta sewage outlet was Labor Party policy in 2002 in the lead-up to the 2002 state election. The Bracks Labor government has not delivered on that policy either. It has not delivered on what had been a solemn promise to the people of the Mornington Peninsula and the people of Melbourne.

In my contribution I will focus in particular on issues about water recycling, water reuse and the infrastructure associated with them. The state government's failure to tackle those issues has left Victoria in a parlous position. To be fair, the state government cannot be blamed for the terrible situation that we face with the drought in Victoria. However, the state government can be held responsible for the lack of preparation for the drought conditions that we face. It is that lack of preparation that I believe is scandalous and has been picked up by Ms Lovell's motion.

Mr Viney — Not as scandalous as the fact you were so incompetent they sacked you.

Mr D. DAVIS — The problem, Mr Viney, is your government's failure to upgrade the eastern treatment plant. Mr Viney previously sought to represent the northern aspect of the peninsula and now represents the whole of the peninsula and eastern Victoria up to Mallacoota. He was a parliamentary secretary in the previous government but could not get that 2002 commitment to upgrade the eastern treatment plant acknowledged and dealt with by this government. Mr Viney's government had four years but did not act to upgrade the eastern treatment plant to achieve the class A water quality that would enable a proper reuse of recycled water in a whole range of ways.

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr D. DAVIS — I will tell you what, Mr Viney, let me give you an example of what we intended to do. One of the things the Liberal Party put on the agenda in the election campaign that had not been dealt with by the government is the use of third-pipe technologies, the use of new technologies in new estates. The government has not produced the recycled water; it has not got the recycled water systems in place, such as the third-pipe systems in new estates.

When I went to Sandhurst, which is one of the few places in the state that is using recycled water, I spoke with the federal parliamentary secretary, Malcolm Turnbull, about third-pipe technology at that important

demonstration site, which shows that third-pipe technology and recycled water technology can be implemented very effectively. I was interested to hear, as the Liberal Party reiterated its commitment to the use of third-pipe technology in all new large estates, the Premier saying on Channel 10:

This is a third pipe on every new development.

And, with a callous sneer, I think:

I tell you what, that's extraordinarily expensive.

The Premier said that on 26 October, in the midst of the election campaign. But what the Premier clearly did not know was that on 12 October, after the Liberal Party announcement on 8 October that it would introduce third-pipe technology, City West Water wrote to large developers on the western side of the city, and I will quote from that letter:

To whom it may concern:

Re: introduction of new mandatory requirements for dual-pipe water systems

I am writing to advise you of two key new developments in state government legislation related to dual-pipe water systems in new estates.

This new legislation states that it is now mandatory for:

developers to install dual-pipe systems in new residential developments where required by the relevant water authority

customers to connect to dual-pipe systems where provided when seeking connection to a water supply

These changes reflect the government's initiatives to conserve our precious drinking water supply and increase the use of safe and alternative water resource.

A dual-pipe water system consists of a drinking water and recycled water supply to each property. Dual water supply areas are expanding within the new growth areas of Melbourne.

And it continues. But, interestingly, do you know what date the mandated dual pipe that the Premier sneered at on Channel 10 came into effect? 1 December 2006!

Ms Lovell — Oh, you're kidding.

Mr D. DAVIS — On 1 December! The state Labor government had been in power for seven years and during that time there had been no third-pipe mandating, no initiative to ensure that that third pipe was necessary on estates, yet it introduced it on 1 December 2006. What a scandal! What a slippery little group of people they are! Let us face the facts here. It took seven years to introduce sensible third-pipe technology on all new estates around the edge of

Melbourne in places where it is appropriate; in country Victoria where new estates are going in near Bendigo and Ballarat there is the option of third-pipe — —

Mr Viney interjected.

Mr D. DAVIS — I tell you what, President, what is clear to me about this is that this state government should have dealt with third-pipe technology a lot earlier, and yet it claims to have dealt with recycling of water when it did not deal with third-pipe technology, only introducing it on 1 December 2006. I say that is not good enough and I say, in the spirit of Ms Lovell's motion, that this state government has not done what it should have done on third-pipe technology and there is a lot more to do.

I pick up the contribution made by Mr Hall earlier on, which was a sensible contribution that put on record some of the questions that surround what the government will do on the water factory in Gippsland — Mr Viney will be well aware of these issues, but has clearly chosen not to act — and the issue of the pipeline from the eastern treatment plant across. Let me be clear here: there is a state government-funded feasibility study into this project, into the use of recycled water, taking it down to the power stations in the Latrobe Valley. In principle, on the surface, it is a good idea. In principle the recycling of water from Melbourne's water supply is a good idea. But what does that mean in terms of Gippsland, and what about the message sent by the losses by the Labor Party in two key seats in Gippsland? The Bracks government has to think about that message that has been sent to it.

But equally we should consider the feasibility study paid for with public money. The Premier said on the *Stateline* television program that he would release the report of the feasibility study, but he has not. Yesterday in the lower house Mr Thwaites, the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change, was asked — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — A good minister.

Mr D. DAVIS — Let me be clear here. Mr Theophanous says he is a good minister, but he is not an open, transparent or honest minister. He should release the feasibility study report in the way the Premier outlined. Victorians, who have paid for that feasibility study, have a right to know. The state government wants federal money to do projects but will not release key feasibility study reports that indicate whether or not these projects are functional and feasible. I tell you what, an open, accountable and

transparent government would release reports of those feasibility studies.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Mr D. DAVIS — I tell Mr Theophanous that he ought to be thinking about this water issue. He is industry minister now in his new portfolio. If he has a close look at the front page of the *Age* today he will see there is a big issue for industry in this state. I warn the minister that unless he starts to get active — he has been lazy, like all of the other Bracks government ministers, in dealing with this issue — and deals with this in terms of Victoria's water future and the security of water for industry, there is a risk that industry will start to close, that jobs will be put at risk and that the state development role that the minister has, which I agree is a very important role, will be compromised by the lack of water.

I do not want to name this individual, but somebody I met in a large regional city in the last few months made the point to me — he is a concrete manufacturer, so that probably narrows the field a bit; I am not going to tell the house the name but will just relate the essence of the story — that he had been trying for four years to get recycled water out of a regional water authority. He wanted recycled water to use for concrete manufacturing. You do not need a high standard of recycled water to manufacture concrete; that is the reality of the situation. But what use of recycled water for those purposes does do is to displace the use of potable water, and it enables potable water to be used for the more sensible purposes that it should be used for.

There has been a failure by the Bracks government to put in place recycling over the longer haul. Announcements were made in Ballarat and Bendigo during the election campaign, almost disingenuously: 'We have been in power for seven years', Steve Bracks said, 'We have had no plan in that time but now that there is an election campaign on and the Liberals and others are very strongly pushing forward with ways to deal with the water crisis the community is facing, we had better start thinking about a plan — and by the way, we are going to put recycled water arrangements in place in major regional cities'. I have to say that people were less than believing of the government's credentials in this area.

I think the government really is on notice in this period in office. It really has to deliver and get these problems solved. As I said earlier on, the government cannot be blamed for the issues around water in terms of the drought, but it can be held responsible for the lack of

preparation. The lack of preparation goes to the misuse of water. It goes to the lack of planning in place for recycling and reuse of water, including the third-pipe technology, which I have mentioned, and the eastern treatment plant and the western treatment plant. The government, through Barwon Water, has a plan for a recycling plant at Black Rock. The Barwon Water group is planning to build that important recycling plant.

The Liberal Party supports the principles of the recycling plant, but it does not support the location of the plant being effectively on the dunes at Black Rock; we believe it should be built further up. But again, that is a state government plan; there is no actual plant in place, and no proper recycling. In fact recyclers face all sorts of difficulties with water statewide. The state government needs to get in place things that enable people who wish to recycle and reuse water to do so in a constructive way.

On the issue of climate change, I take up the point made by Ms Mikakos, who said climate change is an important issue. I would agree with that, and I think she would probably concede on reflection that a number of us have raised those issues in the chamber over time. But I note on a quick examination of *Hansard* that she had raised climate change once in her period in Parliament, and that was in 2001. So it is not appropriate to be lectured by Ms Mikakos about a failure to tackle climate change when she is part of a government that has not sufficiently tackled climate change. The reality is that over the seven years of the Bracks government carbon dioxide output in Victoria and overall carbon dioxide production has increased.

The amount of carbon dioxide that Victoria as a community — industry, individuals and families — puts out has increased. That is the base load record. Ms Mikakos wants to talk about the record on climate change, yet she is part of a government that signed off on Hazelwood — and Mr Theophanous was minister at the time — without getting sufficient arrangements in place to reduce the carbon dioxide output of that important power station. I think it is a bit rich to be lectured by Ms Mikakos on climate change.

In conclusion I want to compliment Ms Lovell. I want to make the point that the state government is on notice. It will have to deliver these recycling projects; it will have to put in place secure water supplies for our major regional cities, for Melbourne and for smaller towns as well. It has to — and Mr Theophanous has a key role in this — tackle water supply for industry. I note that when the Environment Protection Authority (Amendment) Bill went through during the last

Parliament, the Liberal Party did not oppose many of the principles in that bill and was prepared to work with the government on it. Obviously there is a role for the Liberal Party to work with the government through the Environment Protection Authority to ensure that major industries conserve water in a sensible and practical way. Equally we need on the other side to be able to provide secure and predictable water supplies for industry. That is the key task of Mr Theophanous, and I formally put him on notice that we will be watching to ensure that he intervenes and that the government provides that security for industry and the community.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I am pleased to join the debate this morning in support of Ms Lovell's motion on water. It was interesting to listen to Mr Viney leading the debate for the government and to Ms Darveniza's contribution because they seemed to be more interested in talking about the policies of the Liberal Party than what the government has done in this area over the last seven years. That speaks volumes — —

Mr D. Davis — Or has not done.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Or has not done, Mr Davis! That speaks volumes in terms of where the government is at on this issue — the fact that it was easier to talk about Liberal policy than it was to defend the government's own actions.

There are five major dams in the Melbourne metropolitan water supply: the Thomson, Cardinia, Upper Yarra, Sugarloaf and Silvan dams. As of yesterday, for the first time this year, the combined content of those reservoirs fell below 40 per cent. We now have the Silvan Reservoir, which is the smallest, sitting at 87 per cent, Sugarloaf is at 51 per cent, Upper Yarra is 54 per cent, Cardinia is 68 per cent, and the Thomson, which is the largest by far, is at only 26 per cent. It is not unprecedented for Melbourne's water reserves to fall to 40 per cent, but it is very unusual for it to happen in December. Although it is counter-intuitive, the reality is that Melbourne's water supply normally peaks in the summer months following the spring and winter rainfalls and declines to its lowest levels in the winter months following a dry summer and autumn period. But this year we are seeing a continuous decline throughout the year to the point where we now have less than 40 per cent of reserves in our reservoirs for Melbourne. But this is not a recent phenomena for Melbourne. A shortage of water is not something that has only happened this year; Melbourne's water supply has been in decline over the life of this government. We have been in drought or near-drought conditions over the life of this government.

When Mr Viney was here earlier he asked by way of interjection what the previous government did. Most of the time the previous government was in power we were not experiencing drought conditions. We have now had drought conditions since the final year of the previous government, 1998–99, and they have continued through to the current year. The government's response to this issue during the period it has been in power has involved the Premier doing an advertisement. He got in a helicopter, flew over Cardinia Reservoir, and told people to shower together. That was the government's main response to the shortage of water in Melbourne.

Mr Vogels — And put a bucket there to catch it while you are doing it.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — As Mr Vogels said, put a bucket there to catch surplus water. The Premier said in that advertisement, 'We can't build a dam because that will take water away from rivers, and the rivers are using the water'. I put it to you, President, that is similar to saying we cannot use electricity because the powerlines are using it.

I heard Mr Hall in his contribution earlier today talking about the role that dams can play in river management, and I support Mr Hall's comments in that regard. I am disappointed that the government has taken the view that it will not entertain the prospect of an additional water storage for Melbourne. It is clear that what we have from the government in response to the water shortage in both metropolitan and country Victoria is a panic response. This is a problem that has been growing over the last seven or eight years, yet it is only over the last 12 to 18 months that we have seen a response by the government.

In their contributions Mr Viney and Ms Darveniza spoke about the claimed reduction in per capita consumption of water in Melbourne. The figure quoted was 22 per cent. It is interesting that Mr Viney was very careful with the language used in his speech. He referred to a 22 per cent reduction in per capita consumption in Melbourne's water since the 1990s. This is a change in language by the government. Two or three months ago the Premier and the Minister for Water, as he was then, were saying that a 22 per cent reduction had occurred since the government introduced its so-called water-saving measures 12 or 18 months ago. The government was caught out on that. Mr Viney has changed the rhetoric, and we are now talking about the 1990s, but Ms Darveniza is still claiming credit for the 22 per cent reduction in domestic water consumption.

If members look back over the historic figures, they will see that domestic consumption of water per capita in Melbourne has been in decline since the drought of 1982. There has been a consistent decline since 1982, and that has merely been continued throughout the period of this government. So while a lot of credit is claimed by this government for reducing domestic consumption, it has been a long-term trend. According to Melbourne Water figures, the current level of domestic consumption in Melbourne is the lowest it has been since the drought of 1968, and for non-drought years it is the lowest it has been since 1940. We now have domestic water consumption at an historically low level, and we have to ask the question: are further reductions in domestic water consumption a realistic prospect for Melbourne? Can we expect further significant reductions in domestic water consumption or do we need to look at the supply side of the water equation?

The government has announced as part of the flawed Melbourne 2030 policy that it expects an increase in the metropolitan population of a million people over the next 25 years, from 3.5 million people to 4.5 million people — an increase of 28 per cent in metropolitan Melbourne's population. If we do not address the issue of water supply — as the government seems intent not to do — those people will have to be accommodated within the demand side of the equation somehow. Can we realistically expect the Melbourne population to further cut its water consumption by upwards of 25 per cent to ensure that a population increase of a million people can be accommodated within the existing water supply? I submit to you, President, that the answer to that is no.

Mr Vogels — We will have to drink more whisky.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Mr Vogels said, 'We will have to drink more whisky' — perhaps we will have to bathe in whisky as well if that target is to be achieved. It is unrealistic to continue to look at only the demand side of the water equation. It is now time that the supply side is looked at. This is something that the government has been reluctant to do over the last two or three years.

An area I would like to touch on relates to my own electorate — the eastern irrigation scheme. It is a scheme to supply recycled water to market gardeners throughout the south-east. It is currently taking 3.5 per cent of treated class C water from the eastern treatment plant, which is then treated, upgraded to class A and distributed via a 60-kilometre pipeline throughout the Cranbourne-Skye area. This is something that was heralded by the Minister for Water, Environment and Climate Change in the other place, the former Minister

for Environment, as a great achievement of the government, but what has not been highlighted is that many of the market gardeners who were supposed to benefit from this scheme have in fact been cut out of it. The 60-kilometre pipeline that has been laid down is inadequate to reach many of the market gardeners in the greater Cranbourne area.

They have been told that the cost of extending the pipeline to various farms is in the order of \$50 000 to \$100 000 and the government is refusing to fund that. We have the absurd situation of market gardens which in some cases are only 100 metres or 200 metres away from the class A recycled pipeline not being able to get access to it. These farms are suffering, and will continue to suffer through this summer, because the government will not extend the pipeline the required 50 metres or 100 metres to ensure they can have connections.

This is having a dramatic impact on the market garden sector through the Cranbourne-Skye area. It has gotten to the point now where employment is jeopardised. As we head to the Christmas period when many of these farms will shut down and their work forces will take leave, there is a question as to whether the people working on those farms will be re-employed after Christmas, because the water shortage has become so acute as a consequence of this pipeline not being extended to the farms which were promised it. This has taken a very long time to get up and running. It was talked about five years ago — members would have heard the proposal put together by Richard Pratt, Lindsay Fox and Frank Costa for the western suburbs and this is a similar proposal for the eastern suburbs. It took a very long time to come to fruition and now it is up and running it is not serving the people it was supposed to serve. It is a great indictment on this government that this has been allowed to happen. We have had the press releases and the minister out there saying, 'Look at what we have delivered through this plant', when the reality is the people who were supposed to benefit from it have not and that has now jeopardised employment.

Talking about the long-term issues, Mr Viney, Ms Darveniza and Ms Mikakos spoke about climate change. It seems that climate change will now be the cause of everything. Previously it was the former state government and the federal government and now it will be climate change. We can talk about the issue of climate change. It is a long-term and important issue. However, that will not address the immediate concerns and needs of Victorians heading into this summer. We have had seven years of drought and until 18 months ago we had seen no action from the government on this

issue. To date we have seen the government talking about demand issues only — shower with your neighbour, shower with your partner — and we have heard nothing on addressing the issue of water supply. That will be an indictment of this government —

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

Ms LOVELL (Northern Victoria) — In exercising my right of reply I would like to thank all members who contributed to the debate today: from the Liberal side of the house, Mr Vogels, Mr Davis and Mr Rich-Phillips, and from The Nationals, Mr Drum and Mr Hall, who all made excellent contributions. I would also like to thank the government members: Mr Viney, Ms Darveniza and Ms Mikakos. They tried to defend the government's position. However, I must point out that, once again, we were very disappointed to note that each of them made their contribution and then immediately left the chamber. They were not prepared to sit here and listen to the concerns members of the Liberal Party and The Nationals raised on behalf of the people of Victoria and particularly the people in our electorates. It is obvious that Victoria has a water crisis. However, it is also obvious that members of this government have their heads in the sand and that they are not prepared to listen.

Mr Viney claimed the government is addressing climate change and then he blamed the water crisis on lower-than-average rainfall. If the government were addressing climate change, it would have accepted that this level of rainfall may now be the average and it would have implemented policies to capture and deliver water according to the current rainfall figures. Ms Darveniza's answer to the water crisis was government-funded Christmas hampers, a water restriction hotline and fines for the overuse of water. Ms Darveniza said Melbournians are using 20 per cent less water. This reinforces my point that the Bracks government has put all the burden of saving water on to Victorians and has wasted its opportunity to invest in infrastructure and secure a reliable water supply for Victorians.

Ms Darveniza, Mr Viney and Ms Mikakos claimed that the Bracks government is committed to addressing climate change because climate change presents this government with its greatest challenge. Yet prior to today Mr Viney and Ms Darveniza had only mentioned climate change three times in their seven years in Parliament, and Ms Mikakos had mentioned it only once and that was back in 2001.

Ms Darveniza misquoted the Liberal Party's policy. I would like to make it clear that the Liberal Party took to the election a clear and comprehensive policy to supply water to both Geelong and Ballarat. This policy involved tapping into the Newlingbrook aquifer to supply Geelong with additional water. That would have freed up a share of Lal Lal to be supplied to Ballarat. This initiative, together with a suite of other initiatives such as the recycling of water, would have solved the problems of both Geelong and Ballarat. I again encourage the government to look at the Liberal Party's policies. We would be happy for the government to adopt them in the interests of all Victorians.

It is clear that access to water is one of the greatest challenges facing Victoria today. From metropolitan and regional customers to farmers and irrigators, water is a critical issue. Labor has stumbled its way through some of the worst years of drought in recent Victorian history and has failed to provide any long-lasting solutions or plans. Labor cannot be blamed for the drought facing Victoria at present but it can be held responsible for its failure to plan and prepare Victoria for this shortage of rain. Victorians face significant water restrictions. If present trends continue, these restrictions will impact on industry, individual families and gardens. The Bracks government has barely begun the task of making water go further by preventing waste and using water more wisely. What Victoria needs is a plan that will provide a secure water supply, not only now but in coming years when population and demand will necessarily increase. This government does not have such a plan. I urge it to address it as a matter of urgency.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 17

Atkinson, Mr	Koch, Mr
Coote, Mrs	Kronberg, Mrs
Dalla-Riva, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Lovell, Ms
Davis, Mr D.	O'Donohue, Mr
Davis, Mr P.	Petrovich, Mrs
Drum, Mr	Peulich, Mrs
Finn, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Guy, Mr	Vogels, Mr
Hall, Mr	

Noes, 20

Broad, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	Pakula, Mr
Darveniza, Ms (<i>Teller</i>)	Pulford, Ms
Eideh, Mr	Scheffer, Mr
Elasmar, Mr	Smith, Mr
Jennings, Mr	Somyurek, Mr
Kavanagh, Mr	Tee, Mr
Leane, Mr	Theophanous, Mr
Lenders, Mr	Thornley, Mr
Madden, Mr	Tierney, Ms

Mikakos, Ms

Viney, Mr

Motion negatived.

Sitting suspended 1.05 p.m. to 2.08 p.m.

Business interrupted pursuant to standing orders.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Disability services: supported accommodation

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — My question without notice is for the Minister for Community Services. Under the Bracks Labor government there has been an 87 per cent increase in the need for in-home support for people with a disability and their families in the last seven years. In the recent election the government promised \$15 million for new and better shared supported accommodation for people with disabilities. How much of that \$15 million will be spent on the 3900 people aged over 33 years still living with a co-resident parent carer?

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — I think Mrs Coote and I are coming at an understanding that this may be a recurring feature of question time in the term ahead of us. I am very happy about that because it shows that the Liberal Party may be interested in the area of disability. Maybe its track record has not met with that degree of concern in the past. It may be a blind spot in the thinking of our current federal government which has been consistently reducing its contribution in terms of the commonwealth-state disability agreement.

We are on notice that the agreement may be under severe pressure and has the capacity of going out the back door of the federal government's consideration. So if we have renewed enthusiasm from the Liberal Party in relation to disability, I will be very grateful. Any time we can share our efforts both in terms of influence in the Victorian community or importantly in the influence we may bring to bear on the federal government, I will be eternally grateful for Mrs Coote adding her voice to the call of those in our community to rise up and meet the needs of people with disabilities. I thank the member for her interest, as I would any member of the Victorian community who shares that concern.

In her question the member has crossed over in terms of the services provided, earmarked and allocated for providing in-home support. I indicated to the house as recently as yesterday that they are a significant

component of the more than \$1 billion that the Bracks government commits to disability services across Victoria. The break-up of that allocation is in the order of 50 per cent provided to those in residential disability services — such as community residential units, congregate forms of care — and 50 per cent of the allocation is provided to those who receive either day-care programs, planning for their care needs or in-home support.

A feature of the allocation of the Bracks government during recent times has been increasingly to allocate resources and effort to those people who live at home, who live independently or with carers. During the life of the Bracks government we have had a 344 per cent increase in the allocation of individual support programs. It is a feature of where we want to take the portfolio, as I outlined to the house yesterday. We recognise the need to have the appropriate resource allocation and commitment shown between individual support, home-based support, day-care support and residential services. We are going to maintain that degree of commitment.

The degree of confusion that is in the member's question is that she crosses the division between the allocation of program support which is provided for individual services and individual support care and the number of people who are actually on the waiting list for residential care. There is a bit of a mixed notion of what that waiting list means regarding the waiting provision for residential accommodation as distinct from access to day programs or support services. I am happy to work with the department, the community and those individual carers who care for the needs of people with disabilities in our community so there is a degree of clarity rather than confusion about those issues. I am happy to work with the member and the community in that regard.

I am going to put the staff at the department on notice: they need to be clear about the difference between the allocation of resources available for the individual programs, support services and respite services provided to carers and the aggregate number of people who may be waiting for residential care.

Supplementary question

Mrs COOTE (Southern Metropolitan) — I have a supplementary question which should not be confusing for the minister. How much of the \$15 million will be allocated to the 65 200 severe and profoundly disabled children and adults living with parents?

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — Obviously the member and I could try to demonstrate to the community and members of the chamber that we have a command of numbers. We will have some time to clarify the matter of the difference between waiting lists, the allocation to resources — —

Mr Finn interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — I beg your pardon?

Mr Finn — You can start by answering the question.

Mr JENNINGS — I do not think you will find any member of this chamber who provides more comprehensive answers than I do.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The minister is to speak through the Chair.

Mr JENNINGS — I do not think you will have any problem about me staying on message and covering the subject area compared to any other member of this chamber. You do not actually have to worry, Mr Finn.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I would appreciate it if the minister answered the question. He should forget about the debate across the chamber.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr JENNINGS — In fact it obviously is his maiden speech. I appreciate the fact that you, President, did not cover interjections in your ruling this morning. I think it was a very generous ruling — —

Mrs Coote — I am talking about the disabled.

Mr JENNINGS — You were talking about the disabled, and your colleague tried to sidetrack me from a substantive answer, but I will not be sidetracked. Do not worry. The comprehensive answers will continue to come, and they will keep coming because we are in fact going to deal with these issues. Again it is a convergence of statistical relationships with respect to the availability of resources.

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

Schools: Dandenong

Mr SOMYUREK (South Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Education, Mr Lenders. Can the minister outline to the house his plan for schools in Dandenong?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I thank Mr Somyurek for his question and, as a local representative of Dandenong of some years standing, his ongoing interest in schools in Dandenong. Upon being appointed the education minister, my first school visit as minister was to Dandenong to look at the consolidation being proposed for three secondary colleges in the Dandenong area. As members would know, educational outcomes for students is the no. 1 priority of the government in the area of education. The local community has been engaged in a process of finding the best educational outcome for secondary students in Dandenong and Doveton. As a consequence I was delighted to approve the amalgamation of three schools in the area, Dandenong High School, Cleeland Secondary College, which abuts Dandenong High School, and Doveton Secondary College. It was the amalgamation of three schools into a single consolidated process.

Mr Atkinson interjected.

Mr LENDERS — I will take up Mr Atkinson's interjection, because he obviously still thinks we are in the Kennett years and that the government is about school closures. This government will regenerate schools and will work in school communities to improve the educational outcomes of students with a collaborative approach. Unlike the Kennett government, which from on high in Spring Street went forth and closed more than 300 schools without a skerrick of consultation with local communities, the Bracks government goes through a process where we engage communities to achieve good educational outcomes in their environments.

The school councils of Cleeland Secondary College, Dandenong High School and Doveton Secondary College have all voted in support of the schools' consolidation into a single campus on the site of Dandenong High School and Cleeland Secondary College. As part of our budget process this year, I will propose funds to build a new state-of-the-art secondary college in the area using existing facilities and improving upon them so we can get great educational outcomes for students in Dandenong. As I said to members of the house yesterday, education is the one gift you have for life. It is the one thing that society can actually give to its citizens for life.

Mr D. Davis interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Mr Davis might be making inane comments from the middle of the opposition front bench about these issues, but if he is interested in educational outcomes and if the Liberal Party wants to

learn from its seven years under the Kennett government, they should know that you need to take communities with you as the most effective way of getting an educational outcome. Those students in Dandenong will have the best educational opportunities to equip them in their future life.

We have an exciting series of proposals. These proposals are never easy ones. The three communities have had to negotiate on what they see as educational outcomes. They have had to negotiate on a range of issues about autonomy, which principal would be in charge of the new school and where things would happen — they all had visions. But the three communities have a shared vision which this government embraces and which I have signed off on. It is an exciting new project in Dandenong and it will deliver great educational outcomes for the students.

Planning: Stonington Mansion

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Planning. I refer him to the proposed sale of Stonington Mansion. Given that the Stonnington City Council has written to the government four times within the past three months and a major public rally has been held on the issue, I ask: has the minister or his office made any attempt to contact Deakin University regarding the sale of the mansion, and if so, what was the nature of the discussions?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I thank Mr Guy for his question and I congratulate him on assuming the mantle of shadow Minister for Planning. The planning portfolio is a big responsibility, because it is one of those portfolios that can have a profound effect across the community. Can I also congratulate the member on his inaugural speech, which was outstandingly delivered. While I might disagree with the content, the quality of the delivery was certainly worth noting.

This is an issue of significance, particularly in the Stonnington area but more broadly across the state. As background information, it is worth appreciating the history of Stonington Mansion. It was built in 1890 for the Cobb & Co. coach line proprietor, John Wagner. The mansion was acquired for Victoria's vice-regal residents in 1901 and was used for that for 30 years. Since then it has been used as a girls school, a hospital for the care of child polio victims, a Red Cross convalescent hospital and a health department administration centre. In 1957 it was transferred to the education department and was used for educational purposes by the state government of Victoria as a

teachers college. In 1992 the State College of Victoria was merged with Deakin University and title to the site was transferred to Deakin University in September 1995 as an unrestricted Crown grant. It is worth appreciating that the mansion has had a variety of uses. It is a significant property. I know the Stonnington City Council, and even the federal Treasurer, has an inherent interest in this. I suspect that the Treasurer might like to use it as a potential Prime Minister's residence in future years. He might have a vested interest in its use.

We have had correspondence from the City of Stonnington, and I am conscious of its concerns. I make it perfectly clear that I understand there is a tender process under way. I also understand that may well have been completed today. My office, I understand, has been advised only this afternoon that a preferred tenderer for the site has been selected. I would expect that at some stage it will make requests in relation to any proposal on that site and that those requests will come to my office at one stage or another.

I reinforce that regardless of what does or does not take place in the future, because I do not have the details in relation to what that preferred tenderer might be advocating, it is worth appreciating that this building is listed on the Victorian Heritage Register. That means that the project will be respected, because it is on that register and any alteration to the mansion through any development or development proposal or any interest in that will require a permit through the Heritage Act. I will continue to monitor this situation. I am eager and enthusiastic to make sure that the public outcome of this is one that is publicly acceptable to all those interested parties.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for his answer. Last night the member for Prahran in the other place, as the minister did in his answer, mentioned that he would monitor the tender process to respect the heritage values of the mansion. Rather than monitoring, why will the minister not act immediately to protect the mansion from inappropriate development?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — Anybody who knows the Heritage Act well enough will appreciate that one of the great challenges in ensuring that heritage buildings are maintained is to find an appropriate use for those heritage buildings. At this point, as I mentioned, whatever the proposal might be from any prospective applicant in relation to this project, the proposal is unknown. I am eager to hear what that proposal might be, but I also expect that

whatever that proposal might be that the applicant will be required, because of the Heritage Act, to maintain that building in a sensitive manner and find an application for that building which reflects the heritage, the history and the significance of that building to all Victorians.

Bushfires: school closures

Mr VINEY (Eastern Victoria) — My question is to the — —

Mr Atkinson interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Atkinson! Mr Viney, to continue.

Mr VINEY — As usual, Mr Atkinson, you cannot count — this is my first question. My question is to the Minister for Education. We are all aware of the great hardships that are faced by those who are at the fire front. On that note, can the minister inform the house of efforts of school communities in supporting those affected?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I thank Mr Viney for his question and for his particular interest in what school communities are going through in the fire-affected areas of Victoria. I guess that is one area where every person in this chamber would share a very similar view: that we need to be absolutely aware of how we as a community can support these communities that are ravaged by fires, and things as basic as do their schools stay open, how do we safely operate the schools and when does the time come to actually close them for safety. That is something we are all interested in.

At the moment 38 schools in Victoria are closed due to the dangers of bushfires, and I expect the regional directors in Hume and Gippsland regions to close a further 8 schools today for the same reason. These schools will obviously be closed for the rest of the year. It is an issue that those committees are grappling with in many ways. One of the things that I certainly do is extend my support to those communities, because what we are now seeing are seasonal conditions that probably most of us would expect to happen in late January or February happening in mid-December. These communities obviously have a period of great uncertainty in front of them as the fire season continues. In these particular areas we have obviously closed the schools. The opportunity is there for those communities to deal with their own fire plans. Clearly a number of staff in those schools have volunteered for firefighting duties, and I commend them for that. The system, the

regions and their own schools will be supporting them in those endeavours.

I am pleased to report that at this stage there has been no damage to any school property in those areas, so hopefully the schools will be ready to reopen at the start of the 2007 school year. Mr Viney obviously has a great interest in this, because a lot of the schools are in his region of Eastern Victoria. We are certainly monitoring it. The regions are making day-to-day decisions on what is an appropriate thing to do, but certainly we will be first and foremost concerned with protecting the school communities and then with protecting their property in the most effective way in preparing for the next school year.

Planning: local government

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — I again direct my question without notice to the Minister for Planning. Does the minister stand by the Premier's comments of 23 November on 3AW that under Labor the planning powers of local councils and councillors would not be reduced and would remain as they are?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I welcome Mr Guy's second question in the chamber today. We have a track record as a government under previous planning ministers of working cooperatively with local government. It is worth appreciating that local government holds a great degree of authority in relation to the planning process. The planning process has a number of stakeholders at various levels that are instrumental in the effective and efficient implementation of the planning process.

One of the things that we are committed to is not only working in partnership but I am personally committed to working in collaboration with all the stakeholders in relation to the planning process. It is also worth appreciating that we have a very robust planning system, but what is particularly impressive about that is that somewhere in the order of 55 000 planning permit applications are made per year and somewhere in the order of 7 per cent of those go to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. That is not a bad average. What we want to do is make sure we get more collaboration, more negotiation and, most importantly, better outcomes in relation to the planning process more effectively and more swiftly; and hopefully make sure we get those better outcomes right across the community and not, as is proposed in the opposition planning policy, a myopic monoculture of what planning in this state should be.

The Liberal opposition's proposals on the planning scheme are to give everybody the same housing solution. Its same housing solution is basically quarter-acre blocks right across Victoria. Whilst many of us live comfortably on quarter-acre blocks and others might aspire to do so, it is not necessarily appropriate housing for the vast component of the community. It is worth appreciating that the monocultural view of the opposition will not be suitable going into the future because of changing demographics. What opposition members have failed to do is plan. Their planning policy was not a policy at all; it was an oxymoron. Their planning policy was not planning for all; it was failing for all. What we will do is continue to work with all stakeholders and local government and make sure that we get the planning outcomes that Victorians deserve going into the future to make sure — —

Mr Atkinson interjected.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — To make sure, Mr Atkinson, that Victoria is a great place — a better place to live, work and raise a family.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Before I call Mr Guy on a supplementary I would say to the minister that I had no problem hearing him — none whatsoever! He might take that into account next time.

Supplementary question

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — I will make the supplementary question very easy for the minister. Will the government be reducing the planning powers of local government councils or councillors?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I again welcome Mr Guy's question. As I have said, we are keen to work in collaboration with local government to improve local outcomes for local communities, and also to make sure that we work cooperatively with local government. One of the things I am very committed to is highlighting where we have best practice in local government and making sure that where we have effective implementation of the planning process by local government, councils are acknowledged for that. We can see that some local governments are better than others at delivering outcomes for their local communities, and I look forward to working with all local governments with the resources that we will provide to make sure that we strengthen the outcomes they deliver for their local communities.

Mr Viney — On a point of order, President, I did not interrupt the answer to Mr Guy's supplementary question, but I want to alert you to what I understood

from the last Parliament to be some of the rules relating to supplementary questions. You may wish to consider the matter and advise the house at a later time. New standing order 8.05 states that the intention of a supplementary question is to 'elucidate' a specific matter — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I would appreciate hearing Mr Viney's point of order.

Mr Viney — The intention of a supplementary question is to 'elucidate or clarify' an answer — a specific matter. The previous President ruled that after asking a general question it is not appropriate — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I again ask Mr Viney to get to his point of order.

Mr Viney — I am raising the point of order. The previous President ruled that after asking a general question initially it is not appropriate for a member to then ask a very specific question, which is what the member opposite has done on this occasion. In future if we are going to have some genuine supplementary questions, we should accord with the rule that they clarify or elucidate the original answer.

Mr P. Davis — On the point of order, President, it is quite clear that Mr Viney is oxygen deprived, and I hope he gets more questions so that he will not make spurious points of order.

The PRESIDENT — Order! To the point of order, Mr Davis!

Mr P. Davis — The issue is clear: the member asked a question, the minister responded in a rather wide-ranging assault on the opposition and made some comments about government policy. The member then responded with a supplementary question which was to clarify the minister's answer, and under the rules of supplementary questions he is quite entitled to endeavour to seek clarification of a point which has been made by the minister.

The PRESIDENT — Order! After reading standing order 8.05, I think Mr Guy's supplementary question was in fact in order. I think it relates directly to the original question. I will take on notice Mr Viney's point of order and review it, but at this minute I rule the question in.

Planning: government policy

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — My question is to the Minister for Planning. The Bracks government is once again working to make Victoria a better place to

live, work and raise a family. Can the minister inform the house of his plans for the future of Victoria?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Planning) — I welcome Ms Pulford's first question in the chamber, and I congratulate her on her exceptional inaugural speech last night and look forward to working with her cooperatively in the chamber for a long time to come.

No government and no party can ignore demands of the future when it comes to planning in this state. Victoria is thriving, but it is worth appreciating that by 2030 more than 1.3 million people are expected to want to live in Victoria over and above the people who are already here, so we have to make sure that we have the structures in place to deliver and to ensure that we continue to make Victoria a great place to live, work and raise a family. But unlike the opposition we have a plan for the future — a plan that limits urban sprawl, protects our green wedges and protects the character of existing suburbs.

As I mentioned before, we will work closely with local government and communities to protect what makes Victoria a great place to live by continually improving our planning system. We also want to make sure we have a system that treats everybody equally and fairly, a plan for the future that protects our environment and creates jobs, and through an economically sustainable system see development that provides affordable and well-serviced communities.

There is no doubt that continuing to manage growth and sustainability will be a great challenge, but we also need to make sure that we continue the economic growth. We will ensure that those new suburbs are not just subdivisions but great places to live. We will also provide opportunity for diversity when it comes to housing types. We will work in partnership with councils and the Municipal Association of Victoria by also making sure that we boost planning facilitation services for rural councils. We will also ensure that we provide the infrastructure and services needed for these new locations, and we also want to make sure that we continue to make housing affordable. That is why we have ensured up to 25 years of land supply, given relief to first home buyers and made sure that the new Growth Areas Authority works cooperatively with local governments and with all the relevant stakeholders.

We are committed to making sure that not only do we provide a plan for metropolitan Melbourne but also for the regions to make sure that they can cope with the growth that is taking place currently. A strategy is needed for coastal areas — for the sea change and development that might be taking place. We need to

complete the growth plans for those coastal settlements that are experiencing growth pressures due to demand, particularly to protect their landscape and character but also to protect townships from inappropriate development.

As well as that, heritage is a critical concern. There are many challenges, but we look forward to working in partnership and in harmony with all the relevant stakeholders. But that is in direct contrast to the opposition's plan: it called it a plan for all, but it is simply a plan for sprawl. We are committed to making sure that we work cooperatively and collaboratively with the stakeholders to improve planning performance.

Manufacturing: employment

Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Industry and State Development in the absence of a minister for manufacturing. Given the minister's remarks in the house yesterday that manufacturing is his government's priority, can the minister tell us why manufacturing employment in Victoria has fallen to historic lows under his government?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and State Development) — Let me say first of all how pleased I am to be the minister responsible for manufacturing in this state, because only a Labor government is interested in manufacturing in this state. The previous government had no interest in this sector. Its approach was to just stand by and allow the federal government to run the show in manufacturing, and many actions of the federal government led to the decline in manufacturing that the member is referring to.

Let me make this very important point: we are not going to give up on Victorian manufacturing, irrespective of what the federal government seeks to do. Victorian manufacturing is under considerable pressure. A lot of that pressure comes from some of the practices that have been adopted by overseas countries which are happy to take advantage of reductions in tariffs that have been an ongoing feature of manufacturing in this country and which the federal government has adopted. One of those that I am sure the shadow minister for manufacturing and exports would have read about is the automobile industry, where a further reduction in tariff protection is proposed.

What is not understood and what people do not realise when they look at the way manufacturing is protected through those tariffs is the situations in our competitor countries and countries around the world. I cite one

example. At the moment the federal government is negotiating with Thailand for a foreign free trade agreement. There may not be the same tariff barriers for exports of our automotive products to those countries in South-East Asia, but they find other ways of protecting their industries, whether it be by local council fees that have to be paid and which can add up to 50 per cent of the costs of exporting to those countries, or other mechanisms to try to prevent our manufacturing from going into those countries.

When we talk about the protection of our manufacturing industries we have to be mindful of the fact that we cannot just simply allow them to be exposed without getting reciprocity. The federal government has absolutely failed to ensure that protection for our manufacturing industries. But despite that, taking an industry like the automotive industry, with its capacity to restructure itself, and in particular the Victorian manufacturing industry, it has become so aggressive and so competitive that it is now able to export something like \$2.7 billion of exports from that industry alone out of Victoria. This is a success story that we need to build on in the manufacturing sector. For this shadow minister to come in here and ask as his first question that sort of trite and stupid one with no depth to it shows that he has no knowledge, no understanding and no ideas about manufacturing in this state.

Supplementary question

Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — The minister talks about federal and international factors, but I will give him some factors that maybe he can explain. Victoria has lost over 22 000 jobs from its manufacturing sector in the last 12 months, yet Queensland has gained over 7000 and Western Australia almost 2000 — hardly relevant to international competitiveness, if they are going interstate.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Where are you quoting from?

Mr DALLA-RIVA — I ask: what is the minister doing to reverse this serious decline and re-establish Victoria's pre-eminent position as the centre of manufacturing in Australia before it is too late and more manufacturing shifts interstate?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Industry and State Development) — The member again comes here with a question, but when I asked him, by interjection, a simple question — where does he get his figures from? — he is not even able to put that on the

record. For all this chamber knows, he could be making it up.

Mr Dalla-Riva interjected.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — Learn to be precise. If you want to be the shadow minister for manufacturing and exports, then learn to be precise. If you want to bag manufacturing in this state, then do it on the basis of figures you can quote.

Mr Dalla-Riva interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The Minister! Mr Dalla-Riva's constant interjections are unhelpful, to say the least. He may not be interested in the answer to his supplementary question, but I am. He will remain silent so that we can hear the answer.

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS — I only want to say in relation to this that my priority as minister with responsibility in this area is to ensure that we have a competitive manufacturing sector, and that will become evident during the course of my contribution over the next four years.

Housing: affordability

Mr TEE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My question is to the Minister for Major Projects. Can the minister advise the house how the Bracks government is leading the nation in the provision of affordable, sustainable land for home buyers?

Hon. T. C. THEOPHANOUS (Minister for Major Projects) — I thank the member for what is a very sensible question. One of the things that we do when there is a new minister in a new portfolio area is to try, for the benefit of the house, to explain to members how we intend to deal with this sector going forward and with our responsibilities. The Bracks government sees the major projects area as an important policy lever for economic growth and for delivering social outcomes. It has that dual function, and we are very much committed to it for that reason.

We support individual effort and enterprise. Having heard some of the speeches in the house, we on this side support individual enterprise in the economy. But we also believe that governments have a vital role in stimulating economic growth. To put it another way, we in Victoria believe in a Keynesian model, if you like, without assuming the debt. That means we produce good economic management in order to get the funds to invest and to stimulate the economy. We do that for economic purposes and also, importantly, for social outcomes. There is a very important difference

between the approach of our side of the house to stimulating economic growth from what happens on the other side of the house.

There is also another important difference. We believe also in social outcomes through such things as housing affordability. We believe that if we are going to make these investments in order to stimulate the economy, there ought to be a social element to it and preferably also an environmental element as well. By facilitating affordable housing, governments can deliver social, economic and environmental outcomes. It is what Labor governments do well. We do it because we have a belief in the way in which our society should be organised and in sharing the benefits. That is the second key difference we have from our conservative opponents.

We are committed to the provision of affordable land and affordable housing throughout Victoria. I can advise the house that VicUrban has an affordable housing action plan. Features of the plan include targets for the delivery of more affordable homes in VicUrban estates and whole-of-life design initiatives.

The action plan allows for 40 per cent of VicUrban allotments being delivered to the market in the lowest quartile price range for local markets. It involves 25 per cent of house and land packages on VicUrban estates in the lowest quartile of the local market; the development, in partnership with builders, of quality affordable home designs; and new environmental design features to generate whole-of-life savings for home purchases. We will continue to place an emphasis on affordable housing as part of our stimulating the Victorian economy.

Forests: threatened species

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — My question without notice is to the minister representing the Premier. The minister will be aware that Justice Marshall in the Federal Court yesterday found that forestry operations in Tasmania's Wielangta Forest are likely to have a significant impact on listed threatened species, namely the Wielangta stag beetle, the Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle and the swift parrot. He also found that the forestry operations were not exempt from the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, because they were carried out otherwise than in accordance with the regional forest agreement.

Will the government outline the implications of the decision for Victoria? Can the government confirm that Forestry Tasmania has suspended native forest logging

until it obtains legal advice? Why has the government not acted to suspend logging in Victorian forests inhabited by listed threatened species such as the spotted-tail quoll, Leadbeater's possum and the Baw Baw frog?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I thank Mr Barber for his inaugural question. I will take the question on notice. The tradition in this place is that, if it is a specific question on a portfolio where the minister is representing a minister in the other house, it is taken on notice for the minister in the other house.

Mrs Coote — Open and transparent!

Mr LENDERS — I take up Mrs Coote's interjection about being open and transparent. I am being open and transparent here. In deference to Mr Barber — —

Mr Dalla-Riva interjected.

Mr LENDERS — I will take up Mr Dalla-Riva's comment. The practice of this house since question time was introduced in the 1960s has been that when a question is asked of a minister, the minister responds on their own portfolio. They respond on behalf of another minister when they are dealing with the committee stage of a bill. At that stage I will respond to any question in the portfolio areas of the Premier, the Treasurer, the Minister for the Arts, the Minister for Finance and the Minister for Information and Communication Technology.

However, when a question is asked in question time, it is a longstanding practice of this house that that question be taken on notice for the minister in the other chamber. Where there is an area of crossover, I, as a minister, will give a general response to that, as I have on many occasions, but where it is specifically a question for the Premier — or in this case, the environment minister — I will take it on notice, as has been the practice of this house since the first question was asked of former minister Alan Hunt in this house many years ago.

Supplementary question

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — I thank the minister for undertaking to get that response and in light of the urgency, I hope it could be by the end of the day. My supplementary question is — —

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr BARBER — You will like this even better! Will the government take this golden opportunity to

protect once and for all Victoria's remaining old-growth and high conservation value forests, conserving their irreplaceable value for wildlife, water production and carbon storage?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I think my most substantive response answers Mr Barber's question. As Mr Barber will be aware, there is a requirement that questions be responded to within a certain time.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr LENDERS — Members opposite will know from the last Parliament — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I was going to let this go and talk to Mr Barber later, but clearly his supplementary question is out of order given that he received the answer to the previous question. There is no further reason for any cross-banter as a result of that, so we shall move on.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — On a point of order, President, I want to clarify something because I think some of the new members may not understand. The initial question without notice was actually out of order. The reason it was out of order was that it was asking a question of a minister in this house for which he did not have ministerial responsibility. My understanding is that the Leader of the Government said he would treat the question as a question on notice, which means that the question becomes a question on notice, and the normal time for response of 30 days applies to it. It should not be taken to mean that it is appropriate to keep asking questions on notice during question time in the house.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I agree with the minister, and the point is well made. I will take this opportunity to read from the standing orders, particularly for the benefit of some of our new members. Standing order 8.1 states:

- (1) Questions may be put to —
 - (a) ministers of the Crown relating to public affairs with which the minister is connected or to any matter of administration for which the minister is responsible.

Clearly the minister is not responsible for the issues raised in the question Mr Barber asked.

Disability services: supported accommodation

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Community

Services. Over the last seven years the Bracks government has steadfastly refused to even consider congregate care as a legitimate option for housing people in shared supported accommodation. Now that Mr Jennings is the minister responsible for accommodation for people with disabilities, will Victoria finally start to see a range of accommodation options available such as congregate care, cluster housing or residential settings similar to those that now exist at Kew, Colanda and Sandhurst being built around the state of Victoria?

Mr Hall — Good question.

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — I agree with Mr Hall's interjection that it is a good question. I appreciate that I have received three questions in two days on disability services and the support we provide for members of our Victorian community who live with disabilities and those in our community who care for those with disabilities. I am very encouraged by the degree of interest shown by people on the opposition benches. All we need is Mr Kavanagh and someone from the Greens collective to join us in this regard and it will be the first issue that unites this chamber in its new constellation. That would be a good thing in terms of the collaborative arrangements that are entered into; it would be a good thing in terms of the outcomes that we may collectively drive to support those people who live with disabilities.

Mr Drum was a very astute listener to my very first answer to a question yesterday when I indicated to the house a preparedness to consider a range of service provisions that may be appropriate in the various forms of accommodation, from support services for individuals who live at home through to forms of congregate care in terms of the institutions that currently exist, the institutions Mr Drum named and the types of services provided to people who live in community residential units, which comprise the major component of the current configuration of those accommodation options.

I have come into the portfolio looking for the most effective way of providing a flexible range of services to meet the needs of individuals and their carers right across the Victorian community on the basis of need, on the basis of a reasonable geographic spread, on the basis of the appropriate range of services to meet the degree of acuity of disability and on the basis of the flexibility that may be appropriate to provide as much as possible for tailorised individual support being targeted to support those people with profound disabilities in our community. In that context I am very

open to the proposition of looking at what the appropriate range of services may be.

During the course of the election campaign the Bracks government indicated that it is prepared to look at the appropriate long-going situation relating to Colanda, a residential facility in Colac, to see what is the appropriate service configuration that may occur in years to come either to augment what exists in Colac or to come up with a new service configuration. We indicated in the election context that we were prepared to look at that. I reiterate that to the house and to the community today.

In relation to the service configuration, I also advise that I have been intimately involved in providing some space for new flexible options to be created under the My Choice My Future program, which is the state government commitment to removing younger people from nursing homes to different forms of congregate care and other community-based services. I am very open to looking at the needs of individuals in our community and at the range of appropriate services.

As Mr Drum would understand, the sector is driven by people who are very committed to service models they are wedded to. Part of my responsibility is to try to bring the broadest range of people together. I do not want to jump too far ahead in answering the question, but I put the house clearly on notice that I am very happy to explore the range of services, to try and work through with the sector in terms of the capacity to respond to need and to bring as many individuals and their carers as possible along that path to make sure we provide flexible and tailored services to meet the needs of individuals who live with disabilities.

Supplementary question

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — I thank the minister for his answer. With the renewed flexible approach that the minister is espousing on behalf of the government to tackling this problem, does the minister have a specific reduction target to reach within the next four years of government to bring the 1000-plus people who are on the urgent waiting list for shared supported accommodation down to a certain level?

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — In my substantive answer I indicated that I do not want to get too far ahead of myself, but in the life of this Parliament I will come back to the members of the chamber and the community with specific targets such as that. I cannot say when I will do that, because I have been in the job for the best part of 20 days, but in

the not too distant future, within our collective memory span, I will come back and answer the question.

Aboriginals: government initiatives

Mr SCHEFFER (Eastern Victoria) — My question is directed to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Will the minister inform the house of progress made in establishing a whole-of-government framework to address and overcome disadvantages experienced by indigenous Victorians?

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) — I thank Mr Scheffer for his question and for his concern about the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in this community. The nature of my answer to his question is a further supplementary answer to Mr Drum's question.

People in the Victorian community who know of my commitment to address the profound ongoing disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people know that part of my challenge has been to start driving within government, and in partnership with Aboriginal communities across Victoria, strategies to address disadvantage, whether they be important legal reforms such as addressing the fundamental blind spot in the constitution that does not acknowledge the existence of Aboriginal people and the prime role they played in our community prior to and after settlement, whether they be legislative reforms in relation to cultural heritage protection in terms of the programs supported, whether they be through providing support to the stolen generations or whether they be the introduction of new approaches to militate against family violence.

We have worked together in partnership with the Aboriginal community in establishing profound agreements such as the Aboriginal justice agreement to invest in strategies to try to reduce the incidence of Aboriginal people being exposed to and involved in the criminal justice system and to lead people to a better future through social economic development.

Indeed at the end of October, just before we went into caretaker mode, we took that approach further by launching a Victorian indigenous affairs framework, which lays out the commitments on behalf of the Bracks government. I am glad that the Bracks government now has the opportunity to implement that framework in partnership with Aboriginal people. It is a framework rigorously designed to drill down into the strategic areas to address the ongoing disadvantage of Aboriginal people, to increase the life expectancy and quality of life outcomes for all Aboriginal people and to be able to identify six strategic areas of investment and

government programs that will be designed to achieve that outcome. Within those six strategic areas for investment we will establish 5, 10 and 15-year targets in terms of key benchmarks and indicators that will actually demonstrate to all in our community that we are making progress to address that ongoing disadvantage.

Those six areas of strategic investment and priority programs include maternal and child health, literacy and numeracy of young people, the successful completion of year 12 or the equivalent and transition to employment. The fourth indicator relates to the economic and social opportunities, the fifth is the resolution of native title outcomes and land justice outcomes for Aboriginal people and the sixth is the organisational capacity within Aboriginal community organisations and an enhanced sense of governance and skill development within communities to drive those reforms into the future. They are the six areas of strategic intervention.

Within each of those areas there are lead agencies within the Victorian government that are responsible for delivering those outcomes. We set rigorous and ongoing targets in relation to achieving results and demonstrating progress over 5, 10 and 15-year targets. We will achieve those targets. In fact we have a very good track record in increasing resource allocation to meet those objectives. In fact \$75 million of new investments were announced in the last budget to support those programs as part of the ongoing contribution of the Bracks government, in partnership with the Aboriginal people, to increasing the life expectancy of and opportunities for life for Aboriginal people.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed from 19 December; motion of Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) for adoption of address-in-reply.

Mr BARBER (Northern Metropolitan) — President, congratulations on your appointment, and thank you for your sincere statement that you will make this house a house of a fair go. As one of the spruikers in the marketplace of ideas, I am sure I will appreciate it greatly, and I will assist you whenever I can.

I would like to start by thanking my beautiful wife, Deborah Di Natale, who is right here behind me, for her love, affection and support. She shows me support in

quite a unique way: by teasing me relentlessly from the minute I walk in the door. That brings me right back down to the level where I should be, and I find it very hard to take myself seriously after that. That is incredibly important for a politician, I think. I also thank my family: my parents, Rex and Kathy, who have given me the tools that I need to be here, and of course mia famiglia Italiana, who covered most of the booths in Broadmeadows and who are very supportive. I also thank the members of the Greens, many of whom are represented here today, including friends from the Green Party Taiwan, who worked so hard and poured their hearts into it.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I do not like to interrupt Mr Barber, particularly while he is making his inaugural speech, but I advise him that he does not have the right to refer to people in the gallery, particularly by name. He can refer to anyone else by name who is not here, but he cannot indicate. I am sorry about that, but that is the way it is.

Mr BARBER — Thank you very much, President. Of course I would like to thank the voters, 315 000 of them across Victoria, who put '1' in the box next to the Greens, but particularly the voters of the northern suburbs, who considered carefully voting for the Greens and in the end returned us with a quota. That level of support across the community shows that the Greens are not extreme, that we are quite mainstream — and to get 10 per cent of the vote in two elections on the trot is better than any small party has done in a very long time in any jurisdiction across Australia.

I would like to acknowledge the Bracks government's reforms to the upper house that have allowed us to be here. I also particularly acknowledge the three Independents and their charter that led to those reforms: Susan Davies, Craig Ingram and Russell Savage. They had an opportunity; they had a very important decision to make. It is to their credit that what they put up was a charter that was about renewing democracy rather than necessarily going for any other more partisan issues. They trusted in democracy, and that is my theme for today.

I would also like to acknowledge a former member who represented the area that I now cover and who sat for quite a long time in the seat now occupied by Mr Thornley, and that is Ms Glenyys Romanes. She championed many causes in Victoria that the Greens now hold very dear before there was a green party.

The origin of the Greens in Victoria is from a meeting under a tree. It was very similar to the ALP's genesis

under the Tree of Knowledge. A group of people, not including me — I joined shortly afterwards — sat under a tree in Edinburgh Gardens and decided to start a Greens party. Like the Labor Party of 100 years ago, the Greens were arising out of a movement whose time had simply come — it was inevitable. The Greens stand for four pillars: grassroots democracy, social justice, ecological sustainability and non-violence. Those four pillars make for us a very strong and sturdy table: it is not top heavy and cannot easily be tipped over. Social justice means we share. Here in a place as wealthy and prosperous as Victoria everybody can have their basic needs met if we just share. Ecological sustainability means living within our environmental means, living within our environmental budget. Grassroots democracy means that if there is a place to locate power, it should be located as close as possible to the level where ordinary people can have a say. Non-violence of course is a principle by which we must solve these problems. It is not just simply an add-on to the other three but is fundamental to the way we expect to resolve conflict in the world.

We are a global party that has arisen at around about the same time as the economic forces of globalisation. There are 70 green parties around the world, and they have made some tremendous achievements. Greens senator Bob Brown, the voice of Obi-Wan Kenobi in my head, is one of the first ever elected Greens. I admire him greatly. I also admire greatly Greens senator Christine Milne, who is also from Tasmania. She was profiled in an article some time ago. One of the people interviewed about her was Graham 'Richo' Richardson. When asked what he thought of her, he just said 'Tough'. Richo said she is tough.

Wangari Maathai blew us away at the 2001 Global Greens conference, which was held here in Australia. Shortly after she arrived back in Kenya she was jailed. She got out, eventually became the environment minister for the Green Party of Kenya and just last year was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She is an incredibly brave person, as is the Green Party senator from Colombia, Ingrid Betancourt — la Colombienne incorruptible. She is a very popular senator in Colombia, but when she launched her anticorruption campaign was sent photos of children cut up — that is, the photos were not cut up, the children in the photos were cut up. She was kidnapped during her run for presidency and has been a captive for the last four years.

We have had green mayors of Dublin, Rome and Santa Monica, a foreign minister of Germany and an environment minister of France. Here in Victoria our achievements in local government have already been

quite fantastic: we have had six Greens mayors despite the fact that we have only ever had about 18 councillors in Victoria. That summarises the global green movement of which I am part. When members see me standing here they may think I can be dismissed or demonised, but it is not just me standing here — it is a global green surge that backs me up.

Victorians are some of the most prosperous people ever to have lived, but we have some desperate problems, such as carbon dioxide emissions. This is a problem people are becoming aware of. I am not sure that it is going to be the problem that everybody says it is, because the last time I looked, energy was a cost. We pay an energy bill.

Economists believe there is no such thing as a free lunch. What they are saying is that if there were a profitable way, a net present value-positive way, to reduce energy use, we would have already found it, so the only way to make people reduce energy is to raise the price. I see free lunches all over the place. Everywhere I go I see great opportunities to reduce energy use and in so doing, make our economy more competitive.

We are the most ecologically damaged state in Australia, and our record of extinction is just about a world record, except for that of some Third World country like Madagascar — we talk about standing up for people who cannot stand up for themselves, but how about those other beings who live on the planet with us who cannot even speak at all?

Transport and livability — we have an urban growth boundary now. It sets a boundary for where the city is to be. How about a public transport system that extends all the way out to the urban growth boundary, including through South Morang, the Doncaster rail line and out east, north, south and west where everybody is asking for the same thing — that is, 'Please bring us some public transport'.

Public housing waiting lists are really just the tip of the iceberg, given the large number of people on rent assistance paying too much as a proportion of their meagre incomes for housing.

On the issue of pokies, a casual acquaintance said to me the other day, 'Pokies are evil'. I do not think I need to say much more about that, but we will have more to say along the way.

On poverty and disadvantage, according to a study by Jesuit Social Services, about 50 per cent of all disadvantage here in Victoria can be found in just 12 per cent of postcodes. It does not matter what your

measure of disadvantage is, whether it be low birth weight, incarceration, child abuse or unemployment, they are all clustered together, they are all associated. We understand the problem. Poverty is not something we talk about a lot here in Victoria; we tend to call it disadvantage as if it is a golf handicap or something — we should call it what it is: poverty, and we should eliminate it. We have the resources to do that.

On land justice for Victoria's Aboriginal nations, I do not speak for Aboriginal people; I can only speak from the point of view of the rest of us. Why would we want to address land justice in Victoria, the place where the smallest proportion of the landmass of any state has been returned to the Aboriginal people. I can think of a few reasons: it is just, they have been asking for it from the beginning, they have kept their claims going over centuries, and — to use a word from the indigenous people of my country of birth, New Zealand — it will increase their 'mana'. 'Mana' in those cultures means, roughly, the power that comes to you from the status that other people give you. The failure by our society to return Aboriginal land in a just way creates enormous loss of mana both to us and to them.

We are supposed to be talking personally in these speeches. I do not like talking a lot about myself, but I will talk about the real reason I am here or about the driver that got me here — that is, the forests. When I was a young biology undergraduate at La Trobe University I became more and more aware of the scientific evidence of the impact of logging on our native forests. It was all there on the library shelves.

I became very aware of the public support for the protection of those forests, and I naively thought that I would start a campaign and get the problem fixed. But it did not work that way. If the old growth forests of Victoria had been protected under any of the governments since that time — under Cain, Kirner, Kennett or Bracks — I may have said, 'Fair enough, democracy is working just the way it should', and I might not have even joined the Green party. I suppose that was my 'aha' moment. Bear in mind that I was 19 years old. I was a very fresh-faced baby. I was very green in those days! I thought I would start a campaign and get some media coverage. The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs remembers me. He was an adviser to the then environment minister. I remember it very fondly because I received seven years political advanced training in no time at all. I thank him for that. We have talked about it a few times over the years. Maybe this will be the Parliament in which we finally solve the problem.

I do not expect any major progress on a list of issues, a list of asks, without firstly renewing our democracy. We have taken one important step in reforming the upper house to proportionality. We need to keep going with that. Most people here are probably aware that the Greens campaigned strongly on this. Reforming our donation laws so that we get democracy back to one vote, one value would be an enormously important step.

It is time for my quotation, as recommended by the guide on how to write your first speech — I have been following the template pretty well so far! And I have plenty of time left, which is also good. This quote really struck me when I first read it. It is from Pericles, an Athenian general and statesman. He said this during his oration given at the funeral traditionally held as a memorial of a number of soldiers. Basically it was Anzac Day for 431BC. He said:

We are happy in a form of government which cannot envy the laws of our neighbours — for it hath served as a model to others, but is original at Athens. And this our form, as committed not to the few, but to the whole body of the people, is called a democracy. How different soever in a private capacity, we all enjoy the same general equality our laws are fitted to preserve; and superior honours just as we excel.

He said that because democracy was a pretty new thing at the time. His people were at war with people who had not formed democracies, and the point had to be made. 'Democracy' was a dirty word in those days; it was like saying 'mob rules'. It was a new thing, and they wanted to stand up for it and say, 'This is what are here for and what we are about'. It is interesting that when he went on to talk about the fact that they were at war, he said:

For we lay open Athens to general resort, nor ever drive any stranger from us whom either improvement or curiosity hath brought amongst us, lest any enemy should hurt us by seeing what is never concealed. We place not so great a confidence in the preparatives and artifices of war as in the native warmth of our souls impelling us to action.

What he was saying was, 'We should not just shut ourselves down and keep out everybody who is the enemy. We want them to come in. We do not mind if they see how we operate because we think when they see it, it will have an effect on them'. I think that is a very important lesson for me to think about in these times.

I have always had faith in democracy and I have faith in all of us here who believe in our system of government and that through it the people's wills, and their hopes, will come to pass.

Debate interrupted.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I seek to make a personal explanation. In response to a question from Mr Barber during question time I incorrectly advised the house that the first question time in this place was in the 1960s — the actual date was 27 April 1976.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

Debate resumed.

Mrs PETROVICH (Northern Victoria) — I am proud and humbled to have been elected to this place by the people of Northern Victoria Region. Congratulations to my Liberal colleagues and the other parties which have been successful in their election to this place. I would also like to personally congratulate you, President, on your appointment.

I would like to acknowledge the selfless work of the Country Fire Authority volunteers and to thank them for their commitment to those communities affected by fire. I have a personal and family association with the CFA lasting four generations and these volunteers have my utmost respect, support and empathy during this most terrible time and will throughout my service in this place. At this stage I would like to acknowledge a former member for Central Highlands Province, Graeme Stoney. Over the past couple of weeks Graeme has been in the middle of the north-east fires. He is experiencing first hand the terror and fight for survival as his property is in the direct path of these fires. On radio today one of Graeme's neighbours described him as their hero for working day and night to protect the Howqua Valley. In spite of the government's lack of management of public land, the Man from Snowy River still survives and in true style rolls up his sleeves to protect the country he so loves.

It may sound trite but I also love my sunburnt country. For this reason I will read Dorothea Mackellar's *My Country*:

The love of field and coppice,
Of green and shaded lanes,
Of ordered woods and gardens
Is running in your veins;
Strong love of grey-blue distance,
Brown streams and soft, dim skies —
I know but cannot share it,
My love is otherwise.

I love a sunburnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.
I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror —
The wide brown land for me!

The stark white ringbarked forests,
All tragic to the moon,
The sapphire-misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon.
Green tangle of the brushes,
Where lithe lianas coil,
And orchids deck the treetops
And ferns the warm dark soil.

Core of my heart, my country!
Her pitiless blue sky,
When sick at heart, around us,
We see the cattle die —
But then the grey clouds gather,
And we can bless again
The drumming of an army,
The steady soaking rain.

Core of my heart, my country!
Land of the rainbow gold,
For flood and fire and famine,
She pays us back threefold;
Over the thirsty paddocks,
Watch, after many days,
The filmy veil of greenness
That thickens as we gaze.

An opal-hearted country,
A wilful, lavish land —
All you who have not loved her,
You will not understand —
Though earth holds many splendours,
Wherever I may die,
I know to what brown country
My homing thoughts will fly.

I send my thoughts and prayers to rural Victoria. I acknowledge global warming as an issue to be addressed globally and locally. However, what we are experiencing in northern Victoria at the moment is drought not helped by global warming.

This was my priority in standing for Northern Victoria Region. It is in my heart, my being, my sense of country. It is the land of my ancestors. They mined the goldfields of Bendigo and Castlemaine and settled there. They raised their large Christian families and physically built the infrastructure and communities that have continued to thrive in these locations. They arrived from England, Ireland and Wales, some on sailing ships, some men of mystery. They cleared the

land, farmed and raised their families. They survived drought and plague and economic depression; some even survived two world wars. They worked and they developed their communities, roads and schools. They had succession plans and Australia thrived from their sweat. They were organised — they formed teams for cricket, football, athletics, horseracing and hunting. They formed cooperatives, ladies auxiliaries and historical societies. In times of crisis they came together and did what was required until it was over. They made sandwiches and the inevitable pot of tea, but they were united. When times were difficult, they made do. They tightened their belts and enjoyed what life and opportunity offered them. They were proud of their work and they established opportunities to display their work, their produce and their stock at agricultural shows and field days.

I am very proud of my culture, my history and my family. They have formed me and my ideology, my love of country, my sense of place. This is the culture I will seek to preserve in this place. This culture is at risk through prejudice and ignorance. With this ignorance the divide between country and city widens. Preserving and ensuring the continuity of this culture is one of our biggest challenges in rural Victoria. Those who have been the custodians of our farmland, produce and livestock cannot sustain the onslaught of city-based ideas and legislation. Lack of understanding and green ideology will not save the planet. Sustainable land, forest and water management is our way forward. Our primary producers, growers and businesspeople will keep Victoria fed and our export markets flowing and continue a tradition of over 150 years of custodianship if allowed to do so.

If we were fair dinkum about reducing CO₂ and preserving our natural heritage and wildlife, why would we so poorly manage our forests? How can this government have allowed 650 000 hectares to burn away our forests, wildlife, townships and homes?

Today I received a note from a family friend which reads in part:

Who knows what the future now holds — our business will most surely burn within the next two days — the drought has had a huge impact on our farm, bare paddocks, dry dams and those cattle we have not sold are very hungry.

Why would we put our water catchments and water supply at risk from such enormous wildfire and pollution? With locking up our forests and expanding our parks system comes a responsibility and a cost. If we are not prepared to manage utopia, then be prepared for all hell to break loose. By allowing these large areas of public land to have such heavy fuel loads and remain

largely unmanaged, we are committing our communities to a terror that no-one should have to endure. How many thousands of tonnes of CO₂ have been released into the atmosphere as a result of the still burning north-east fires?

Strong and sustainable communities will ensure Victoria's future — a Victoria with strong economic growth, good community links, viable organisations, associations and clubs. Our environment is our priority. Land capability studies, sustainable farming practices and a triple-bottom-line business approach are required. It should also be remembered that the role of government is to provide schools, hospitals and services, which strengthen our community. Government is not about photo opportunities, spin and accolades for what should be provided as a matter of course.

I will be holding this government to account: more performance, less spin and less photos. Since my preselection by the Liberal Party in October 2005 I have had the pleasure of driving across this region which stretches from Sunbury to Mildura, across to Corryong and down to Yarra Glen, which area covers over 100 000 square kilometres and with a population as diverse as the communities they live in. To experience the diversity of landscape and community is both wonderful and daunting.

Clearly this is not a one-size-fits-all electorate. To effectively represent this region it will be important that I talk to these people but more importantly, that I listen. I have seen and experienced much since I commenced this journey: great contrasts of landscapes and seasons, acres upon acres of fruit trees in full blossom, a carpet of pinks more beautiful than any painting but reminiscent of a masterpiece by Monet. I have experienced the harsh beauty of the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park and the absurdity of the Bracks government's proposal for a toxic waste facility amongst the ageless mallee scrub and its unique wildlife; the mighty Murray River, its red gum forests and life-giving water producing some of the best wines, dried fruits, vegetables and dairy products in the world.

The effect of nine years of drought are biting hard into our resilient rural communities who have made do. They have tightened their belts and continued to pay for ever-diminishing water rights. It has worn down our farmers, towns and regional centres. On 9 November 2006, a 38-degree day during the election campaign, I was at the Warracknabeal Show. The reality of nine years of drought is a fact of life in that area. What a surprise when a declaration was made by the government and finally the drought became a reality

through the front page of metropolitan media. Finally photos and a story of a dry Lake Eppalock made their way onto front pages of newspapers. It was even touted that Melbourne might have to go on to stage 2 water restrictions.

The plight of farmers became the story of the day. Water and the lack of it had been determined by the Premier as the cause of the drought! It was a joke amongst the wags around the Donald pub that night. It was a clear demonstration of the divide and lack of understanding between rural and metropolitan.

I hope that in my time in this place I will be an advocate for those in rural Victoria and that I can help bridge the gap, so that it will not take nine years for the government and Melbourne media to acknowledge and understand issues as important as drought in the country. Throughout this period of denial and optimistic hope for rain the water supply for the large regional centre of Bendigo has effectively run out. Bendigo has been on stage 4 water restrictions for some time now. A pipeline has been proposed, and I will be working to ensure that promises the Bracks government made to the people of Bendigo are delivered on time and on budget.

It is clear that there has been neglect and misunderstanding of land use planning in both country and regional Victoria. Our current one-size-fits-all planning scheme application of the rural zones and residential lot sizes does not suitably apply to rural and fringe metropolitan areas. With growth comes the demand for improved infrastructure — particularly for improvements to deteriorating roads, bridges and exposed open water channels. These issues are affecting the sustainability of rural and regional towns. The issue of cost shifting to rural and regional councils is simply not fair and places enormous burdens on our ratepayers who face ever-increasing rate burdens.

I have spent the last six and a half years in local government, serving the communities of the Macedon Ranges. The issue of cost-shifting is clearly highlighted through budgets which cannot afford to keep up with the hundreds of kilometres of road maintenance, footpaths and bridges as well as a range of community service projects. Major government infrastructure projects take up large chunks of budget monies through unfunded project management and unbudgeted price increases.

Libraries, swimming pools and maternal child health services, to name but a few, cannot continue to be funded from the shrinking rate bases being experienced by many small rural shires. State-required planning

scheme reviews are clearly stretching local government budgets, tying up planning staff and not delivering good planning as a net result. Lack of consultation and inclusion in the planning process for wind farms has left many communities angry and divided. Surely local government has the capacity to properly consult all interested parties and not be shut out of the process. Real funding solutions to assist councils provide what is now expected of them should be forwarded, perhaps through distribution of a percentage of the GST.

It was through our family business that I had first-hand experience of the challenges of managing an organisation on which up to 80 families relied for their continued employment and financial security. Small business is about understanding the value of a good employee-employer relationship. All small business employers would certainly agree that valuing and training staff is a company's greatest asset. It is about knowing the responsibility and accountability of paying creditors, your employees' wages, payroll taxes and WorkCover fees. It is about delivering projects on time and on budget — or facing the penalty of contract overruns and loss of profitability.

Good management skills gained through a competent team is what all small businesses strive for. It is vitally important to support small business in regional Victoria. Without growth in business, our economy will not thrive. The only way to achieve this is with real support for entrepreneurs and businesses, employment and a strong economy.

Victoria is now no longer the place to be: other Australian states have now overtaken Victoria. Victorians are leaving in droves. Coupled with this is the fact that we are faced with the worst drought in living memory. The importance of support for industry and a strong local economy has never been greater. I am very proud to be a Liberal. Our values of achievement, encouragement for the individual, belief in diversity and the rights of the individual stand tall. We believe that through a strong economy, an understanding of business and the creation of wealth, we can provide social policy for those who need assistance, offering programs of encouragement of opportunity for all to achieve and to improve their own circumstances wherever possible.

My challenge in my first term is to be a strong voice for the Northern Victorian Region, an area of land covering 48 per cent of the state of Victoria. It is a position I have worked enormously hard to achieve and look forward to continuing immensely.

I would not have been able to achieve this position without the love and support of my immediate and extended family. We are a close and loving family, which is very important to me. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my father and my mother, Ron and Sandra Bynon. You have both instilled in me a strong work ethic and the ability to sort the wheat from the chaff. You have also both provided me with a stable and safe home environment to grow with my siblings, Brett and Belinda, in the knowledge that my best effort was always good enough.

To my best friend and partner of 20 years, Serge: for your wisdom, love, patience and support I thank you. To our children, Nikki and Adrian: I thank you for your understanding and for sharing with me your sense of fun and love of life. You both make me proud to be your mum every day. With my family by my side, I will never have to look far for my meaning of life. I hope and trust that in this place my best effort will be good enough because that will be my aim to provide and produce the best for the constituents in the Northern Victoria Region and the state of Victoria.

Mr PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I should say at the outset that I obviously did not read my inaugural speech guide because I do not have a quote. It is a great honour to be in this chamber today. I must admit that it is a bit awe inspiring as well, although I did not realise before I arrived that it would also be quite so amusing. I probably will find it less amusing as time moves on.

That being said, I feel a great sense of pride. I cannot speak knowledgeably about the internal processes that are faced by the honourable members opposite. But I can say that when I began in the Labor Party in 1987, the way ahead seemed intimidating, confusing and fairly mysterious. To have found a way through and finally be standing here is undeniably satisfying. It is actually a tremendous exercise to sit down to write an inaugural speech. I am aware that the main event is the delivery of the speech, but the process of composing it is extremely valuable of itself. Those of us who have chosen to be active in public life, whether it is in politics, the labour movement or through any vehicle probably find it relatively simple to internally recognise what it is that drives us. Our values and passions are something that are inherent and they inform our approach to life. But until we reach this point, there are not many occasions that require us to sit down and think about how we would express those drivers or those passions in a public forum. To that extent the process of composition has been quite rewarding.

I want to speak about a topic which, in large part, is in the purview of the commonwealth government but is nevertheless close to my heart. Having spent 13½ years in the trade union movement, it will not come as a surprise to anyone to know that the great philosophical contest that is industrial relations policy has always been my key interest. That is not something that dates from 1993, when I began in the labour movement, but from many years earlier when I was a schoolboy in Ormond. Whilst my family were always Labor Party voters, there is no particular genesis which I can point to. It is just something that has always been with me.

I have always believed — and I think I am right in saying this — that the most fundamental and intractable divide in public policy between those of us on this side of politics and our honourable friends opposite is industrial relations. In most other areas of government involvement the policies that are pursued and outcomes which are sought by these two sides of politics intersect from time to time but not regarding industrial relations.

I do not pretend to know the private thoughts of honourable members in this place, but there simply can be no common ground when so many conservative academics, commentators and politicians in their heart of hearts deny unions any legitimate role in the workplace. While so many deep down think it is okay for employers to dismiss their employees without giving them a reason and so many deep down abhor collective bargaining and the consequent protection it provides against the untrammelled excesses of the market, I believe the WorkChoices legislation is the ferocious legislative expression of an uncharitable world view.

But I have to hand it to the conservative commentariat. Its members are exceptional at circling the wagons when their agenda is threatened, and they are at it again now. They have cried havoc and released the dogs of war in the papers coming out of the conservative think tanks and on the opinion pages of the national broadsheet. They would have us believe that a system that was working well a mere nine months ago is now an anachronism; that decency in the workplace is unaffordable; and that any attempt to rebalance rights, relationships and outcomes is retrograde. Although this legislation is the most extreme workplace law ever seen in the developed world, they would have us believe that the legislation is modest and that those seeking change are the ones who are captive.

The Prime Minister claims that at its heart WorkChoices is about job creation. Even if you accept that — and I do not — there are two models of job creation. There is the Labor way — boosting research

and development, investing in skills, improving productivity and developing export markets — or there is the WorkChoices way.

WorkChoices, despite the veneer, despite the spin about catering for the new economy, is a legislative one-trick pony: it is trying to create jobs by driving wages down. How does it do it? By removing loadings and penalties; by telling workers they can have a union so long as the union does not actually do anything; by putting workers in fear of their job; by neutering the industrial commission and by forcing workers to negotiate — and I use the term advisedly — one on one simply to keep conditions they have enjoyed for years. All of that may lead to fairly benign outcomes at the top end of the labour market while the boom continues, but wait until the boom ends. That is when it will become apparent that one kind of job creation, the structural kind, is enduring, sustainable and respects the needs of working families, while the other kind, the WorkChoices kind, goes through working families like a wrecking ball.

I am aware that WorkChoices is federal legislation, and I am also cognisant of the fact that the High Court has confirmed the right of the commonwealth to legislate in a manner that it has. But that makes me no less passionate about seeing the repeal of this bad and, dare I say it, un-Australian law, and it makes me no less determined to ensure that our Labor government here in Victoria enacts every piece of legislation and takes every action within its power to defend the rights, the incomes and the job security of Victorian families.

Having said all of that, if I wanted to continue focusing solely on industrial relations issues I would have stayed where I was. Parliament, and in particular government, gives one the opportunity to impact on the wellbeing of the community across a whole range of disciplines.

I have long been an adherent to the view that the great leveller in society, the great equaliser, is education. That government provision of quality education for all kids is the single most effective way to minimise disadvantage. But it is more than that. An educated society is a modern society; it is a self-sufficient society; it is a questioning society; and it is an economically vibrant society. Government provision of broad, quality education is our core business because it enhances not just the individuals who receive it but also the community more generally. That is why I was so pleased to be at the Labor Party launch in Ballarat and hear the Premier's pledge to rebuild or modernise every government school in Victoria over the next decade. It reminded me just how bereft the alternative ideology is — the ideology where funds are taken from the

public system every time a child moves across to a private school.

Choice is wonderful. We all support choice, but the choice of one child, the choice of one parent, should never be used as an excuse to limit the opportunities of other kids; it should never be used as an excuse to denude public schools of their funds. In my time in this place I want to have an impact on the quality of education provided to Victorian children, not just at the secondary or even at the primary level. As the father of two small kids I am keenly aware of the value of early childhood education; of the ancillary services offered to very young children, especially those who are struggling to keep up; of the great work being done in our kinders — and yes, I would like to see contact hours for three and four-year-olds in kinder increased.

I am also very fortunate in that the Premier has asked me to take some responsibility in the realm of transport as a parliamentary secretary, and I am very grateful for the opportunity. When you strip away ideology the reason that we contest the right to govern is so that we can in a concrete sense improve the opportunities for and the lives of the Victorian public. Transport is a discipline where one can have an impact in dozens of small ways.

At its heart transport is a mobility issue — moving people from their homes to their friends, to their shops and to their jobs. But it is also about employment in a very direct sense. To which port — indeed to which state — will the interstate and overseas deliveries come? Where will the new distribution centres be? How can we use integrated transport solutions to support jobs in regional Victoria?

Transport is an environmental issue. In thinking about the needs of future generations we have to be creative. We must do our best to ensure that when we consider how to transport our burgeoning population from A to B and when we consider how best to protect Victorian jobs, we also turn our minds to our parklands and nature reserves, our air and our water. We must ensure that we are supporting and extending clean mass transit whenever we can.

Transport is also a planning issue. Our city and our population is constantly expanding. More families are making the switch to provincial Victoria. In the same way that we all now accept that water conservation must be a key component of new suburban developments, we must also accept that appropriate transport corridors are integrated into urban and regional design rather than expecting a future generation to unscramble the omelette.

As we turn our minds to some of those challenges I want to pay tribute to the former Minister for Transport, Peter Batchelor, for the work done in developing the transport blueprint *Meeting Our Transport Challenges*. Its commitments deal with many of the issues I have outlined today. The initiatives in the policy — and this is by no means an exhaustive list — include the expansion of the SmartBus program, new train stations in growing suburbs, over \$1 billion for new rolling stock, almost \$700 million for the upgrade of regional roads, the Monash-West Gate improvement project and a needs assessment for an east-west link.

While the transport questions confronting Victoria are massive, as I suspect they will always be, this government continues to faithfully and diligently answer those questions, and I look forward to playing my small part in that process over the next four years.

The final responsibility I want to refer to today is the one I owe to the people who elected me, the people of Melbourne's west. The 14 Labor members who have been elected to this place, and the other place, by the voters of the Western Metropolitan Region are proud and humbled by the fact that those voters have shown such faith in Labor. I think it is faith that is not misplaced. The people of the Western suburbs are loyal people with long memories. They do remember, and they do not easily forgive, services being ripped from local communities, schools closing and local hospitals being targeted.

By way of contrast, this government has, I think rightly, been given credit for the new primary schools in Tarneit and Deer Park, just to name a couple; for the new secondary schools in Sydenham and Point Cook; for the upgraded emergency departments at Williamstown and Western hospitals; and for the 23 per cent reduction in crime across the western suburbs.

I would suggest that the faith shown by the people of the Western Metropolitan Region is as much about the commitments we have made to them as it is about the improvements that have already been delivered: the commitment to build five new schools in the western suburbs; the \$184 million expansion of Sunshine Hospital; the duplication of Grieve Parade in Altona; the improvement in environmental flows to the Maribyrnong and Werribee rivers, the new State Emergency Service unit at Point Cook; and the new police station at Wyndham North.

But having said all that, there are still enormous challenges in representing Melbourne's west. It is a massive growth corridor, particularly the city of Wyndham, and providing the infrastructure necessary

for that level of growth will always be a difficult job. Every year thousands more people are travelling into the city for work from the expanding communities in the west. Making those trips as timely and as hassle free as possible is, as I alluded to earlier, another objective that I share with my colleagues.

The character and demographics of the inner western suburbs continue their two-decade-long transformation. But at its heart the inner west retains an industrial core — the port, refineries, a power station and, for the time being, a wholesale fruit and vegetable market. Finding ways to enable residents to coexist happily with such significant industrial facilities in close proximity is not an easy task, but it is one I commit myself to in my capacity as a local member.

In my time as a National Union of Workers official I spent hundreds of rewarding hours at places as diverse as Kmart in Hoppers Crossing, Olex Cables in Tottenham, Ross Cosmetics in Tullamarine, Costa's in Laverton and Qenos in Altona. I am keenly aware of the obligations that come with representing a Labor and union heartland area, and I will not let those people down.

I would like to end my remarks by saying a few thankyou's. Firstly, my family has always been incredibly supportive. On both sides they were victims and survivors of both Nazism and Stalinism. Whilst it is not a trait exclusive to such families, I think those kinds of trials engender a very nurturing environment, so I want to thank my sisters, Rita and Tammy; my aunt and uncle, Zelda and Leon; but more particularly my mum and dad, Adele and Lou. Being a relatively well balanced person — at least, I think I am! — I possess healthy levels of pessimism and self-doubt from time to time. My parents in their own way have made it their business to have no such doubts. They have always encouraged me and believed in me. They have reinforced in me the certainty that I have sometimes lacked, and I thank them for that.

Obviously I want to pay particular thanks to my wife, Lisa. Being the wife of a senior union official is not a job for the fainthearted, nor for the particularly dependent. Between late-night mass meetings and country runs, union conferences and picket lines, you can be away from home a lot, and for many years I was. Lisa always handled that with class and tolerance, particularly after our kids were born, and I owe her a great deal for that. Her life and, as a consequence, mine would have been made a great deal more difficult without the help we have received from her parents, William and Diana, and I thank them as well for all the

support and friendship they have shown me over nearly 20 years.

I want to mention my beautiful kids, Ben and Eva. Ben is only four and Eva is just 18 months old, but I am truly blessed to have them and very lucky to be in a place that I hope will not take me away from them too much. Ben is a bit put out at the moment. He loved coming to Papa's old work and does not understand why Papa has a new work. I was always very relaxed about taking Ben to the NUW, and even to the occasional industrial dispute. I am not convinced that I want to expose him to the political process just yet; he is still very innocent, so he might have to wait a while to see Papa's new work.

I want to very quickly mention four mates who have been by my side throughout my entire journey in the Labor Party: Charles Power, Mark Nelson, Pete Cowling and Steve Moore. They are not all active members of the party any more, but they are all still good mates, and I feel very fortunate for that.

For members of the Legislative Assembly I know it is customary to pay tribute to previous sitting members of their seat. That is a bit harder in here given the new electoral system, but there is one retiring member that I want to mention, much as my friend Ms Pulford did last night. The old seat of Dousta Galla Province sits entirely within the boundaries of the new Western Metropolitan Region, and the Honourable Monica Gould has recently retired after representing Dousta Galla since 1993. Monica served as Labor leader in the Council, as Minister for Industrial Relations in the first Bracks government and more recently as President of the Legislative Council. However, before her parliamentary career Monica and I worked together at the NUW, which is where I first met her. She has always been a great friend and confidante to me. She enjoyed a career of great significance here, and I pay tribute to her.

No speech by me would be complete without acknowledging the organisation from which I have come: the mighty National Union of Workers. In particular I want to honour the three people who gave me my start at the NUW in 1993. When I went there I was not straight out of law school, but I was not long out of law school. It would have been very easy to throw a young fellow to the wolves, but the guys who gave me my opportunity were my first national secretary, Greg Sword; my first state secretary, Denis Lennen; and my first state president, the incomparable Peter Kelly.

I also want to thank the current leadership of the union who have been so incredibly supportive of me, not just in my attempts to enter Parliament but throughout my entire career at the union. I thank the current Victorian branch leadership: my old mate, Antony Thow; Esmond Curnow and Julie Warren; and the national leadership — Doug Stevens and my dear friends Tim Kennedy and in particular Charlie Donnelly, whom I genuinely believe to be the most substantial figure running any trade union in the country today. But mostly I owe a great debt to the union itself — its culture and its members — for giving me the breadth and the depth to embark on this job, for giving me some capacity to speak on my feet and for allowing me to represent people every day of my working life, addressing their issues and improving their circumstances.

The union provided me with an environment where I could meet with shop floor workers and chief executive officers on a daily basis, discovering the pressures on working families, companies and entire industries — sometimes all in the one meeting. I also thank the union for exposing me regularly to all of the factors impacting on a diverse range of industries, such as manufacturing, food, dairy, oil and logistics and, I should add, for familiarising me a little bit with the workings of all levels of government.

In my view very few occupations prepare one better for a career in public life than working in the trade union movement. Quite apart from the skills and experiences I have learnt and picked up along the way, there is the unparalleled advantage of spending 13½ years surrounded by people of strength, morality, loyalty and compassion.

Finally, I would like to restate my gratitude to the people of the Western Metropolitan Region for electing me and the rest of the Labor team. My pledge to them is to work as hard for those people as I always did for my members at the NUW.

Ms HARTLAND (Western Metropolitan) — I would like to start by congratulating you, President, on your election as Presiding Officer of this chamber. I see being elected to the Victorian Parliament along with my other Greens colleagues, Sue Pennicuik and Greg Barber, as not only an honour but a great responsibility.

To give the house some idea of my background, I grew up in Morwell. Both parents were active in the local ALP and were shop stewards in their workplaces. I came to Melbourne at 17 for employment and have mainly worked in kitchens, including the Parliament House kitchen, as a home care worker and a

community worker, and in that time I have always been an active shop steward.

At 40 I decided that I had to finally get a formal education and attended Victoria University of Technology TAFE in St Albans to do the community development course. That was a fantastic time for me because, even though I had very little formal education, I realised that my huge practical knowledge of the community issues that I had been involved in gave me a great basis for the course.

For the past five years I have worked for the Western Region Health Centre as an older persons high-rise worker in an Office of Housing high-rise block in Williamstown. I have worked with a wonderful group of clients and co-workers and think this is one of those programs that makes a huge difference to people's lives. I especially want to thank my employer, the Western Region Health Centre, for allowing me to resign with 12 hours notice.

I have endeavoured to be a catalyst for change in my community for the past 25 years. I was a founding member of the Hazardous Materials Action Group, which has been fighting to improve our environment and especially to reduce toxic emissions from Coode Island. I was the spokesperson for HazMAG when I last worked in the parliamentary kitchens. The day that Coode Island blew up, covering Melbourne's suburbs in a plume of toxic smoke, I had to be pulled out of the kitchen, still wearing my gorgeous uniform, to be briefed by the then labour minister, Neil Pope. It was one of those surreal situations. There I was, the pantry hand, having a minister of the Crown explain to me what had happened at Coode Island, and I was able to tell him exactly how dangerous were the chemicals that had been blown up and allowed to be released over my community.

Fifteen years later I have a new job in the Parliament, but in many ways the job is the same. Coode Island is still 500 metres from the nearest house, and the Docklands development has been built immediately downwind, against the advice of the Coode Island panel which was chaired by the former Governor, John Landy. The waste from the Coode Island fire was dumped at the toxic waste tip at Tullamarine, where it joined a cocktail of lethal substances from heavy metals to polychlorinated biphenyls and dioxin. Closing the Tullamarine toxic dump is an issue I have brought with me to this, my new job.

I agree with the Stern report on global warming that the cost of cleaning up after an environmental disaster is far greater than the cost of dealing with the problem at

source. A good example of this is in Yarraville, where 21 000 trucks per day use Somerville Road and Francis Street, and there are many schools and kindergartens along these routes. The noise of trucks stops people from sleeping at night, and the fumes cover their homes in sticky dust. It is like living in a transit station or worse, a scientific experiment to see how many tonnes of diesel fumes you can feed a community. There are enormous costs to be saved by arranging a freight network to get trucks off our streets.

In the same way our community is crying out for an opportunity to use public transport and get their cars off the roads. This year I have visited many communities in the Western Metropolitan Region, asking people about their concerns, and their no. 1 issue has been public transport. Public transport in our region is woeful. Abolishing zone 3 or giving students free travel is all very well and good, but it is not much use when you do not actually have a transport system. There are nearly 45 000 more people in Hobsons Bay and Wyndham than there were 10 years ago, including a 45 per cent increase in population at the end of the Werribee line. It is no wonder the trains are packed solid by the time they get to Newport. There are 55 000 more people in Brimbank than a decade ago, and they will also want to use public transport. Caroline Springs, which is right on the Melton train line, has no station. How have we allowed areas such as this to grow up without infrastructure and public transport? If we want to do something about climate change, we need to give areas like Caroline Springs train stations.

I am a member of the Greens not just because of the party's commitment to the physical environment. In fact I joined during what I refer to as the Tampa election, when I felt for the first time in my life utterly ashamed of what a government was doing in my name in refusing refugees access into our country and that the ALP felt it was quite justified to stand as it did, shoulder to shoulder with the government, and not let poor and desperate people into this country. I see the Greens as the only political party making a genuine effort to support vulnerable people in our community, such as refugees and people with disabilities, mental health issues, poor education and a lack of good housing.

Over the next four years, and hopefully four years after that and four years after that, we intend to raise issues such as mental health, especially in the west, where we simply do not have enough services. There are not enough crisis assessment and treatment teams or emergency beds. These are things that must be addressed. I can talk about mental health from a very personal view as well, as several members of my

immediate family suffer from bipolar disorder, and I know what happens when a family does not get assistance. I also want to see the west as no longer an area that both political parties believe they can neglect. I would have to disagree with Mr Pakula's assessment that industry and residents can live side by side. That is not my experience of having lived in Footscray for 25 years.

One of the great scourges of the western suburbs is poker machines. They now seem to be completely entrenched, with a massive \$1147 average loss per adult last year in the city of Maribyrnong alone — that is, nearly twice the state average loss in a suburb that just does not have that kind of money to lose. I have looked at the gambling statistics for the whole region, and they show that there are slightly fewer machines per 1000 adults in Wyndham and Tarneit; each machine just works a bit harder. Minor cutbacks will not fix this problem. We need massive cutbacks, and we need to ask ourselves why in many of the newer suburbs is the pokie club the only family-friendly venue nearby.

I would like to acknowledge the indigenous Australians of my region and of this country. I would also like to say that I am quite happy to say sorry for what has happened and for the mistreatment they have received since white settlement.

As a woman I care about many of the issues that affect us, such as health, housing, domestic violence and caring for families, especially disabled children and parents. The lack of safe, affordable and adequate community health services continues to put women's health and that of their families at risk, particularly in new communities such as Caroline Springs, where often women feel extremely isolated. Women have a right to make informed choices about their lives, education, sexual identity, health and reproduction. I support the need for increased funding for more centres against sexual assault. I also clearly support a woman's right to safe and legal abortion. I could speak for hours on local issues but, since I have several more years to do that, the house will just have to wait to hear from me.

I have a number of people I wish to thank. My thanks to my husband, Victor Moore, who I do not think is actually here — he is at his Christmas party. It is all right, he will get it from me later! Victor is one of those amazing men who has supported me during some 26 years of marriage. He is one of those rare men, too, who understands that women have a right to their own opinion and can never be dominated. And he still makes me laugh!

I also want to thank my campaign team and the 11 lower house candidates and their campaign teams. I would especially like to thank the scrutineers who came along on what has been referred to by our poet laureate as 'The battle at Jeff's Shed'. As most people would be aware, I won this election on a very close countback.

I want to thank my extended family— my brothers, my sisters, my cousins, my aunts and uncles. My thanks to Janet Rice, who I stood with at Maribyrnong council for three years. I learnt a huge amount from Janet — one, how to control my temper and, two, how to work cooperatively with people even when you completely disagreed with them.

I have several friends and members of my family who have died far too early. I feel that they will still be looking on from wherever they are, making sure that I do the right thing. There is my mother, June, who struggled to raise four children when often her only income was a pension. This was pre-Whitlam and prior to the time when we actually had a decent welfare safety net.

There is also Michelle, my youngest sister, who many people thought of as just an average stay-at-home mum, but to me she was much more. She did the job that I chose not to do, in raising five amazing children and often taking in other kids from the neighbourhood when they were in trouble at home. It was not unusual to go to her house and find three or four other children sleeping in the lounge room. You would ask her what it was about, and she would just say, 'They did not have anywhere to go tonight, so they came here'. People thought she was ordinary; I thought she was extraordinary.

John Cummings, Johnny Loh and Tony Messina were great union organisers. I believe they would probably be now negotiating EBAs in construction and railway sites in the sky. I remember, too, Mary Lynch: feminist, fighter for social justice, a great letter writer and a regular 774 talkback caller.

I am grateful for my family and friends who have been praying for me this week. My uncle Bill told me at the weekend that he thought I would be prepared to accept help from any quarter. Whilst I am no longer a practising Catholic, I would still define myself as a Christian, and I believe that my early religious teaching formed the basis of many of my ideals on social justice.

As a community campaigner of over 25 years I understand what it is like to care about local issues and what it is like to try to get your local member to see and understand what the issue is. I hope not to be that kind

of local member. My door will always be open to the local community, and I intend to continue to work on the issues of great concern that I have and I know that the community has.

I look forward to representing and being an advocate for the west for the next four years, and hopefully beyond that. I am very proud of the fact that people in the western suburbs chose to vote for the Greens for the first time.

Mr THORNLEY (Southern Metropolitan) — I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, the people of the Kulin nation, and pay respect to their elders. President, congratulations on your election to that high office. It is the pinnacle in a lifetime of service to others.

I want to acknowledge my family and friends, many of whom are here today, and in particular my partner in politics, business and life of nearly 20 years, Tracey Ellery, and our three wonderful children, Ruby, Max and Miss Daisy.

I also congratulate the Leader of the Government in this place, John Lenders, on his election in the Southern Metropolitan Region and to thank him for the support, wisdom and encouragement he shared with me throughout our campaign together. To my other 17 colleagues here, congratulations and thank you.

Like everyone here I represent a new region in a new system. The Southern Metropolitan Region stretches from the once working-class cottages of Port Melbourne to the working families of Oakleigh and Ashwood; from the leafy green suburbs of Kew and Hawthorn to the sand belt in the south; the public housing in Hampton East to the Royal Melbourne Golf Club around the corner. It represents so much of the diversity that makes this the greatest city in the world in which to live, work and raise a family. Some members opposite may object, but I really mean it. We have lived, worked and raised a family in New York, San Francisco and a range of other great cities around the world, and this is by far the best. This did not occur by accident.

The diversity of the Southern Metropolitan Region also reminds us of the great disparities in life chances for the children across that region. That is what puts the fire in the belly and the courage in the heart of every Labor member. While I have no direct predecessors in Southern Metropolitan Region I want to acknowledge two fine members under the previous system, Noel Pullen and Johan Scheffer, and thank them for their generous support.

President, though we are elected as individuals we represent all the people in our electorates, our party and in a different way a continuation of the traditions of our families and peoples. My paternal grandmother Margaret Cassar's people came from Cospicua in Malta. My family name came from Lancashire coalminers who came here five generations ago. My maternal grandfather, Eric Levett, was an accountant, a communist and a property developer — sometimes all three. He married Constance Robertson, a woman of English upbringing but proud Scottish roots. They arrived in Australia in 1950 virtually penniless, with my mother, Phoebe, and her sister. It is from these varied traditions that my people have come, and with Tracey's multigenerational heritage from the Ellery and Green families of Castlemaine, these are the traditions that my children will inherit.

The people of the Southern Metropolitan Region have an even wider diversity of backgrounds. There are those who fled unspeakable terror — the Holocaust survivors and their families in the Jewish community, and our Cambodian people who witnessed the killing fields of Pol Pot. There are those who came freely and optimistically seeking a better life, whether they were £10 tourists from the United Kingdom or the waves of migrants from Greece, Italy, Turkey or other countries and more recent arrivals. There are those whose families came on the First Fleet and there are those whose families and ancestors walked this earth and owned this land before Western civilisation existed. The Labor narrative makes sense to all these people, because no matter what your background, the universal values that we stand for — justice, education, helping the vulnerable and a worthwhile and well-paying job — have appealed and will always have appeal.

We all come here with varying backgrounds and motivations. Some who read my background when my candidacy was announced were surprised I was leaving business for politics, and indeed on the Labor side. They should not have been. For those who know me well it was no surprise at all. My formative memories spring from the time when my mother was a struggling sole parent with four kids under the age of seven years, with limited family support and nothing but the early stages of a welfare safety net to draw on. These times formed my view of the world and my lifelong belief in the Australian Labor Party and Labor values. Somehow between making ends meet and driving us to endless sporting commitments, Mum also found time to join the ALP. When Mum's health gave way we found support in the families of our friends, and in my case in particular, the family of my best mate of 33 years, Mark New, and his parents, Bob and Evelyn. Without them I

would not be here today. I pay tribute to their generosity.

My dad moved to Melbourne in 1974, and in the next six years I would visit when I could on school holidays. Dad ran a small business helping service stations process their account customers. With an IBM computer the size of a small car he would take in the hand written charge sheets and return to the servos a nice pile of neatly printed statements. It was not a fancy business but Dad loved it. To Dad all that mattered was to look after your people and your customers. If he could do that and stay afloat, Dad was happy. If times were tough, as they often were, he always went without to make sure his people never did. It was a lesson I am glad I learnt and, when we were in the same position 15 years later, continued.

I moved to Melbourne when I was 16 years old and through a series of unlikely and extraordinary circumstances I was given the opportunity to do my final two years of school — after 10 years at Erina West Primary School and Erina High School — at Scotch College. It was another world from anything I had ever seen or experienced. The school was very generous, and I was grateful for the chance. It is not a chance other kids like me would ever get. That point was not lost on me. Friends from that time will tell you that I was the only kid in the class with a John Cain sticker on my folder. When I finished I went to Melbourne University and joined the Labor Party — that was 22 years ago. A few years later I was elected president of the Students Representative Council, and then we established a national student union with my now wife, Tracey Ellery, as president.

From leadership of student politics to this place there is a well-worn path, but I chose a road less travelled. I wanted to get into the media business to try and change the world that way, so I went to McKinsey and Company and then to Silicon Valley with LookSmart, the company Tracey and I founded. In 15 years in international business I learnt a lot. I learnt that unless you are unreasonably determined you do not stand a chance. We went within two days of missing payroll nine times in six months and went through many, many other challenges, but we never succumbed. I learnt that Australian companies can make it in the global game but that you had better be ready for competition that is ruthless, relentless and often coming from unexpected angles. I learnt that if you treat your people well, they repay that loyalty in spades, and that if you make them shareholders, they feel and act like owners as well as employees. Every one of our team was a shareholder, and together they owned more than a third of the company.

I also learnt something else; something that brought me back to politics despite my love of business. I learnt that the leadership of an organisation sets the culture and values and that these things are as important to the outcomes as anything that is ever written down. I learnt the importance of what Teddy Roosevelt called 'the bully pulpit', and that reignited my passion for elected office and being part of a Labor government that sets the tone — for what is important and what is unimportant and for what is right and what is wrong. It is not just about where the money is spent; it is about the message that sends about what sort of society we want to live in.

For the last four years since coming home I have had the rare privilege of working on the things I care most about. Whether it has been giving the Labor ideas engine a rev through the Fabian Society or engaging hundreds of thousands in a new form of politics at GetUp or putting something back directly into great institutions like the Brotherhood of St Laurence, I have tried to be one of the many builders serving the architecture of progressive renewal — refreshing the institutions and ideas on our side of politics.

I admire and respect the many paths that bring Labor people to this chamber, and I hope that mine will add to the pool of collective experience that enables us to bring the Labor message to all.

I am particularly proud of my many friends here who have spent their adult lives standing up for working people in the trade union movement. You cannot listen to the speeches recounting their experiences of supporting people who are victims of monstrous injustices and not feel a knot in your gut. You cannot but wonder at the moral selectivity of people who regard these injustices as somehow acceptable while the slightest breach of some other code, such as whom you are allowed to love, is a cause for moral outrage. They must be reading a very different Bible to the one I was brought up with.

I am not an ideologue. I believe extremism is better fought by redoubling our commitment to reality than by creating a competing extremism. It is here that modern conservative politics has squandered its inheritance. The great progressive history of the Scottish Enlightenment of the 18th century has been twisted into a rigid and extremist ideology formed in an understandable attempt to fight totalitarianism in the 20th century. The Enlightenment sought an end to the tyranny of kings and an authoritarianism that kept the people ignorant to make them pliable — and it did so by empowering individuals with knowledge and capacity to think for themselves and by creating the

modern institutions of liberal democracy that we so cherish today. So Scotland — smaller in scale and population than Victoria — moved from a small, poor, backward country on the edge of Europe to the intellectual powerhouse of the Western World. How? By being the first with a broad-based commitment to education. Indeed it was the passage of well-educated but unlanded Scots to the Western District of Victoria that created a wool industry that led the world and made this the most prosperous nation on earth a century ago. While modern conservatives claim to retain that moral core, forging an ideology of freedom against the evils of totalitarianism and therefore the state, that fight is over. The residual that is left is just an elegantly worded charade to enable the wealthy to pay less tax and refuse to support the simple goal of quality education for all. It is the antithesis of the Scottish Enlightenment. As Kenneth Galbraith said:

No one likes to believe that his or her personal wellbeing is in conflict with the greater public need. To invent a plausible or, if necessary, a moderately implausible ideology, in defence of self-interest is thus the natural course. A corps of willing and talented craftsmen is available for the task.

Some of them are in this chamber.

But there is a better way. In Europe and the United States of America it is sometimes called the politics of the radical centre. Radical not because it is extreme but because it combats extremism with moderation, patience, wisdom and maturity. It is radical because it is based not in the wild theories of some excitable academic but in the lived experience of ordinary people's lives and is dedicated to that reality.

Some believe politics is a contest between those who believe in individual responsibility and those who believe in community responsibility. Since I believe in the importance of both I find this contest hollow and unnecessary and extremes of either view absurd.

Some believe politics is a contest between the pro-business and anti-business forces. I do not see how you can be pro or anti 80 per cent of the economy. It is now becoming obvious to all that the global economy is a team sport.

Some believe politics is a contest between belief in markets and belief in the state, but since I believe in both and since I am more interested in how we can have effective markets and an effective state, I find this contest a waste of time. Our society has a certain genius about it that balances the system of one dollar, one value within a framework of one vote, one value. The proportions of the show in each sector have hardly

moved a jot for a very long time. It is not the fight that matters.

Some believe politics is becoming a contest between the economy and the planet. But this misunderstands rigorous economics, which should recognise externalities and price them into the market. The fight against climate change is a chance for growth, not a reason to stop it — as the Stern report recently showed. There is no more important issue that we face, but the risk to our economy is in being the ostrich, rather than having the courage to face reality and make a virtue of the problem by grabbing first-mover advantage in creating the solutions.

Some believe politics should judge the morality of individuals — the good to be rewarded, the bad to be punished. I certainly believe there is a morality at the centre of politics, but the decision as to which individuals are indeed good or evil seems to be one, as someone said a few thousand years ago, perhaps better left to someone wiser than any of us.

So if all these contests are for naught, you might be wondering what there is left to debate — why we cannot all just continue down some bland, centrist course to happiness. It is because, while I reject all these old contests and refuse to fight in these last wars, there remains one central contest that shows no sign of disappearing. It is the contest between the virtuous cycles and the vicious cycles of human behaviour. It is a contest between the builders — the people who understand that by investing in each other we all win — and the sharp elbows brigade.

Members of the sharp elbows brigade have a faulty understanding of the world. They believe that for you to have something must mean I cannot. The genius of investing in people — that by investing in people now, we can both have more later — has passed them by. And so they believe that by inflicting damage on you, I will somehow be advantaged and, perhaps even more absurdly, that you will not respond in kind and inflict damage on me. My experiences of life have taught me that the sharp elbows brigade is wrong.

In business you learn the difference between the P and L and the balance sheet — the difference between what you get for today and what you invest for tomorrow. The purpose of government is not to take money from individuals with one hand and give the same money back to the same individuals with the other. The purpose is to pool the resources of the community to get to the scale where we can invest in the things that we all need and which bring us all future benefits.

As it turns out, the investments which generate the greatest returns, the things that can deliver the biggest future benefit are the investments in the people themselves — what the economists call human capital. A dollar invested in early childhood development returns \$9. A dollar invested in preventative health care now can save many dollars in the future. A dollar spent in preventing road trauma returns many times over in reduced health care costs, welfare costs and lost productivity.

But all these investments in human capital return much more than that — they improve people's lives; they give them dignity and hope; they help them enter or become more productive in the work force; and they help them help their own families and communities rather than needing help. Investing in human capital is what Labor has always been about — although we have not often used that language.

There is another thing you learn in business: the difference between strategy and execution, between doing the right thing and doing it right. Far too often in politics you hear the safe refrain against any reform, 'We tried that before and it did not work'. Not often do we ask, 'Was what we were trying to do wrong, or did we just not go about it the right way?'.

In some ways this distinction gives the key to the power of the state government. In state government we do the doing — we are the service delivery wing of government. It always matters what you spend the money on, but it matters even more how you go about it. The power of being a longer term government is that you can get better and better at what you do, creating a culture of continuous improvement and ultimately changing the outcomes. That is what we are doing here in Victoria. When we recognised the need to invest in early childhood we built 55 integrated children's centres, and now we have promised to build 40 more. But we know there is more to do.

Through our national reform agenda we are pushing further on early childhood development and further on improving literacy and numeracy skills. We are tackling the growth of diseases like type 2 diabetes and driving the next wave of competition policy to create jobs and give the economy a plan B for when the inevitable deflation of the commodity price bubble hits.

While it pushes forward on the next generation of needs the Bracks government has also never lost sight of what matters to working families and has been diligently delivering against those needs in health, education, transport and many other service areas. It has been alert to the changing circumstances of climate change, an

ageing population and a rapidly changing global economy. The results of the recent election speak volumes for the trust the people of Victoria have placed in us to continue the job.

For me personally, to be preselected to represent our great party is an honour and the fulfilment of a lifelong dream. For that my first thanks must go to the Premier, who put his faith in me and supported me through the process. I hope I can do justice to that faith.

To be elected, in the end, reflects the faith that the people of the Southern Metropolitan Region put in a re-elected Bracks government. In my case it was a near-run thing, but that victory was due to the outstanding campaign led by the Premier, his office, our colleagues in King Street and the 34 ALP branches across the region. Most of all, however, it is a tribute to the work of over 740 volunteers. This victory is for each of them and is living proof that it is the vibrant grassroots of our party that makes the difference between success and failure. An old hand said to me, 'The smaller the margin, the fewer people you need to thank!'. But in my case, the opposite is true.

Specifically I want to thank Helen Tierney, my campaign manager, for a phenomenal job; Sean Kelly, the ultimate team player; Marya McDonald, who came down from Queensland for a month to run our office; the very web native Mr David Eedle; and Pablo Salina and Adam Collins, who worked tirelessly in the Balaclava Road bunker getting our hundreds of volunteers engaged and active throughout the region.

Michael Beahan and the rest of our campaign committee provided seasoned advice when it was needed. Kate Deverall came down from Sydney, Damian Smith was always there, and Barbara Norman, the national chair of the Fabian Society, has been steadfast in support.

Over the last few years there have also been many old hands — some younger than me! — whose wise counsel I have valued: John Button, Geoff Walsh, Race Mathews, Michael Danby, Luke Foley and Tim Holding, among many others. I express my appreciation to each of them.

To our lower house colleagues who worked so hard — the five sitting members, all of whom deserved and received re-election; to our six tireless and selfless campaigners in the non-held seats — Noel, Jane, Steve, Paul, John and Maree; and to Shelly Freeman in the upper house: thank you for your willingness to go into enemy territory for our party, the primary beneficiary of which was me, and for our 19th position in this house.

Finally, the team at Per Capita, some of whom are here today — and all of whom will recognise the shared ideas we have developed together — have been a source of inspiration, friendship and support throughout.

There are many reasons people enter public life. To me the reasons are deeply personal. For most of my childhood the world was a melancholy and mysterious place, for it was simply never clear to me how you got to the place where you had either the basic material things most people want or the security of a family life that others seemed to have. The rules to follow and the paths to success were simply opaque.

My colleague Tony Nicholson at the Brotherhood of St Laurence put it simply recently when describing our mission. 'Poverty humiliates children', he said, and I knew what he meant. That poverty is not just a material poverty: it can also be a poverty of understanding and a poverty of relationships that can make an otherwise workable world a place of mysterious forces and unknowable rules. Material poverty is frequently an outcome of that lack of cultural capital as well as a cause.

Like many, I was fortunate to have those mysteries gradually revealed. My life has turned out better than that young child could ever have hoped or literally have even dreamed of, and the confusion of those early days has gone. My most fervent hope is that my children and others like them will begin their lives knowing the rules, experiencing the love, and being committed to reciprocating in the virtuous cycle that made success possible for me.

So I now try to be a builder — of organisations, of solutions, of communities — and to encourage the virtuous cycle of trust, investment and growth that I have seen work miracles in people's lives. These are the loaves and fishes of the real world; a world where to give to you is not to deprive me but to benefit us both. Although I hope the harshest challenges of my life have passed, my role now is to represent so many people for whom the challenges of life remain immense.

As I have been around the region over the last six months, talking, listening and learning, I have seen things that have stirred a quiet anger. I have seen people willingly inciting the vicious cycle of damaging others and themselves and believing that for you to have more means that I must have less and turning their own fears into a cycle of fear for all. I feel that quiet anger when people in this place and other places of power participate in that cycle or, in some ways worse, stand

idly by and pretend or even proclaim that it is not happening or that there is nothing we can do about it.

My preference is always to find common ground: to see others' perspectives, to listen and learn and see whether there is a way we can work together. I hope I have seen enough of life from so many angles to understand where most people are coming from. But I also know that sometimes that is just not possible and that there is no compromise on offer; that the willingness to incite the vicious cycle is premeditated, systematic and ongoing.

On those occasions when the sharp elbows brigade is determined to pursue its world view against all evidence to the contrary and ignore all the costs, it must be stopped and, if necessary, fought. That is why I am a member of the Australian Labor Party, and I always will be.

Mr FINN (Western Metropolitan) — It is an intriguing mixture of pride and humility that I feel as I rise today as the first Liberal member to represent the Western Metropolitan Region. In doing so I congratulate you very warmly, President, on your election to your high office. I certainly wish you well as you oversee the proceedings of this house. I will say it today, and you will hear it again — it was not me!

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the almost 92 000 people in the west who saw fit to send me here. I give them a categorical guarantee that I will not let them down. Nor, I should add, will I let down those who did not vote for me. My aim is to represent all of the west without fear or favour, and it is an aim that will be carried through.

I would like to thank some of those people who have been my strongest supporters during the recent campaign and over a long period of time. My most ardent supporter is undoubtedly my wife, Cathy. Without her backing there is little doubt I would not be here now. If honourable members wish to point the finger, Cathy, more than anyone else, is responsible for my return to this Parliament. I should add that she acquitted herself admirably in the seat of Yuroke at last month's election, so this Parliament may well look forward to two Finns gracing these halls before long. Give it another decade and members may well have my eight-year-old daughter, Madeleine, to contend with as well. I am sure that is something the entire Parliament will anticipate with unbridled glee!

A special thank you should also go to my regional electorate chairman, John Jennison; campaign director, Dean Kennedy; Greenvale branch president, Di Livett;

Liberal state president, Russell Hannan; state director, Julian Sheezel, and his staff at 104.

In particular I wish to thank and publicly recognise the hardworking team of Liberal candidates in the west. These men and women who contested the election on 25 November are totally committed to their communities. They are without exception magnificent individuals, many of whom will make enormously constructive contributions to this Parliament in the years ahead. It is a great pity that Steve Reynolds, who was my running mate in the Western Metropolitan Region, did not quite make it here this time. Hang in there, Steve, I am sure there is a place in this Parliament for you. We are the poorer for your not being here.

I would be most remiss if I did not thank the outstanding campaign workers and members of the Liberal Party in the west of Melbourne. It has to be said that it is often not easy being a Liberal in the western suburbs, but what we lack in numbers we more than make up for in quality. They are a hardy breed, and they are a loyal breed. I assure them that from this point on they should prepare themselves because the best is yet to come. It is dangerous to single out individuals on occasions such as this, but — and 'but' is surely the most dangerous word in the English language — I would also like to place on the record my eternal thanks to Giuseppe De Simone and Michael Kroger, whose support and friendship when it was most needed will never be forgotten.

My parents were extraordinary people. Tom and Julie Finn are sadly no longer with us. But it was by their example that I learnt tenacity and the ability to fight on, whatever the adversity. Theirs were not long lives; nor were they easy lives. They faced more hardships than most, but they never complained, and they never gave up. They were as perfect a team as I have ever seen. They did not need some shonky piece of legislation to tell them they were equals; they just knew it and so did everyone around them. They were the salt of the earth, and I miss them more than words can say. They are a hard act to follow, but I, too, at the very least intend to never weaken until the final siren has gone.

I come into this chamber with one overwhelming objective — that is, to achieve for the people of the western suburbs the fair go that they deserve but which for so long has been denied. I should at this point perhaps offer an apology to the house if I have inadvertently breached the convention that says that one should not be unduly provocative. As members would be aware, it is not something that is in my nature. But if that were to occur, I would also understand if members

opposite felt it necessary to break their convention of hearing me in silence. So, Theo, get ready!

Decades, indeed generations, of support for the Australian Labor Party have resulted in the west of Melbourne becoming the poor relation of our city. Under the Bracks government, neglect of Melbourne's west is the order of the day. Government members of Parliament are far more interested in branch stacking, factional manoeuvring and personal power plays than the needs of their constituents. In fact the very real problems facing the west do not seem to enter the equation at all. Labor regards the people of the west as dirt beneath its feet. Corruption has become a way of life in Labor politics in the west. I can further assure those many rank and file members of the ALP who have approached me over recent months that I have taken on board the information they have given me and I will expose the abuses, the bullying, the intimidation and the threats of physical violence practised by their local party at federal, state and local government levels. I particularly look forward to a closer examination of the antics of the Brimbank City Council.

The people of Melbourne's west are good people; they are fair dinkum people. They work hard. They pay their taxes. They love their families as much as anyone anywhere else. They deserve the same quality of education, the same health care, the same transport, the same leisure facilities as the rest of Melbourne.

It might be about now that some questions could be entering the minds of honourable members. Questions such as why can the people of Greenvale not look forward to sending their children to a local secondary college? There is a simple answer to that — because Labor says they cannot. Questions such as why must the people of St Albans risk their lives every day on one of the most dangerous level crossings in the state? Because Labor says they must. Why should the people of Tullamarine and every worker at Melbourne Airport live with the ever-present threat of catastrophe if an accident hits the Cleanaway toxic waste dump? Very simply, because Labor says they should. Why can the people of Sunshine not enjoy the swimming pool they so desperately want and need? Because Labor says they cannot. Why do the people of Werribee have to put up with some 40 fewer police officers than are needed to properly protect their community? Because Labor says they should.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous interjected.

Mr FINN — These are just five examples of the contempt shown to the western suburbs by the Bracks government. It takes the residents of the west for

granted and uses and abuses them at will. There are hundreds, possibly thousands, of other examples — —

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — If you want interjections, you have to listen to them.

Mr FINN — I thank Mr Theophanous for his advice.

There are hundreds if not thousands of others. I anticipate that I will have my hands full bringing cases of neglect in the west to the attention of this house.

Over many years migration has made a huge contribution to Australia and in particular to Victoria. I have met many newcomers to our shores and many people who have been here for a lifetime who love Australia more than the few who do not realise just how fortunate they are to have been born in the greatest nation on earth. It is of great distress to me to see political parties, and indeed members of Parliament, promoting ethnic tribal warfare for their own political benefit. It is rife in the western suburbs. I will say much more about this at a later date. It is sufficient at this point for me to say that I regard this reprehensible activity as not just un-Australian but anti-Australian. I guarantee that those who participate in such behaviour will be exposed for what they are. If drafting ethnic communities into political misconduct, often without their consent or their knowledge, and turning community against community are Labor's version of multiculturalism, then, by George, we can live without it.

I am so incredibly proud to represent Melbourne's west. From Craigieburn to Cairnlea, from Williamstown to Westmeadows, from Pascoe Vale to Puckle Street, it is a huge honour. In the immortal words of Jeff Fenech, 'I love youse all'. The time has come when the needs of the west must come before the needs of Labor hacks.

It will come as no surprise to anyone inside or outside this Parliament that I proclaim myself a political conservative, an unashamed conservative at that. I share the view once put by one of my political heroes, probably the greatest United States president, Ronald Wilson Reagan:

Government's first duty is to protect the people, not run their lives.

It is the government's responsibility to protect the poor, the sick, the weak, those with disabilities, the elderly and children, particularly the most defenceless and vulnerable of all — children before they are born. It is not the role of any government to tell people what they should say, much less what they should think. That of

course is exactly what the Bracks government is attempting to do. Political correctness is a cancer within our society. It is a threat to the rights of all, except of course our intellectual masters who dictate what is correct and what is not. To its eternal discredit, the Bracks government has embarked upon a program of political correctness which is unparalleled in the history of Australia. I will do everything in my power to eradicate this foul agenda and restore freedom of expression in this great state of Victoria.

The Racial and Religious Vilification Act is without doubt one of the most insidious, indeed evil, pieces of legislation ever approved by any Australian parliament, perhaps surpassed only by the commonwealth Parliament's recent endorsement of human cloning. The Racial and Religious Vilification Act is designed not to protect freedom but to suppress it. The day this law is repealed — and it will be repealed — will be a day of rejoicing for every Victorian.

The Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities, which was rushed through this Parliament before the people could give their judgment at the election, is a far-reaching and dangerous foray into control of every facet of Victorians' lives. It is a direct and very deliberate attack on the liberty of every Victorian. It gives political correctness a whole new meaning. It is legislation of which Joe Stalin would be proud. It too must, and will, go.

The Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission is a vast bureaucracy which has become nothing more than a tool for the forced implementation of politically correct social engineering. From personal experience I can accept it is Victorian, a commission it most certainly is but equal it is not. The only opportunity it offers is for the oh-so-superior, left-wing elites — the latte-sipping, chardonnay-quaffing know-alls that they are — to inflict their warped view of the world on the rest of us.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — We're not going to get four years of this, are we?

Mr FINN — You might get eight, Theo. I am just warming up. It would be an understatement to say that the role of the Equal Opportunity Commission is in urgent need of review.

Ms Lovell — You missed crystal-gazing.

Mr FINN — Crystal-gazing will come, do not worry. We will get to the basketweavers too.

There was a time when the initials PC stood for police constable. That is no longer the case on Victoria's thin blue line. Since the appointment as chief commissioner

of an obscure officer with little operational experience from arguably the most corrupt police force in this nation, public perception of our police and the morale of membership has nosedived. Political correctness now seems to be more important to police command than upholding the law of this state.

Let me make my position very clear: I am a devoted supporter of the rule of law. I am an equally strong supporter of those wonderful men and women charged with the responsibility of upholding that rule of law. My admiration for the front-line troops of Victoria Police knows no bounds. It sickened me to see Victoria's finest forced to shelter from violent attacks by professional left-wing ratbags as these highly organised agitators took over the streets of Melbourne just one month ago. Peace at all costs is now the message emanating from the chief commissioner's office. The law of this state is taking second place to appeasing thugs and hooligans — if they happen to be championing a political cause. Enough is enough.

Hon. T. C. Theophanous — Did Andrew Bolt write this?

Mr FINN — He will get a copy. If anyone is to end up in hospital as a result of such demonstrations, it should not be members of Victoria Police. I am sure such outstanding former chief commissioners as Mick Miller and Neil Comrie would agree with me when I say our police must be given the authority to uphold the law. At the moment that is, at the very least, highly doubtful.

Earlier this year a number of police officers were subject to what were little more than show trials. Justice was not served. The chief commissioner even went as far as consulting criminals on this course of action. Did anyone in this house, or anywhere else for that matter, ever think we would see the day when the most senior law enforcement officer in this state would be taking directives from law-breakers? It is simply astonishing. Christine Nixon is failing members. She is failing the law. She is failing the Victorian public. She is ripping at the very fabric of law and order in this state.

Mr Lenders — On a point of order, President, it is with extraordinary reluctance that I raise a point of order during an inaugural speech. With a sense of humour we on this side have listened, but the member has crossed the line in besmirching the Chief Commissioner of Police in this Parliament. I ask him to withdraw his comments attacking the chief commissioner.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Whilst I understand the Leader of the Government's personal concern, the fact is that the Chief Commissioner of Police is not covered by the sort of protection he thinks may be afforded to her. Therefore there is no point of order.

Mr FINN — I can certainly understand the sensitivity of government members on this subject. Christine Nixon has proven by her actions that she is not fit to lead the Victoria Police. The government should act immediately and dismiss her before irreparable damage is done to the police force. Christine Nixon should go, and she should go now.

The politically correct brigade are probably at their most dangerous when they advocate harm-minimisation policies on illicit drugs. No tolerance is clearly the only effective policy to accept in combating illegal drugs. The enormous damage done to generations of our young people by supposedly harmless, recreational drugs is now becoming apparent. Too many have died from the scourge of drugs, and now we are seeing the long-term effects of illegal drug use with mental health problems reaching epidemic proportions. Too large a percentage of two generations have literally fried their brains.

The most conclusive argument against the legalisation of marijuana I have experienced is a once highly regarded journalist who after decades of heavy marijuana use is now nothing but a paranoid, babbling fool. He has ruined not just his own life but the lives of many, if not most, of those who have had the misfortune to come into contact with him. Sadly that individual is just one example of the thousands whose lives have been destroyed by drug use.

One of the great mysteries of our time concerns those who advocate the legalisation of such drugs as an answer. To give these drugs the parliamentary seal of approval would be in itself a crime. A greater mystery is the proposition that legal heroin injecting rooms with taxpayer-funded heroin would somehow stem the tide of this virulent disease in our society. Perhaps next we can expect to cure alcoholism by distributing cans of Victoria Bitter or bottles of Johnnie Walker courtesy of the taxpayer. It is a ludicrous proposition and one deserving of total contempt by this Parliament.

Those who grow, produce, import, sell, push or otherwise promote illicit drugs or drug use are the scum of the earth. They should be treated as such. These mongrels are more than happy to make their fortune from the misery and even death of our children. If we are serious about the war on drugs, every defence should be adopted against these creatures. Victoria

should lead Australia, if not the world, in showing that dealing illicit drugs within our borders will not be tolerated. We should make it overwhelmingly clear to anyone thinking of peddling their particular form of wretchedness that we as a community will ensure they risk the heaviest penalties possible every time they ply their heinous trade. As a parent I have a right and a responsibility to protect my children. But as a legislator I have a much wider obligation to protect all children. If we in this Parliament can save some who would otherwise fall victim to drugs by ensuring that major drug dealers no longer walk this earth, then we will have done our duty and served the youth of Victoria well.

If the politically correct, chattering classes have imperilled the youth of this nation by their implicit support of illicit drugs, they have devastated indigenous Australians. Anyone who questions the long-established system of Aboriginal affairs in this country is immediately shouted down as a racist. That is all very well and good for the comfortable inner-city dwellers who claim a monopoly on such issues, but the simple fact of the matter is the system does not work. It has never worked, and it does not look like it will ever work in its current form. For all the billions of dollars poured into Aboriginal affairs over the years, infant mortality among Aborigines is a national disgrace. Domestic violence in many Aboriginal communities is a national shame, and the lack of proper health care, education and housing for Aborigines continues to be a national scandal.

On radio a few years ago I recall asking the then chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Geoff Clark, where all the money had gone. I asked why the billions of dollars marked annually to create better services for Aborigines was having no effect. At that time I got plenty of abuse but no answers. It is, however, a question worth asking again. Where has all that money gone? Where is it going and why has it not improved the lives it is supposed to? Why is the Aboriginal bureaucracy booming, yet those who it is supposed to assist still suffer? These are questions worth asking and asking again until we get a satisfactory answer. A royal commission into Aboriginal affairs is needed in Australia. Let us find out exactly why so many are suffering and why so many lives are cut short. Why are so many Aboriginal communities like something out of the Third World? In a country like Australia it should never be so. We must find out why it is so and fix it.

As a Liberal I have a deep belief in both small government and decentralisation. It never ceases to amaze me why we should have a commonwealth

department of health and a state department of health, a commonwealth department of education and a state department of education, a commonwealth department of transport and a state department of transport. And on it goes.

Given the cacophony of incompetence emanating from every state government in Australia at the moment, I can understand why some might have fallen for the old socialist line by calling for these responsibilities to be transferred lock, stock and barrel to the commonwealth. But that is clearly not the answer. This nation — —

Mr Pakula — Tell Tony Abbott.

Mr FINN — I will have a chat with him. This nation's founding fathers were also decentralists. They correctly believed that services are best provided by a government that is closest to the people. I have no doubt that the prospect of Canberra would have appalled many of them. The prospect of all central control in Canberra would have those founding fathers spinning in their graves today, and equally it should horrify every Australian. Canberra is simply the biggest mistake in this nation's history.

Irrespective of the fact that Australia now has the greatest Prime Minister in our nation's history — and will have for a considerable time to come — we should immediately begin the process of returning power to the states with the accompanying abolition, if you want to use that word, of most commonwealth bureaucracies. Decentralisation best provides for the needs of people, and that is surely what every government should be concerned with. This might well send the alfalfa munchers in Brunswick Street into a tizz, but I am one who is more than happy with Australia's system of government. The constitutional monarchy has served this nation and its people superbly for over a century. As systems of government go, it is clearly a world leader. It has given my great-grandparents, my grandparents, my parents, me and my children the reality of security and stability on which to build a decent life. I have no reason to believe it will not equally serve my grandchildren and their children.

I love Australia. That is not to say we cannot improve it. We can improve in some areas — a Richmond premiership would not go astray for starters — but we are blessed to be in this country. How many millions around the globe look upon our tolerance, respect, prosperity and freedom with unashamed envy? It is little wonder that so many have made their way to our shores for a better life and that many more are hoping to follow in their footsteps. A constitutional monarchy has overseen the building of a wonderful nation. It is

not something we should take for granted. If those seeking change can come up with a better system, I will wholeheartedly embrace it. It is not good enough to accept a dog's breakfast as republicans are prone to do. Fortunately the people of Australia share my view. They value what we have and signalled the last time they voted on this issue that they will not throw it away lightly. Let us not forget that just seven years ago the republican referendum was defeated in every state in the commonwealth. Not one state voted for change. The only win for the republicans was the Australian Capital Territory — that says far more about Canberra than it does about any referendum question. Australians deserve the best. In terms of our system of government, we have the best. It is worth keeping.

As the 56th Victorian Parliament convenes almost on the eve of the most important birthday in the history of the world, we, as members of that Parliament, should always remember that we are the servants of the people. We should dedicate ourselves every day to the service and the betterment of the people of Victoria. That is why we are here. That is our job, pure and simple. This chamber brings together people with widely divergent views, but if we remember the end result that we are all seeking, it will be a far more productive place. I look forward to this Parliament being a place where views and ideas — such as the ones I have just expressed — can be freely exchanged. I look forward to it being a true Parliament of and for the people of Victoria. I look forward to playing a role in ensuring that both come to pass. Let us make it our aim for Victoria to be a better place in four years time than it is now. Better still, let us make sure that it is truly — and no spin here! — a better place for every Victorian to live, work and raise a family.

Ms PENNICUIK (Southern Metropolitan) — Thank you, President, for the opportunity to speak today. My congratulations to you on your appointment as President, and to all members on their election to the 56th Parliament and to this historic new Legislative Council. Rest assured that I am not going to deliver a polemic now, but I would like to talk a little bit about the Greens, about myself and about what I care about.

This land on which we are meeting is the traditional home of Wurundjeri clans of the Woiworung tribe of the Kulin nation. We honour the Kulin nation today by acknowledging our past truthfully and by working for reconciliation and justice for all indigenous Australians. As a new member of this Parliament, I wish to express my personal apology to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the injustices they have suffered in the past and continue to suffer today.

Today the city of Melbourne is blanketed by a cloud of smoke from the bushfires to the north and to the east of us. The last time we experienced this was in 1983. At that time I was living in Anglesea, where the fires were burning, as they were in the Dandenong Ranges. The bushfires have always been a feature of the Australian landscape, but now we know that climate change is going to make that feature much more frequent and horrible. As other members have already mentioned in this chamber today, my heart goes out to the people who are in the bushfire areas and also to the wild animals, thousands of which have been killed in the fires in the last few weeks.

It is a great privilege for me to take my place with Ms Hartland and Mr Barber as the first three Australian Greens to be elected to the Victorian Parliament. I am acutely aware that being the first Greens in this place is a great opportunity and a great responsibility for us to promote Greens policies and ideas through the parliamentary processes, and to play a significant role in the review and amendment of legislative proposals.

I am enormously proud of the Victorian Greens that have grown from a fledgling political party just over a decade ago to become the third force in Victorian politics. I would like to pay tribute to the 17 people who started the Victorian Greens in 1992. One of those people, Janet Rice, is now mayor of the City of Maribyrnong and another, Margaret Blakers, has worked as an adviser to Mr Bob Brown and is working with us now in our first few weeks as parliamentarians.

There are currently four Greens mayors in Victoria: in the City of Maribyrnong, as mentioned; in the City of Yarra, which has now had two Greens mayors, one of whom was Greg Barber; in the City of Moonee Valley and in the City of Greater Bendigo, which has just elected two Greens mayors in a row. There has always been a Greens councillor on the Melbourne City Council since 1999.

I would also like to acknowledge all those Greens members and supporters who have worked so hard over the last 14 years to further the aims of the Greens. It is due to their dedication and commitment that our vote has increased at every election and that three of us are now elected to this Parliament. The Greens have been a positive force for democracy, peace, social justice and the environment in the Australian Senate since 1996, and in the state parliaments of Tasmania since 1983, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory since 1993, New South Wales since 1999 and South Australia since 2006.

All these Greens MPs have been an inspiration to me and to all Greens around Australia. Our senators, for example, stood up for the Tampa asylum seekers and for refugees in Australian detention centres; for the rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual and intersex people; for the rights of working people by opposing WorkChoices; for the protection of the old growth forests and the unique flora and fauna contained within them; and in support of global action on climate change.

It is a great achievement that in our fifth state election 10 per cent of Victorians have voted for us in the lower house. This result is the highest Greens vote ever in the lower house of a mainland state, and there are only a handful of regional parliaments around the world where this result has been bettered. There are Greens in national, regional and local governments around the world.

In April 2001, along with 800 people from 70 countries, I was privileged to attend the first global Greens conference in Canberra. It was very inspiring to meet so many committed people from every continent who are united by a common vision. A global Greens charter was adopted and the conference concluded with a dinner in the Great Hall of Parliament.

It was at the Global Greens conference that I heard Ingrid Betancourt, presidential candidate for the Oxygeno Verde, or Green Oxygen Party, in Columbia speak. She had an enormous impact on me. She spoke about having to put your life on the line for what you believe in — not something that confronts us in Australia, but imagine standing up to the powers that be in Columbia. In February 2002 Ingrid and her presidential running mate, Clara Rojas, were kidnapped by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the FARC, and are still being held in the Colombian jungle today. Bob Brown has been working tirelessly for her release.

I also admire enormously Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the Burmese National League for Democracy and winner of the Nobel Peace prize, who has been under house arrest for 11 of the last 16 years, the last three with only her maid in the house. She has stood up to the military dictatorship with great dignity and courage and at great personal cost. The thing that we Greens share across the world is values in common with these great heroes.

In the Southern Metropolitan Region approximately 1 in 6 people voted for the Greens. I thank them for their support, and I will work hard to represent them in this Parliament. I would also like to thank the Southern

Metropolitan Region Greens campaign team, especially my campaign manager, Amanda Sharp, and the 11 district candidates who worked so hard in a fantastic team effort. I have lived in the Southern Metropolitan Region since 1989, and my father and grandparents grew up there. In that time I have been active in a range of community and environmental issues in my local area, and have made many great friends who also care about our own environment and our community. I would especially like to make mention of the groups, Earthcare St Kilda, which has studied the penguin colony in St Kilda for 20 years and is responsible for indigenous plantings around the city of Port Phillip, and The Esplanade Alliance, which has fought many development battles on The Esplanade, St Kilda.

Port Phillip Bay is very special to me. For most of my life I have lived on its shores. I learnt to swim in the 25 metre salt water pool at the Williamstown Life Saving Club, and now I regularly swim at Brighton baths, at Half Moon Bay and at Elwood and St Kilda beaches. I have learnt, especially in the three years that I have been involved in the campaign against channel deepening, just how finely balanced the ecology of the bay is due to the pressures it is under every day. In the past dredging has negatively affected the important denitrification processes in the bay. CSIRO recommended in 1996 that future dredging in the bay be minimised. Victoria has astonishing marine diversity. Some 85 per cent of our fish species are found nowhere but the southern coast of Australia. Marine parks have been created, but more are needed to preserve our precious marine assets now and for the future.

I have always been green at heart. I can remember as a small child being intensely interested and awed by the natural world. I loved animals and documentaries about them, and about other parts of the world, and I loved going on day trips to the country or on camping holidays with my parents. My partner, Adrian, and I still love to go camping; due to work commitments he is unable to be here today, but I thank him for his love and support over 12 years.

It also seemed completely natural to me that the health of the environment is very important. I always saw it as inherently wrong to pollute or degrade the environment. I am also a person who is distressed by animal cruelty, and at the age of 20 I stopped eating meat, and I have been various versions of a vegetarian ever since. There has been much media histrionics over the years alleging that the Greens would force everyone to become vegetarian. This of course is not Greens policy, but I believe there are compelling environmental, health, economic and humane reasons why western cultures

should in the 21st century move towards a more vegetarian-based diet. Animals cannot advocate for themselves. They need people to do it for them, and in this Parliament I will work to see an end to anachronistic activities such as duck shooting and cruel and unnecessary intensive farming practices.

I joined the Greens 10 years ago because the principles and policies reflect my own values and ideals. The Greens are not and never have been a single-issue party. I strongly believe the Greens' principles of democracy, ecology, peace and social justice are the essential bases of a fair and sustainable future. These principles underpin the Greens progressive policies on all the important issues that face us now and in the future.

We Greens like to ask: will people in 50 or 100 years from now thank us for the decisions we make today? Decisions can cast long shadows. If we had our time again perhaps we would not drain all our wetlands and build houses on them; perhaps we would not build houses all over our market gardens; perhaps we would not have concreted in all our streams and turned them into canals; and perhaps we would not have built housing estates over land that was put aside once for public transport so that we are now in the position where we have a public transport crisis.

We cannot be so arrogant as to assume that as a nation or a state we cannot suffer an environmental collapse if we keep on the same path. The signs are there, and they have been for a long time — loss of species and biodiversity, land degradation and salinity, ongoing drought and polluted streams, rivers and marine environments and rising carbon dioxide levels. We need to think differently from the way we thought in the past. The 21st century requires a new paradigm. Cosmetic changes at the edges just will not cut it. As David Suzuki said, we are living off our capital. The Greens have been raising these issues for years, and now they are becoming more and more obvious. The general community is taking notice. This is good, because it means that more will be done, but it is also a sign that the problems with water scarcity, climate change, species loss et cetera are getting so critical that they cannot be ignored any longer.

Our economy and society is dependent upon and shaped by the environment, not the other way around. This is not a platitude but a fact of life. In our Western lifestyle we can be tricked into thinking that the economy is everything, but the fact is that everything is dependent upon healthy, dynamic ecosystems. It is like my yoga teacher used to say, 'You are not alive because

you have a good job and a nice car. You are alive because you are breathing. No breath, no life'.

During the election campaign we asked the Victorian people to imagine a better vision for Victoria — a Victoria of healthy rivers, wetlands and coastal areas, with sustainable farming and forestry practices and where no-one would even dream of logging our old-growth forests or water catchments; where people can travel on world-class, safe and reliable public transport in all our metropolitan and regional areas; with well-funded and vibrant public schools for all our children, no matter where they live; and as a world leader in wind, solar and other renewable technologies and with energy-efficient homes, businesses and public buildings. We know that these things and more are possible, and with commitment and vision and people in the Parliament who are thinking long term. Sadly I do not believe many of the decisions that have been made by our governments have been much about long-term thinking.

I would like to pay tribute to my parents, Margaret and John Pennicuik. I will stop for a moment to say Pennicuik again, because many members have come up to me outside the chamber and asked me how my name is pronounced. It is pronounced 'Pennicue'. The origins of the name Pennicuik are Scottish. It is the name of a town in Scotland, which if you were living in Scotland you would call 'Pennycook', and is a famous glassmaking area just outside Edinburgh. My father, John, who has been struggling with his health these last few years, came from a long line of sailors — my grandfather and great-grandfather were both sea captains. He served in the Royal Australian Navy for the duration of World War II, and was present on the bridge of HMAS *Australia* when it was hit by five kamikazes in the Leyte Gulf, and the captain and 44 other men were killed. My mother, Margaret, is a wonderful mother and best friend. She is an expert in mediaeval history and a feminist, who taught my sister and me to always stand up for ourselves and what we believe in. She also made sure my brothers knew that housework was not women's work, a matter in which my father set a very good example. I grew up with my sister, Megan, and two brothers, Bruce and Rodney, in the industrial western suburbs of Melbourne. I would like to thank them for their love and support over the years.

From our kitchen window in West Newport we could see the crackling tower at the Australian Petroleum refinery, which we naively called the smoky chimney. Unfortunately it and many of the other industries around us belched out an array of pollutants into the air. Our washing was often covered in soot from the

coal-fired power station down the road at Newport. Kororoit Creek was a lifeless trickle of industrial sludge. At an early age I knew this was wrong and it made me angry. It took years of community action to bring about improvements in this area, and our modern lifestyle still produces too much pollution and too many chemicals.

Despite the sometimes smelly air, it was a great place to grow up — a typical Australian working-class suburb on the fringe of the city. We spent much of our time playing in the quarry nearby, where we were not allowed to go and which is now called Newport Lakes. It was a warm and friendly community. I still have many close friends from my days at Newport West Primary School, who are of course very happy that I have been elected to Parliament, and I thank them for their love and support over the years as well.

I may not have been as overtly political at as early an age as many other members in this place, but I did wag school to attend the anti-Vietnam War rally in 1971, and I always attended the Palm Sunday peace rallies and the Hiroshima Day rallies, at which I spoke last year, and the May Day marches. More recently of course there have been the anti-war rallies in 2003 and the rallies against the WorkChoices laws. In Australia we are lucky that we can exercise our democratic right to take to the streets to protest against government decisions or for issues we believe in.

In the late 1980s, when I was working as a secondary schoolteacher, my interest and concern for what was happening to our planet prompted me to enrol in a masters course in environmental science at Monash University. This course was renowned for its toughness and high workload, and it was an absolute privilege to study under the farsighted and fabulous people who developed the course and who challenged our thinking about the world and how it works. Without launching into a dissertation, suffice it to say that we gained an understanding of the interconnectedness of the philosophical, the social, the political, the ecological and the economic. One of our slogans was 'Structure is destiny', and I will leave you all to think about that one.

It was during this course that I and three other students undertook a research project for the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) about the attitudes of its members to environmental issues. This report entitled *Working for the Environment* was one of the few group reports published by the university. This led to me working for the AMWU as, as far as I know, the first union environment officer in Australia. I would like to thank the AMWU for that opportunity and for the support it gave me while I worked there.

From 1997 to 2004 I had the great privilege of working at the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) as the national occupational health and safety coordinator. A great focus of my work at that time was on the downside of the workplace productivity revolution of the 1980s and 1990s. There was a growing incidence of stress-related hazards and illness at work, which is still with us today. Since the 1980s governments have pursued a series of so-called industrial reforms. While productivity has increased enormously, many people find themselves working excessive hours without extra pay, while many others remain unemployed or stuck in part-time, casual, low-paid and insecure work.

The worst attack on our working conditions has come from the passage of the Orwellianly named WorkChoices legislation — the greatest redistribution of powers to employers in Australia's history. Far from being the basis of a modern economy, as claimed by the Howard government, WorkChoices strips away the hard-won working conditions that have been the basis for fairness and equity at work and a fair society, which was the hallmark of the Australian industrial relations system. It takes us back to the days of Thomas Hardy and Charles Dickens, when working people had few rights or protections.

The Victorian Greens recognise that reversing WorkChoices will require significant policy changes at a federal level. Nevertheless a central public policy question is how Victorian laws can best protect employees in Victoria. I acknowledge that the government has taken some action; however, I believe more can and should be done for Victorian workers who are more exposed to WorkChoices than workers in other states.

While at the ACTU in 2001 I organised the hosting by Australia of the International Workers Memorial Day, which is held on 28 April every year to commemorate the people who have died at work. The theme that year was 'Asbestos', and most people found it unbelievable that Australia was still using asbestos imported from Canada to make brake linings. Many people worked from that time to bring about the final ban on the use of asbestos which came into effect in 2003. This was a great thing, but the fight for justice for victims of asbestos — estimated to be up to 40 000 people by 2020 — has been a long and hard one. What concerns me is that asbestos in situ in buildings around Victoria still poses a hidden hazard which could claim the health of thousands more people into the future.

I would like to thank my colleagues at the Australian Council of Trade Unions, in particular Bill Mansfield, Peter Moylan and Ken Norling, and the members of the

ACTU occupational health and safety committee, especially Cathy Butcher and Debra Vallance. I express my support for the Your Rights at Work campaign led by Greg Combet and Sharan Burrow of the ACTU. I would also like to thank my most recent employer, the Australian Drug Foundation, for its support during the recent election campaign and for letting me go at such short notice after it was confirmed last week that I had been elected.

The 2006 Victorian election was an historic occasion for Victoria. It marked the 150th anniversary of the Parliament of Victoria, and at this election we saw significant electoral reforms with fixed four-year terms and the introduction of proportional representation in the Legislative Council. I assisted in drafting the Australian Greens Victoria submission to the inquiry into upper house reform. While the model adopted for the new Legislative Council was not the one preferred and advocated by the Greens, it is still a great improvement, and the government should be congratulated.

The upper house is now more representative of the electorate than it was, and with goodwill and appropriate resourcing, for the first time it will be able to function as a true house of review, increasing accountability in the Victorian Parliament. The people of Victoria expect and deserve no less. However, there should be a thorough evaluation and review of the process the first time around and improvements such as the option for voters to direct preferences above the line, as has been introduced in New South Wales, should be considered.

The Greens and many people in the community are concerned about the growing amounts of money given in the form of business and corporate donations to political parties, particularly in connection with elections. For the sake of accountability, transparency and democracy we should be moving towards the UK and Canadian systems, with limits on and open disclosure of political donations.

President, in conclusion, I look forward to working with the members of this Parliament in a respectful and cooperative way to achieve the best outcomes for the present and future wellbeing of the Victorian people and our environment.

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — Thank you, President, for inviting me to speak on this motion. I take the opportunity to congratulate you on your election as President of the Legislative Council.

I will start by thanking the voters of the Eastern Metropolitan Region for voting me in as one of their representatives in the Council, and I thank the ALP for its endorsement and support during the election.

I add a late thankyou to Mr Greg Barber, who told me that the inaugural speech notes said 'Your speech should be personal and you should add a quote'. Without having read those notes, that is exactly what I think I have done. I felt a bit more comfortable once he said that. I think I have landed on my feet!

I am the second youngest of eight children born to John and Agnes Leane. My father, John, who was better known as Jack, was a bricklayer who worked hard all his life. During World War II Jack fought for Australia in New Guinea with the 2nd/5th Commando Squadron. By all reports the 2nd/5th Commando Squadron was a very active unit. I have dug up a couple of quotes about the 2nd/5th that I would like to share today. The first is:

A small war was being waged ceaselessly by the company, continually harassing the enemy bases and patrols, observing and recording the movements.

And from one of the squadron members:

Time would fail me to tell of all the battles of the 2nd/5th.

It sounds like Jack had a torrid time during the war. My mother told me that when he returned from the war he would always refuse invitations to go on hunting trips with his relatives, because after what he had seen he could not even shoot at rabbits. My hope is that no future young Victorian will have to see anything like my father, Jack, saw.

Unfortunately when I was still at primary school my father died from a heart attack. This left my mother, Agnes, who is now a happily retired nurse, with the hard slog of working night shift and bringing up eight children when the majority of us were still quite young. It is a huge testament to my mother's efforts that all my brothers and sisters are now successful contributors in a number of areas of society, including the police force, nursing, teaching, social work and private enterprise. It is also a testament to my mother's efforts that I am speaking here tonight as a new member of the Victorian Parliament. I believe that because of the double load that single parents have to carry, we should always hold them in very high esteem.

At the end of secondary school I was lucky enough to graduate year 11 at the then Oakleigh Technical School. I was lucky for two reasons, the first because at the time I much preferred playing sport and generally mucking around than concentrating on schoolwork; and secondly, lucky to have had a broad technical training

in trade subjects in secondary school. The trade subjects I took at Oakleigh Tech. definitely helped determine the career path I wanted to take. They also assisted me later in obtaining an apprenticeship. This is something not all young people have enjoyed recently. However, I am very pleased to be part of a re-elected Bracks government that has committed to introducing technology wings into all public secondary schools.

When I was 17 I gained an apprenticeship as an electrical mechanic with an electrical contractor that employed about 50 electricians. At the start of the third year of my apprenticeship the company went into liquidation. I was given a cheque by the company for my last week's pay and annual leave that was owing. That cheque bounced. I learnt early in my working life that entitlements that you have actually worked for can be unsecured. At the time I was young and had no pressing commitments to keep, so the impact on me of not receiving this money was minimal. However, in the last few years as a union official I have witnessed how devastating it can be for people who have worked, in some cases for decades, for companies that have gone into liquidation, leaving the workers with the prospect of losing most of their accrued annual leave, long-service leave and redundancy payments or maybe receiving only a small percentage of them after a very long wait.

The situation that really frustrated me as an official was when an established company that had been in existence for a very long time was sold to new owners who somehow managed to send that business broke in less than a year, leaving employees who had been around the business a lot longer than the new owners in a financial mess. In a perfect world the federal transmission-of-business laws work fine. The company gets sold and the employees' accrued entitlements and years of service transfer over to the new owner. This allows the employees to utilise their accrued leave when they want to in the future, despite the sale of a company.

Unfortunately this part of our world is becoming less and less perfect. I believe the federal legislation governing the transmission of business needs to be reviewed to take into consideration that before a point of sale the employees should have a say in whether the entitlements they have worked hard for should be bought or sold or whether they should have an option that their money could be transferred into an industry fund or any other financial vehicle that they felt their money would be secure in. This should not be an outrageous thing for the workers to request, considering that they actually work for those entitlements.

Going back to the time after my first experience of working for a company that went broke, this led me to the first of a number of times in my working life when I have been unemployed. After about six months of unemployment I obtained a job with a big electrical contractor that I worked with until I completed my apprenticeship. During this period of time I obtained an A-grade electrical licence. That licence was not easy to obtain. It involved hours of study and on-the-job training. However, it should be hard to obtain a licence to work on electricity, a licence to work on gas or any other occupational licence that gives you authority to work on services in people's homes and workplaces that, if not dealt with properly, can be potentially lethal to the occupants. I can report that the current pass rate in the practical part of the Victorian electrical licence is about 40 per cent. I am very pleased to know that the bar is still set very high for the sake of the electrical safety of Victorians.

A federal report which poses a question about the duration of the electrical apprenticeship has recently been presented by some people who are peripheral to the electrical industry. It also puts a question mark — or half a question mark, I reckon; they are not brave enough to make it a question mark — over the existence of the electrical licence. I have not spoken to one electrician or one employer of electricians that would share this view. It is an opportunistic, knee-jerk reaction to what, if handled properly, should be a short-term skills shortage.

I have been fortunate enough for the last eight years to have been a board member of the not-for-profit company, VICTEC Ltd. VICTEC is an apprentice group training scheme that at any one time employs over 400 electrical, plumbing and refrigeration apprentices. In recent years this company has received hundreds of applications over and above the positions it has had available. At this one company alone we currently have a situation where young people looking to be trained in areas where there is a desperate need are missing out. What we have to do is find ways to get as many of these young people who are looking for apprenticeships in areas where there are skill shortages into the system as soon as possible so that in a few years there will be enough properly trained, skilled workers to meet Victoria's business needs. What we should not do is be panicked into shortening apprenticeships and abolishing licences, which will seriously undermine Victoria's electrical safety.

Not long after I finished my apprenticeship my wife, Paula, and I married. We married at a relatively young age, and had two daughters, Jacqueline and Monique, soon after. This year Jacqueline has successfully

completed her accounting degree at Monash University's Caulfield campus, and Monique has successfully finished her first year in marine biology at Deakin University in Warrnambool. I am very proud of them both. I love them very much. I want to thank them for the love and support they have given me, especially in the last few months.

Paula and I found that being parents at a young age threw up many challenges that we managed to negotiate by sticking together and learning fast. Paula decided to put her career ambitions on hold to take on the role as the girls' primary carer from the time they were babies until after they completed primary school. During this time she also worked in a number of part-time jobs she could do on weekends and at night, when I could be at home with the girls. One of these jobs involved unpacking flowers from boxes in supermarkets and putting them out in the shop for sale in time for trading hours. Early one morning in a supermarket storeroom she reached into a box to pull out what she thought was a new colourful range of flowers but unfortunately turned out to be a live tropical snake that must have somehow got into the box in transit. Paula decided to leave that job.

When both girls were in secondary school Paula did what I believe was a very brave thing. She successfully applied for an information technology traineeship, which meant returning to study after a long break. It also meant — and I have to be careful how I say this — that she was probably the most mature-aged person in the program. She successfully obtained her certificate and is now working as an information technology project manager.

I believe we must support mature-age people to get into apprenticeships and traineeships, especially where we have skills shortages. I am very proud of Paula and love her very much. I have been blessed to have a life partner in Paula. All through our marriage she has always supported my union activism and what I believe in, even though it meant at times accepting work on less wages than we previously enjoyed or even having no income at all. As I said earlier about my mother, it is a huge testament to Paula's support that I am speaking here today as a new member of the Victorian Parliament.

I have been a proud member of the Electrical Trades Union all my working life. The union has a great history of representing electrical workers' interests. I thank the union for all the training and support it gave me. I thank the leader of the Victorian Electrical Trades Union, Dean Mighell, for supporting me and encouraging me in trying to get elected to this place. I

also thank the plumbers union, which is a great union in representing workers. I thank the plumbers union secretary, Earl Setches. A very long time ago Earl and I were apprentices at the same company on the same job. Back then I was an apprentice electrician and Earl was an apprentice sprinkler fitter. In those days I used to think that sprinkler fitters were mad and you should not cross them. I also thank the firefighters union, the Maritime Union of Australia and the postal workers union for supporting me in the election campaign.

When I was a young tradesmen I worked on a number of large construction jobs with a lot of other construction workers. It was then I found myself speaking out to builders and employers on behalf of my fellow workers regarding safety and industrial issues. At a number of those sites my peers elected me to be the shop steward or safety representative. I found myself getting more and more involved in the union movement, which I came to love. At the completion of most of those projects I found it hard to obtain another job straight away.

I had friends who had a theory at the time that some employers would not consider a sparky who spoke out on behalf of his fellow workers as the sort of employee their business was necessarily looking for. After being unsuccessful in gaining a position on one particular project an employer admitted to me that an official of an employer association told him not to touch me with a 10-foot pole. Even though this person later denied he said that, I was very tempted to take an 11-foot pole to my next job interview.

It is important that workers are encouraged to speak out, especially about safety concerns. It is also important that workers are not discriminated against in doing so. The longest stint of unemployment I had was a little over nine months. It may not sound too bad, but it is hard when you are supporting a young family. I look back at that time and the other times I have been unemployed as teaching me a good lesson, and one to bring into this house. I gained a lesson in understanding how people who were really struggling actually think. I know what it is like to go through the house to find the 5-cent pieces that people have everywhere, collect them, take them to the store and put them on the counter — to the horror of the storekeeper — and use them to buy milk and bread. If that is what you have to do, you do it.

I eventually got a job in the eastern suburbs with a company that maintained traffic lights. This involved changing a lot of blown globes. I might be a bit rusty now, but I can confidently say to the people of the Eastern Metropolitan Region that I know nearly every

traffic light intersection intimately because at some stage I have probably changed nearly every globe there.

My most recent job has been as an official of the Electrical Trades Union. I was fortunate in being involved in a number of positive campaigns as well as in assisting individual members to overcome some challenging issues. Being involved in the introduction of the 36-hour week, coupled with overtime limits in the construction industry and a number of other workplaces, was something close to my heart. Extra leisure time to spend with your family these days is like gold. Workers at all levels in all industries are working longer and longer hours. This has to be having a detrimental effect on our society.

The Governor said in his speech to Parliament that we have had a recent epidemic in childhood obesity and diabetes. We have to acknowledge that a lot of parents do not have the time any more to get home and cook. Fast food outlets are thriving. Many parents do not have time to get home and chase the kids around the backyard. The Bracks government's Go for Your Life program is great in that it encourages people of all ages to be active.

I got back into competitive sport in the last few years. I do not know, as a new guy, whether I should give notice, but I will do some boasting now. My boast is that this season — maybe not next season because of poor form — I was one of two deputy vice-captains at the eastern veterans football club. I should qualify this boast by saying the best way to try to explain the standard of the eastern veterans district football league is to say that the level of football would be several fractions of the standard our colleagues Mr Madden and Mr Drum played. In saying that, you cannot deny that it is a good thing for some middle-aged blokes, some of whom are a little overweight, to chase a football around a park and get some exercise every couple of Sundays.

As a union official I found that a good number of employers actually have a high regard for their work force. I also found that a lot of workers have a high regard for their employers and most problems that arise can be sorted out amicably if commonsense is applied. Unfortunately in the last dispute I had to deal with before leaving the union that was far from the case.

A switchboard company in the eastern suburbs tried to force its low-paid work force to agree to a new workplace agreement that contained a provision that would allow workers to be asked to work 60 hours in one week and 20 hours in the next but which would not attract penalty rates. There were also other issues in the agreement that the workers thought were very unfair.

When the workers protested this by not making themselves available to work overtime, which was clearly their right under the existing agreement — which said that overtime was not compulsory — in the next week the company refused to pay them for the normal hours they had worked. For a week they worked the hours they were contracted for but got paid nothing. The federal government defended the company's action by saying that, although it had not paid the wages, the company was probably not doing anything illegal under the WorkChoices legislation.

Whether that was illegal or not might be sorted out some day in some court, but what we have to say is that what this company did and what that government did in defending it basically went against an Australian institution that you get paid a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. These people put in five days of fair work and got nothing. I believe it is important that we in this house do everything we can to ensure that no Victorian workers are subjected to this unfair treatment again.

In closing, it is my goal to do my best job in representing the people of the Eastern Metropolitan Region. I plan to do this by working hard. I plan to do this by trying to learn fast. I plan to do this by drawing on all the lessons of a number of people I have come across in my life, and I will mention just a few: process workers who are on \$15 an hour, labourers on building sites, people I spoke to in queues at social security offices, union officials of all unions and my family. I tend to draw on what my family has taught me. I intend to do as good a job as I can here. I thank you for the chance to speak today.

Ms TIERNEY (Western Victoria) — I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we stand, the Kulin nation, and pay my respects to their elders.

President, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on being elected President of the Legislative Council. I am confident that you will ensure the efficient operation of this Council in a manner that will be both inclusive and enjoyable.

Firstly I wish to pay tribute to the enormous effort being put in by the firefighters, community members and departmental staff currently engaged in fighting Victoria's bushfires. I am sure all members of this chamber will be thinking of them and their families, especially as it is getting so close to Christmas. I also wish to express my appreciation to the staff of the parliamentary departments for the assistance that they have provided us as new members of this 56th Parliament. I also wish to acknowledge the

goodwill and warmth expressed towards me by my parliamentary colleagues; I can assure them that it is very much appreciated.

It was interesting yesterday listening to Jaala Pulford, who in the course of research for her reply to the Governor's speech uncovered the fact that her ancestors arrived in Victoria in 1850s and then made their way to Ballarat to settle. I also uncovered a similar 1850s ancestral journey. At that time my great-great-great-grandmother, Mary Anne Williamson, at the age of 16, arrived in Australia from Ireland. Mary, along with her sister and her brother, William, walked from the ship near Melbourne to Ballarat. Mary's daughter Mary Jane — one of 14 — was born in Ballarat and her daughter Ida, my great-grandmother, was born in Clunes.

This was an era when the men worked in the mines and the girls and the women in the family ran the boarding houses. I am fortunate that Ida was able to pass on numerous family stories to me about growing up in Ballarat and Clunes. My ancestors, as I found out last night from Jaala, now rest in the same cemetery in Ballarat as hers, so it is entirely appropriate that both Jaala and I put in our best efforts and continue to build the electorate that our ancestors chose to create and live in.

Most of my working life has been spent representing working families, which has been a very broad and a very privileged experience. I, like so many of my generation, was fortunate to live at a time where a Whitlam Labor government acted to eliminate tuition fees as a barrier to higher education. This made a decent university education accessible to working families in Australia for the first time, which to this very day remains a legacy for which I am eternally indebted. My entire secondary school education was undertaken at country high schools, where netball, weekend football, the Saturday night dance and church on Sunday ruled. In summer it was the town swimming pool, the railway dam and listening out for the fire siren. Saturday night was movies at the mechanics institute, and church was on Sunday. In the evenings throughout the week local community groups met regularly on a whole range of issues, from swimming pool finances to canteen rosters to establishing the library, or re-establishing it, and hospital extensions.

At school we established a Junior Rural Youth Group, and as president over a two-year period I organised numerous activities for rural youth, as well as community fundraisers. In fact I owe the rural youth organisation a significant amount. Looking back now, it was the beginning of things to come. As a consequence

I do know the importance of community. I do know the importance of organising. I do know the importance of proper financial management and accessible services. This is also true of course of the Bracks government, which continues to ensure that regional Victorians are not regarded as second-class citizens.

The new electorate of Western Victoria Region, which I have been elected to represent, covers over 70 000 square kilometres, an expanse that runs from the Werribee River, Lara and along the entire western coast, including the Surf Coast, Apollo Bay, the Apostles, Warrnambool, Port Fairy, Portland, Nelson and the significant farming and primary industry serviced by the townships of Colac, Camperdown, Terang and Hamilton. The circle continues into the Wimmera to Nhill, Horsham, Jeparit and Rainbow and back through the Grampians to Stawell, Ararat, Maryborough and includes the natural attractions of Daylesford and the Kyneton region.

The geographic diversity of the region is also demonstrated by its large provincial cities such as Geelong and Ballarat, which have their own unique histories and beauty. Its diversity is further enhanced through the growing communities in and around the Bacchus Marsh area and the larger outer western suburb of Melton. The Western Victoria Region also has many smaller towns, such as Garvoc, Harrow, Talbot and Glenthompson and many others — too many to mention — but each and every one of these communities has stories to tell, with specific needs as well as needs that are common across other regional and urban communities.

Whilst my role in the Vehicle Builders Union has often taken me to Geelong and Ballarat, I have also had the privilege to experience other parts of Western Victoria Region. I have appreciated briefings from the many municipal councils on matters of concern to their communities. I have particularly enjoyed listening and talking to people at the Hamilton Sheepvention and the Warrnambool, Horsham, Ballarat and Geelong shows and meeting various community leaders, whether they be at Edenhope, Bannockburn, Apollo Bay or Portland.

The major issues fronting Western Victoria Region, like most of Victoria, are drought, the protection of water supplies and the all-pervasive issue of climate change. Like many other members of this chamber, I am committed to tackling these challenges head on. Solutions to these problems need cross-party support, and as such our level of maturity in arriving at solutions will be tested. The electorate will not tolerate party-political point scoring on these terribly vital issues, and quite rightly so. The provision of accessible

services in regional Victoria is fundamental to the future of all of those I am elected to represent.

It is a matter of fact that the restitution of services, whether it be education, health, police, infrastructure or transport, are policy imperatives and priorities of this government. They are clear, and they are plain for all to see. Almost every town, rural city and provincial city has had a new aged care centre, a children's hub, a hospital extension, a rest room facility, a police station and a aquatic centre, and schools have been built, but there will be much more to come. I look forward to being part of a team that continues this momentum.

Rural communities in particular know that historically their towns have grown as a consequence of their own community working together. Reliance on each other is woven into the fabric of everyday life, and in tough times everyone in a town pulls together. When someone's family has had a terrible misfortune everyone rallies to offer generous support, both physical and emotional. Rural and regional areas are the natural landscape for community capacity building. Community renewal is the lynchpin in communities being able to participate in determining their growth. Planning ahead and making sure that each community has a vision and a capacity to deliver the vision to the next generation is our challenge, and I keenly look forward to being involved in this process. For all the progress and growth that has been achieved to date, we need to be continually vigilant in ensuring that the most vulnerable are protected.

I stand on this side of the chamber because this side of the chamber represents a serious understanding of power relationships within our society. It develops programs to protect and engage the vulnerable. It recognises the pressures of modern life and the consequences which lead to the fragmentation of our society and tackles them at the grassroots level with community renewal and human capacity building. It is seriously committed to working with all Victorians regardless of class, age or geographic location. This is amply demonstrated by the whole-of-government approach to regional development and a clear focus on services for regional Victoria.

It is this side of the chamber that recognises that employment and prosperity sustain families and that there is no room for unfair and unsafe practices in the workplace. It is this side of the chamber that supports a collaborative culture to resolve problems and foster relationships where workers and their unions are respected, not sidelined or treated with derision. It is this side of the chamber that ensures the voices of ordinary working families are taken seriously.

I have been fortunate to have been able to participate in the last two Victorian Trades Hall Council's Your Rights at Work country cavalcades throughout western Victoria, talking to people at shopping centres and railway stations, addressing workers in the workplace, organising public meetings, and listening to their experiences and what is happening to them in their factories, their shops and their areas of expertise. This has all happened in a whole range of rural towns. It is very clear how Victorians feel about this new anti-worker legislation that has been introduced by the commonwealth government. If there is anyone in this chamber who believes opposition to the federal government's WorkChoices legislation is only metropolitan based, they are being seriously misled.

My experience in western Victoria is that people are worried. They are concerned; some are angry and some are even scared. Working families are realising how damaging these insidious industrial relations laws are to their way of life. Many of them are experiencing the impact first hand, whether it be on a family member or indeed on themselves. Working families in western Victoria want a fair system of workplace laws, and they want a Bracks government that stands strongly against bad laws that damage their communities.

Working families also want governments to have a positive vision for the future and to work on ensuring that the next generation will not be worse off and to encourage our children to aspire towards and realise their goals. A starting point for this vision has to be the retention of industry, particularly industries that allow skills development and industries that have decently funded apprenticeships and traineeship schemes for our children, as well as the provision of long-term stable employment. This is why it is important to support the Australian manufacturing industry in a real and genuine way and to stop a culture that allows people to just shrug their shoulders and say it is all too hard, allowing our jobs to haemorrhage out of Australia into low-wage countries such as China and India.

We cannot be a country that continues to just simply dig it up and sell it off. Nor can we think that we have sustainable employment that revolves solely around the services industry. All progressive countries around the world have highly developed manufacturing industries coupled with highly developed industry policies. This is what drives employment and economic prosperity. You can imagine the impact on Geelong, for example, if the automotive industry were to close. As stated by the Geelong Manufacturing Council:

Geelong's social and economic fabric would suffer significantly from a less favourable investment climate in

Australia. Through direct and indirect effects, 10 000 people in Geelong are dependent on the automotive sector.

Victoria is the home of automotive manufacturing in this country and provides stable, well-paid, properly regulated employment. It is an industry that has mature industrial partnerships that have stood the test of time and the test of government. It is at the cutting edge of technology, design, manufacturing processes, research, training, education and just about any other process or area that you can think of. It is this diversity that provides young people with a launching pad into a range of career opportunities. These are the sorts of industries that should be fostered by governments. These are the sorts of industries that need to be the bedrock of our economy. To do otherwise is to abandon our children's future to the altar of market forces and to accordingly suffer the consequences.

I look forward to being involved in policies and programs that do not widen the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged, whether it be in education, health, employment or transport, and I am particularly interested in engaging with the disengaged. It is a fact that when a society allows people to be detained without trial or charge, when it simply cannot come to terms with our indigenous people, when racism raises its ugly head, when social justice is forgotten or just plainly not understood, when drug abuse continues to rise, when there is a growing indifference among people as to whether they should exercise their responsibility of citizenship through voting, and when governments act ideologically in closing down institutions such as student organisations, then people become disengaged from the political process and lose confidence in the structure of our society.

This is where Labor can make a difference. It is an area I look forward with optimism to working in. I am looking forward to being very much part of the Bracks team, representing western Victoria, working to the best of my ability and getting on with issues and programs that really matter.

In closing, like many new members I have many people to acknowledge and thank. Firstly I would like to thank the ordinary members of the Vehicle Builders Union. I thank the shop stewards, organisers and staff of the VBU for their insights, their unity, their determination and their overwhelming support for me over the past 18 years, in particular the last 14 years as state secretary. The VBU is a genuine family where I have been treated as a daughter and a sister, and I have been very honoured to be a leader. Thanks must also go to the hardworking Vehicle Builders Union women's committee, which has continually demonstrated and

lived its community activism. This in turn has inspired others to take grassroots approaches to organising in our campaign against WorkChoices. I wish to acknowledge and thank very much Greg Combet, Sharan Burrow and Brian Boyd and the many others who are steering a truly magnificent Your Rights at Work campaign in support of working families in this country. They are continuing to widen the debate on core values in our society in a thoughtful and considered manner that makes us proud to be union.

I thank the hundreds of ALP members and supporters who worked on the polling booths and who are committed to bringing about a more ongoing compassionate, democratic and sustainable society.

I thank my parents, Rylice and Ken, for providing good grounding. I also thank them for their enormous strength and resilience in terms of the experiences they have had in their lives. My son, Shea, gives me great pleasure. I thank him for his understanding and support and his solid notions of social justice that make it so important for us to speak up for the next generation. I thank Ian, my closest friend and husband. His tough-yet-compassionate, hardworking qualities, mixed with optimism, always provide me with inspiration to simply do better on a daily basis. I love him for that.

Acting President, I thank you and members of the Legislative Council for your attention.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

Sitting suspended 6.30 p.m. until 8.03 p.m.

STATE TAXATION LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (HOUSING AFFORDABILITY) BILL

Second reading

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated on motion of Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education).

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Incorporated speech as follows:

At the commencement of the 2006 election campaign, the government announced key reforms designed to make home ownership easier for Victorians as well as reforms to support employment growth in the Victorian economy.

The government has already implemented important reforms making home ownership more affordable for Victorians.

We are the first and currently the only state that has fully abolished stamp duty on mortgages — which saves an average home buyer around \$1400.

We have introduced the first home bonus, which has assisted almost 87 000 home buyers — providing additional assistance for young people purchasing their first home.

And we are proud to have extended assistance to concession card holders. When the government was elected, a pensioner paid the full amount of stamp duty if the value of the property was above \$130 000. Today, they receive a full stamp duty exemption up to \$300 000 and a discount up to \$400 000.

As a result of these measures, Victoria has led the way with housing affordability. Recent Housing Industry Association data shows that on average Victoria has had the highest level of housing starts of all the states for the past three years, and according to the association forecasts, housing starts in Victoria will continue to outperform other states for at least the next three years.

Last year, Victoria had more first home buyers than any other state in Australia. In fact, we had 40 214 new first home buyers compared to New South Wales with 39 149 — impressive given that New South Wales has 1.7 million more people.

And the most recent Real Estate Institute of Australia survey shows that once again Melbourne is the most affordable city on the eastern seaboard.

But across Australia, affordability remains an important issue. In recent months higher interest rates have put pressure on Victorian families.

Our election commitments are aimed at continuing to assist first home buyers and to reduce stamp duty for most Victorians who buy a home.

This bill delivers on these important commitments. It provides for a conveyance duty reduction for certain principal place of residence transactions and the extension of the first home bonus — including an increase in the bonus for the purchase of newly constructed homes.

The Duties Act 2000 is amended to give effect to the reduction in duty payable on eligible properties purchased as a principal place of residence. The duty payable will be reduced as follows:

cutting the duty rate from 6 per cent to 5 per cent for properties valued between \$115 001 and \$400 000; and

cutting the duty payable by \$2850 for properties valued between \$400 001 and \$500 000.

The reduction will take effect for contracts entered into on or after 1 January 2007.

The assistance is deliberately targeted to those home buyers who need it most: those Victorians buying a home for themselves and their family to live in.

Reflecting this, the largest percentage reduction in conveyance duty will be enjoyed by purchasers of homes

around the median Melbourne price. The rate cut will deliver a saving of around \$2600 on the purchase of a median-priced home, which represents a 14 per cent cut in duty payable.

To ensure that the duty reduction is only available to genuine purchasers, there are some criteria that must be met for eligibility for the reduction. These include:

an age limit of at least 18 years;

a requirement to commence occupation of the residence within 12 months of settlement; and

a requirement to occupy the residence for a continuous period of at least 12 months.

However, the commissioner of state revenue will have a discretion to allow exceptions to the age and residency requirements to deal with certain situations, such as a genuine home buyer under the age of 18 years, legitimate temporary absences or where a home becomes unfit for occupation.

The conveyance duty reductions will save home buyers \$305 million over five years.

The First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 is amended to give effect to the commitments announced around the extension of the first home bonus. The amendments:

extend the \$3000 first home bonus for buyers of existing properties until June 2009 (from June 2007); and

increase the bonus to \$5000 for all first home buyers of newly built homes, commencing January 2007.

The bonus, in both forms, is available for properties valued at or below \$500 000 and purchased as a principal place of residence.

First home buyers will have a choice between the conveyance duty reduction or the first home bonus. However, the first home bonus will always be more generous to give first home buyers an edge in the market.

Three-quarters of all Victorian home buyers will benefit from this new package of bonuses and conveyance duty cuts.

In addition to the benefits to home buyers, the added incentive to purchase newly constructed homes will provide a boost to the Victorian building industry. While Victoria has led the nation in housing starts, the building industry is especially vulnerable to fluctuations in the economy, including recent interest rate increases. Along with Victoria's off-the-plan concession on stamp duty, this additional grant will provide strong incentives for families to look at purchasing newly constructed homes.

During the campaign, we also made a commitment to provide relief to the business sector. The bill will amend the Pay-roll Tax Act 1971 to bring forward the implementation of the payroll tax cuts announced in the 2006–07 budget. The rate reduction from 5.15 per cent to 5.05 per cent is being brought forward to take effect from January 2007, rather than July 2007. This represents a \$26 million benefit to businesses.

Victoria already enjoys one of the lowest payroll tax rates in the country and this further change represents direct savings for Victorian businesses. Victoria's record on tax reform is second to none, with more taxes being abolished under the

intergovernmental agreement than any other state. This comes on top of the already announced abolition of the business rental duty from 1 January 2007.

The government has a proud record of taxation reform that benefits Victorian families and businesses. The measures contained in this bill on housing affordability and payroll tax will further build on this record.

I commend the bill to the house.

**Debate adjourned on motion of
Mr RICH-PHILLIPS (South Eastern
Metropolitan).**

Debate adjourned until next day.

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH

Address-in-reply

**Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of
Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) for adoption of
address-in-reply.**

Mrs PEULICH (South Eastern Metropolitan) — I can perhaps use this opportunity to provide a bit of tuition on the pronunciation of my very difficult Slavic surname. It is actually pronounced 'Powlitch'. I will not share with you the play on words my former students used with my surname.

I will also not use the signature introductory line that re-elected members have used in the past years. I believe it goes something like, 'Before I was so rudely interrupted ...'. I will not use that, and I certainly will not try to match the theatre and drama of my colleague Bernie Finn. That would simply not be possible.

But like other members I would like to outline the context and perspective that I bring to bear on this role, that I have had the great honour of having bestowed upon me by the Liberal Party as well as the electors of the South Eastern Metropolitan Region. This particular inaugural speech — which some would call a maiden speech, which is quite inappropriate since I am a bit of an old maid, not a maiden — should be seen as supplementary to the one that I gave the other place in 1992. As with other members, some of the themes and issues are not dissimilar but are couched in different terms and are perhaps set in a different ideology and different language, which I would like to caution is probably more divisive than the actual values which many of us in this chamber probably share.

One way of working collaboratively towards practical outcomes would be to cut through the ideology of language and focus on some real and practical

outcomes. The challenge for this Parliament and those in other democracies is how to navigate through that ideological difference that each of us brings with us and focus on outcomes to make sure that we deliver better outcomes for the people who have elected us to represent them.

But before doing so it would be remiss of me, President, being a co-representative of the same region, not to pass on my congratulations to you, on behalf of our region, on your elevation to this very high office. I am sure that you will do a great job. You certainly have the faith and confidence of members on this side of the house. We are confident that your previous experience as a shop steward will in actual fact be a great asset to representing the interests of opposition members, and we look forward to benefiting from some of those skills that you bring with you.

I would also like to congratulate all members of this chamber on their election to the 56th Parliament. It is an historic occasion. If we achieve nothing else, our names will certainly go down in history. But of course this occasion is more than about names in a history book: it is about representing real people, real constituencies and of course having a large job in these very large new regions.

I am a mindful of sharing the mantle of representing the South Eastern Metropolitan Region with four others: you, President; Mr Jennings; Mr Somyurek; and a party colleague, Mr Rich-Phillips. Some of the vagaries of this new upper house and the outcomes that it has delivered are expected. They have been a result of a fairly protracted process, and despite the commentary about whether it is fair or democratic, the results have been delivered — it is a verdict.

We may not like what the verdict delivers, but it certainly beats any other modern system of government that I know about. The traditions of democracy mean that we accept the verdicts, and unlike more volatile regimes that struggle and that we read about on virtually a daily basis, we do not use force or coercion to overturn democratic elections.

The history of this Parliament and other Australian parliaments is that they have been formed without blood being spilt, unlike in other democracies. It is a history of which I believe we must be immensely proud. It is not lost on someone like me who was born under a communist regime in the former Yugoslavia. I take the democratic traditions of our state and nation very seriously. Bosnia and Herzegovina, where I was born half a century ago, has had a troubled and bloody path as a fledgling democracy. It is a path which has

devastated many lives following the fall of communism and during communism.

Communism throughout much of Eastern Europe and undoubtedly other authoritarian regimes historically have inspired many to seek greater freedoms and other forms of democratic government as an expression of their own and the community's will, like my parents did when they immigrated to Australia in 1967 and arrived in Melbourne — actually at Port Melbourne — on the Italian ship *Galileo*. This, as well as my early life in Australia, fuelled my desire to be an active participant in this democratic process to ensure that what has been a beacon of hope to many immigrants continues to offer the opportunity and equality unmatched by other nations.

This desire or dream was realised when I was fortunate enough to be elected in 1992 and have the immense honour of representing the people of Bentleigh for a decade. My re-election to this place would have my late father, Drago Dosen — who had one of those adorable Slavic names which actually means 'Beau' in English — stirring with pride in his resting place or perhaps chuckling with pleasure from a better place. I regret his premature passing a decade ago, which means that I am not able to share today my sense of accomplishment with him. He would be very proud of his daughter and any of his progeny, in particular given that he was always concerned I would somehow be seduced by the left when I entered university and then went on to become a teacher.

Mr Finn — I don't think that's going to happen!

Mrs PEULICH — No, I did not fail him, but it was always a concern.

My mother, Nena, is a great survivor. She survived a children's concentration camp and the indignity of illiteracy as a result of her education being interrupted by the Second World War. She was subsequently able to overcome this in her adult life. In their company of great love, she and my father crossed half the world to an unknown place without money, language and with two children — my brother and I — in tow, with four suitcases, a couple of soup ladles and a load of hopes and aspirations.

I like to think that I have taken my parents' best attributes: my mother's work ethic, loyalty to family and preparedness to make many sacrifices to achieve a dream; and my dad's commitment to integrity, honesty and following through with the confidence of one's own convictions, which he demonstrated in his life. My parents both sacrificed a lot to achieve a dream and

provided my brother and I with what the Second World War, including communism, religious conflict and the life of relative poverty, had denied them.

Both of my parents remain very powerful role models to my brother and me, as well to the grandchildren. My 22-year-old son, Paul, and my brother's children, 23-year-old Sarah and 25-year-old Andrew, are all dinky-di Aussies.

My mother would not have missed my taking the oath of office yesterday for anything in the world. Her photo appears in the *Age* today. She is sitting next to my great longtime mentor and supporter, Mrs Thelma Mansfield. The two look very regal and are symbolically seated above the visual line of the Premier. They are both satisfied that their plan for my re-election somehow succeeded despite the odds.

My parents' ambitions and hopes for their children are held by other families and are commonplace in many immigrant families who live in the South Eastern Metropolitan Region to which I and others have been elected. The tasks involved in meeting the needs of families that have sole parents — like Thelma Mansfield, who is a mother of four adult daughters, who continues to work night shift at the age of 74 and who helps with Meals on Wheels by delivering food to 'older' members of our community — are incredible examples of the sacrifices made by those sole parents, many of whom of course carry a double burden. Thelma is the bedrock of a large and loyal family comprised of four independently minded daughters, lots of grandchildren and of course her beloved Liberal Party.

The challenge of being a regional representative of an area that covers the electorates of 11 lower house seats is significant. The South Eastern Metropolitan Region spans 545 square kilometres and covers the lower house electorates of Carrum, Clayton, Cranbourne, Dandenong, Frankston, Lyndhurst, Mordialloc, Mount Waverley, Mulgrave, Narre Warren North and Narre Warren South.

Over the preceding year it has been a great pleasure to get to know the people who live in those electorates. The South Eastern Metropolitan Region stretches from Berwick, covers the growth corridor and extends to the beaches of Frankston, Carrum and Mordialloc. Mordialloc is where you, President, have your office. There is some very beautiful coastline in the region. The region also encompasses large concentrations of business in Braeside, Dandenong and Hallam, which provide employment to many people, including those

who came to Australia, as my family did, to find greater personal and economic security.

As one of 10 Liberal women in the 56th Parliament, as a former child-care campaigner who campaigned for child-care fee relief as well as tax deductibility in the 1980s, as a mother, as an educator — in fact a graduate of Albert Park High School, which subsequently became Hobsons Bay Secondary College and which the government is now progressing to close — and as a legislator with a passion for finding long-lasting, real and practical solutions so that the needs of individuals and their families and our communities are advanced, I understand the challenges of juggling family life and work that so many families continue to face today, and I imagine it will continue to be thus.

My own parents faced similar challenges. As a child I spent my early years being raised by my grandparents on their farm, an idyllic setting for a child, a place with horses, farm animals, brooks and wells, the adventure of bush walks and tree climbing. Yes, we ate red meat occasionally and definitely no alfalfa. This arrangement was driven by economic necessity as my parents found employment in the big smoke, literally a town built around heavy mining industry and permanently covered with the blanket of soot and grime.

Initially my parents lived in a bed-sitter, storing their coal for the winter under their bed. Later, with greater success — and my father was a double degree graduate — he and mum were able to secure a small apartment, which my brother and I eventually shared with them. Though my parents had to do what they had to do, there was never any doubt about their love of or devotion to us, and this continued all their lives.

When my parents emigrated to Australia my mother worked two jobs and dad took a labouring job in a tyre manufacturing plant in Port Melbourne, where eventually his health did suffer. My brother and I took up part-time jobs. Mine was selling ice-cream at the Kerferd Road pier in Albert Park. I was paid \$1 an hour. I was the luckiest person alive because at the end of the working day I could actually buy myself a dress that previously I could not have afforded, or help my parents pay for a dental bill, books or some sort of educational expenses.

My brother of course took up a newspaper round — the good old Aussie tradition. This sort of economic prosperity, previously unknown to us, was exciting, and we calculated very quickly that we, as a family, could purchase our first home within three years — and we did, in Hawthorn. Of course not too many years later

we bought a family business, and we all worked even harder to realise a dream of a better life.

To my family, as it does to my husband, Savo, who still runs our small engineering business, this work was a choice we were prepared to make and we welcome that. It is not unusual for us, or for others involved in small business, to work seven days a week. Often immigrant families make that choice to work hard and to take advantage of opportunities to build and rebuild their lives, to buy homes and to educate their children.

Low taxation, flexible work practices, a flexible labour force, affordable child-care or family support and reward for the effort and initiative are absolutely vital to a prosperous society. Language about class warfare in industrial relations will do nothing to provide for a sustainable future, will do nothing to ensure that jobs do not go offshore, and will do nothing to diminish the prospects of our unskilled workers becoming a permanent underclass of unemployed in our community. There is nothing more alienating, nothing more impoverishing and nothing more debilitating to individuals and their families than unemployment.

Housing affordability, education and training, necessary infrastructure, good services and the ability to support the genuinely sick and disadvantaged are the no-frills responsibilities of any good government. I look forward to working with all members to advance the interests of the people of the South Eastern Metropolitan Region as well as all Victorians.

The issue of work and industrial relations will no doubt be on our agenda many times, as signalled by the Governor's address as well as the inaugural speeches of a number of government members and because, we assume, the Bracks Labor government intends to use the opportunities of this chamber in the lead-up to the federal election. This is a debate that I believe this side of the house should not be afraid of. For our state and our nation this is a debate that we must have not only in this chamber but also in suburban homes, in workplaces and in the community.

History shows that many big debates and decisions in the Victorian Parliament are not individual ones but a product of collective decision making. But we as members of Parliament after serving in this place for some time can always point to some individual projects, initiatives or ideas or policies where we have left our mark on steering the debate, the legislation and regulation to hopefully make a positive contribution to people's lives. After 10 years of service in the other place — and I am reflecting on what I have achieved over that time — I point to several examples, some

smaller than others, but all with the capacity to make a difference. For my part my role in the debate, which stopped the liberalisation of drug laws, including legalisation of marijuana for supposedly personal recreational use, was, I think, one of the most important positions I have taken and which I now believe is increasingly vindicated by evidence pointing to the destructive effects of marijuana use on the developing brains of the young. I am also proud of the campaign against the proposals to establish heroin injecting rooms. A healthy community is not one that succumbs to destructive addictions, be it they drugs or compulsive gambling.

I would also like to place on record my disappointment in the lack of significant advancement in the government's attempt to break the drug-use culture among our young people, and clubbers in particular. The provision of stronger rehabilitation programs for drug users and ongoing support for young people whose lives have been damaged by drug use are challenges, with many unlikely to hold productive jobs. I would like to see this government and this Parliament address this issue because the cost in human life, the tragedy as well as the economic cost, makes this an absolutely non-negotiable imperative.

The rights of adopted children to have access to some basic information about their biological parents when they turn 18 years of age and where contact is reciprocated is a reform that I pursued knowing how critical this knowledge is to the identities and rights of those who have been adopted.

The physical resources maintenance system established under the former Kennett government, which has now seemingly been relegated to relative disuse by the current government, was a mechanism I conceived to eliminate the practice of previous governments using school maintenance for party-political patronage. I believe school communities deserve better. I am still of the view that schools and school communities deserve to have a system which is fair, open and accountable, and a system which provides some certainty about schedules and time frames around which schools can better plan their facilities and capital needs.

The work I undertook as a member of the all-party Family and Community Development Committee over a decade, along with other parliamentary colleagues, was also time well spent, with several reports making a significant contribution in developing blueprints for the future development of services. I point to the *Planning for Positive Ageing*, report which was extremely well received at the time and which is still used as the basis for the development of programs, services and policies

today. The reason was that it focused on practical outcomes supported by both sides of the house.

The review undertaken of family and children's services in the first term of the Kennett government recommended a number of initiatives which surprisingly have been adopted by this government, including one announced in the Governor's address — the clustering of family services and centres for the convenience of parents and families. I am delighted the government is finally moving along this track, although the wheels of democracy appear to be moving very slowly in Victoria.

Over the last seven years we have seen some of the problems caused by excessive consultation, excessive collaboration and excessive promotion, which is all fine except that many of the problems have become acute and remain unresolved. Clearly many challenges need to be addressed by the government and this Parliament with a greater degree of urgency — for example, the way forward in avoiding and minimising the devastation of bushfires, which have taken lives and homes and burnt over 800 000 hectares in our state. I place on record my thanks of course to all of these volunteers and firefighters who have been risking lives to protect others.

The drought, with record low levels of water in our reservoirs and metropolitan Melbourne soon to enter stage 3 water restrictions — and according to some industry sources perhaps even stage 4 is not too far down the track — is the product of five years of record low rainfall during a time when \$1.6 billion has been taken out of the water authorities by this government, with the problem of water having been largely ignored and neglected. The impact of the drought on economic growth, on assets, gardens and trees — many mature trees costing \$50 000 each to plant — and the destruction of our recreational reserves, cancellation of various types of sporting pursuits, sporting competitions, loss of jobs, the inability to secure enough feed for stock, leading farmers to sell even their breeders, has exposed clearly what is the government's Achilles heel.

The challenge of providing for an ageing society, of providing for an increase in population and of providing access to key services, infrastructure and affordable housing are all issues that require longer-term planning and careful use of funds, especially during our prosperous times to ensure that we are providing adequately for our various communities.

This is certainly not the case in the growth corridor in the South Eastern Metropolitan Region, where we still need the Cranbourne rail extension built, we still need the Lynbrook station advanced, we need country roads upgraded to cope with city volumes of traffic and of course further south we need the Dingley bypass completed as a way of getting rid of the blanket of traffic congestion choking up the south-eastern suburbs because the government has failed to connect arterial flows to better manage increasing traffic.

The resources for better enforcement of law and order are also stretched, not to mention access to our hospitals — Monash Medical Centre and Casey and Frankston hospitals.

The things that make up the bedrock of our society — our families and our communities, including our social sporting and business communities — need to be supported. This is community building, to which Ms Tierney referred earlier in her inaugural speech, but we need to focus on practical solutions and cut through the ideological divides, especially those created by language. Community building requires a number of things. We need to provide the services, the physical infrastructure, and relief from punishing financial pressures in a planned, prudent and transparent manner. I thought the slogan 'When it matters' that the Bracks Labor government took to the election actually highlighted the government's weaknesses. The government seems to let things slide until some arm-twisting occurs, until there is community outrage and until its hand is forced. The reality is that it ought to matter all the time.

In summary, an effective state government has four roles or functions. The first role is to provide much-needed development of social capital: services, stronger families, well-organised community organisations, better community safety, access to hospital services when required — not two or three years later — a stronger mental health system and a strong education system. I am a former teacher — clearly there are a few of us in this chamber — and I taught for 14 years in the state system and, as I said, I am also a product of the state system. I firmly believe that the state education system must lift its offerings to our community and to our students. It must challenge, extend and take our students out of the realms of populist culture that often reinforces mediocrity and a sense of hopelessness. Many immigrant families rip their kids out of state schools, including elite ones such as McKinnon Secondary College, because they are so disappointed with the content of the curriculum. Our families and community need to have strong

expectations that children will receive a quality public education.

Secondly, an effective government needs to deliver the necessary physical capital. This includes infrastructure projects, railway lines, stations for new suburbs, schools where they are needed — such as Timbarra in Berwick — upgraded hospitals, roads which connect arterial flows and of course our water infrastructure.

My concern is that if governments cannot build the infrastructure in good times, when can they be built? Clearly our ability to build social capital, invest in the futures of our children and families and communities also depends on being able to access and use the required physical capital — well-connected roads, effective public transport, schools, and a secure water supply, to name just a few.

In a complex society we cannot build social capital without physical capital. Both are necessary for the health and wellbeing of our communities and are a necessary investment in people's lives and their futures.

The problem of major project overruns and the lack of planning of new projects are key challenges for the government. The waste of millions of taxpayer dollars is tragic for Victorians. The state budget is now \$33 billion and was \$19 billion in 1999. In view of this bigger budget we should have been able to deliver many of these projects and planned future projects. The annual indexation of over 5000 taxes and charges allows a lack of financial discipline, as of course does the largesse of the goods and services tax receipts from the federal government.

As I said, the government has four roles. The last one I would like to refer to is the role of being a transparent and honest government, and of course strengthening our democratic institutions. The government would have us believe that indeed it is doing so. If this were the case, there would not be the fudging of performance indicators across a range of portfolios, the butchering of the freedom-of-information system and the tabling of parliamentary reports when Parliament is not sitting, despite the concession of being able to make a comment in the chamber at a subsequent time.

The four clear roles for government are the building of social and physical capital with the prudent use of taxpayer funds in an open, transparent and fair way. This is what is required for building community capacity.

It is yet to be seen whether this chamber is able to effectively subject the government to much-needed scrutiny, not only for its own sake but for the sake of

Victoria. The people of the South Eastern Metropolitan Region look to governments and parliaments for leadership and strength of conviction, especially during difficult times. The community does need to be consulted, and it must trust that the actions and the priorities of the government are focused on all of the things that matter all the time, not just at election time. There should be no smoko times for governments. Effective government matters all the time, and of course I look forward to making sure that the promises outlined in the Governor's speech are delivered to Victoria and the South Eastern Metropolitan Region.

In closing, I commit to working with all of those who have been elected to this office to vigorously represent the interests of the region as well as the state to plan and prepare and do what is humanly possible to secure the future of those who have placed their faith in us by electing us to office.

In 1992 in another place I outlined in my inaugural speech my inspirations for joining the Liberal Party. I will not cover that; much of it is evident from my life story. However, I would like to refer to a book by neo-conservative Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*. In it he expressed the view that liberalism is by far the best protection from undemocratic forces and arrogant government. Essentially I share this view, but this is tempered by caution and a wariness of those who present themselves as supporters of greater liberties, but frequently do so at the expense of someone else's liberty, or do so by ripping down or undermining the great democratic institutions of our society.

I would like to thank all of those people with whom I must share this particular accomplishment. First and foremost I thank my family — my mother, Nena and my husband, Savo. I also thank my wonderful supporters and campaigners and my son, Paul. This is the first election that he has not been able to take part in — he is a university student in New York. We did keep in touch via MSN and Skype, and he proved to be an enormous personal and emotional support.

I thank my many supporters over many years — party members — and of course all of those who continued to work tirelessly for the party by turning up at pre-poll voting and letterboxing, the usual campaigning and so forth. I would also like to thank those who supported me in my role on the administrative committee and as vice-president for two years.

In particular I would like to thank the following people for their encouragement of me over many years: Thelma Mansfield, Patti and Ben Sanders, John and

Kathy Foley, Peter and Katrina Grove, Peter Norman, Geoff Leigh and the Honourable Geoff Connard. I thank all the region's hardworking lower house Liberal candidates, their families and their campaign teams who worked tirelessly and sacrificed much over many months. These include Michael Shepherdson in Narre Warren South, Stephen Hartney in Mordialloc, Ashton Ashokkumar in Mulgrave, Gary Anderton in Lyndhurst, Jeff Shelly in Carrum, Rochelle McArthur in Frankston, Cr Mick Morland in Narre Warren North, Luke Martin in Cranbourne, Michael Gidley in Mount Waverley, Michael Carty in Clayton, and Cameron Nicholls in Dandenong.

My election, along with Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips, as a Liberal Party representative on a full upper house ticket presented to electors, which included Ken Ong and Susanne La Fontaine, is the product of the work of many people. I would like to share my win with all of those people whom I have mentioned and many I have not.

I would also like to pay tribute to the service provided by the immediate outgoing Liberal members of the Legislative Council in the area, including the Honourable Andrew Brideson and the Honourable Chris Strong.

Lastly I wish to thank the electors of the South Eastern Metropolitan Region. I will work hard to repay the faith that has been placed in me. Not to be outdone by my colleague Mr Matthew Guy, I would like to say the following: ziveli i nazdravlje! In English it is: wishing you long life and good health!

Mr EIDEH (Western Metropolitan) — Thank you, President, for the opportunity to speak on behalf of the people of the Western Metropolitan Region. I also take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election as President of this house. I am honoured to be standing here today to make my first speech in Parliament. It is also a great privilege to be the first Syrian-Arab-Australian to be elected to the Victorian Parliament.

Before I proceed I would like to pay tribute to the heroic men and women who are fighting the bushfires sweeping across Victoria. Their courage and dedication in the face of danger are inspirational.

President, I wish to thank the people of Western Metropolitan Region for electing me and entrusting me to represent them in the Legislative Council. I will strive to ensure that all their concerns and needs are addressed. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Premier on winning an historic third

term in office, which has been a great milestone not only for the Labor Party but for all Victorians.

My deepest thanks I reserve for my loving parents, my brothers, my sisters and my dear wife, Souad, as they are definitely an integral part of my success. Without their loving support and encouragement I would not be standing here today. I would also like to thank my campaign committee for the great work they did and the assistance they provided me. I sincerely thank them for all their efforts.

I was born in Tripoli, Lebanon, to Syrian parents who follow the Alawite Islamic faith. As much as I am proud of my heritage and faith, I am equally proud to live in a country where freedom of speech and religious tolerance are so entrenched in our Australian democracy. I am proud to be Australian. I migrated to Australia from Lebanon in 1970 at the age of 15, together with my father and sister, in search of better opportunities. The trip to Australia was not easy, and unfortunately, due to circumstances beyond our control, the rest of the family had to stay behind. Like the vast majority of migrants who come to this country, we were determined to make a better life for ourselves, and I had to work very hard to achieve this dream.

I can assure you that in the beginning nothing was easy. Our home was a run-down Victorian house in Clifton Hill which we shared with another family. During my teenage years I was given adult responsibilities and worked a variety of jobs to support my family back home. I worked as a factory worker, tram driver, tram conductor, truck driver and mail officer at Australia Post and then in my own mixed business. It took eight long years until I was reunited with all my brothers and sisters in Australia.

In 1987 I decided to start my own business, utilising the experience I had gained during my employment with various transport companies. With the help of my brothers I started out by purchasing a small business called Blue Star Transport. It was a very challenging period as we did not have local experience, language proficiency or formal qualifications. Blue Star Transport started with one delivery van, a 3-tonne truck and an 8-tonne truck. The delivery van still stands in a Melbourne warehouse as a reminder of our humble beginnings.

The only real marketing strategy was the implementation of four core values — reliability, loyalty, integrity and trust. Over the years our business grew rapidly, and today Blue Star has national distribution centres in all major capital cities. Blue Star has also won a number of awards including, in 2003,

the Centenary Medal for service to transport and the local community. I have also proudly employed a large number of people from diverse backgrounds, many of whom reside in the Western Metropolitan Region. With this experience I understand the needs and frustrations of Victorians who are self-employed and running their own businesses.

During my time as managing director of Blue Star I earned the reputation of being a key community leader. I held honorary positions in many community organisations. I have always been a strong advocate for improving relations between Australia and the Middle East, both locally and overseas. I was part of the delegation which accompanied former New South Wales Premier Bob Carr on his trade mission to Beirut in 1997. I have regularly met with Victorian MPs who have large, Arabic-speaking populations within their electorates and helped develop a greater awareness of a range of issues including multicultural affairs, tourism, education and transport.

When I was approached to consider a parliamentary career I welcomed the honour because I realised it is a great opportunity to pay Australia back for being so generous to me and my family by giving something back to the local community. As I stand here today it is evident that indeed Australia is the land of opportunity and that no matter where you come from or what you believe, in Australia you can achieve your dreams. I sincerely hope my election will encourage more people from migrant backgrounds to become future leaders, to have a say in their government and become active in their local communities.

Multiculturalism is about the right of all Australians to express and share their cultural heritage, the right to equality of treatment and opportunity and removal of discriminatory barriers. This is one of Australia's proudest achievements. Australia has benefited much from what the migrant population has brought to our shores, including the long history of contribution by His Excellency the Governor of Victoria, which is just one example of the many positives that multiculturalism has brought to Australia.

I am proud to be part of the Bracks Labor government which is committed to strengthening multiculturalism in Victoria and providing increased support for Victoria's culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

I am also proud to mention that in 2005 I was honoured to receive an award for excellence in multicultural affairs from the Premier. I was also appointed Harmony Day ambassador in the same year. Unfortunately not

everyone celebrates this great accomplishment, and the future of multiculturalism is at risk. Recently the federal government announced the introduction of a new citizenship test for migrants. Prospective citizens will soon be tested on their English language comprehension and understanding of Australian history and culture. The new test is definitely a setback for multiculturalism in Australia.

That new policy is discriminatory because it seeks to create two different classes of people. Even members of the conservative parties have criticised the test by saying it will create unreasonable barriers that undermine the successful settlement of migrants. I truly believe that the capacity to speak English is no measure of a person's worth as a citizen.

I have learnt over the years that only one political party in Australia has, as its core belief, the principle of social justice. Only one party has delivered the values that we all regard as truly Australian — equality, fairness and justice. That party is the Australian Labor Party. After all, it has always been the Australian Labor Party that has championed consumer rights, introduced reforms in health services, promoted equal opportunity, fought against racial discrimination and introduced laws for many other social reforms.

It is the Australian Labor Party, in cooperation with the Australian Council of Trade Unions, that is fighting the assault on Australian workers by the workplace relations laws of the federal government. After being an employee for most of my life, I know the importance of having access to adequate working conditions and rights. I have always acknowledged the importance of maintaining a strong relationship between employers and employees.

The Western Metropolitan Region is a vast and diverse community; it covers 11 lower house seats. The true wealth of the Western Metropolitan Region is its people and the rich diversity of cultures, heritage and all the many benefits they have brought to our state over many decades. My electorate has had a long, proud history, and this is evident in many of its districts — for example, the Williamstown lighthouse, built by convict labour in 1855; the trestle bridge located in Keilor, which stands higher above water than the Sydney Harbour Bridge; the famous Werribee Park mansion; the Woodlands Historic Park in Somerton and much more.

The suburb of Sunshine was also once home to Massey Ferguson, which produced harvesters that revolutionised the agricultural industry in Australia and around the world. The region has a number of parks,

creeks, lakes and other recreational areas that must be preserved for future generations. You can also find well-known tourist attractions, such as the famous Scienceworks museum and internationally renowned Werribee Zoo. It also is home to one of Australia's most innovative universities, Victoria University, and one of the world's finest airports, Melbourne International Airport.

The Western Metropolitan Region is celebrated for its sporting achievements. It is famous for a variety of sports, including Australian Rules Football, soccer, hockey, basketball and cricket. It is home to many sporting clubs, including the Essendon Football Club and the Western Bulldogs. Many notable sports stars, some internationally recognised, also live in the region.

Today you will find some of Australia's largest companies, such as Toyota, Mobil and Orica, operating in the Western Metropolitan Region. These are just a few of the companies that have provided significant employment over the years. These essential industries are responsible for refining the petroleum products that we use every day, for recycling our waste, producing essential chemicals and many more other essential items for everyday living. Overall these plants serve not just the needs of Victorians but also the rest of Australia.

Before the Premier took office in 1999, the Western Metropolitan Region was largely neglected by the previous government. Schools, hospitals and vital community services all felt the impact of the inaction of the previous governments. Today Melbourne's west is a much better place to live, work and raise a family, thanks to the courageous leadership of Steve Bracks and the Australian Labor Party. It is a much better place indeed.

I am proud to say that the commitment of the Bracks government to govern for all Victorians has meant that the benefits of sound financial and economic management are very much evident across Melbourne's west. I am also proud of the Bracks government's record of investment in Melbourne's west, especially its investment in schools, hospitals, transport systems and other vital community needs. But as we well know, there is a lot more to be done.

I look forward to contributing towards an exciting policy agenda that will build an even stronger future for the region. My vision for the Western Metropolitan Region is a community that is both cohesive and diverse, where all people have the opportunity to access a good education, meaningful employment, decent health and transport services, safety and security, and

the best environment to develop personal, family and community harmony. I am proud to be a member of the Bracks Labor government, which is committed to such a vision for the whole of Victoria and has already done so much to turn this vision into a reality.

Mrs KRONBERG (Eastern Metropolitan) — Thank you, President, for inviting me to speak. In doing so I wish to congratulate you on your appointment as the Presiding Officer of this chamber. May your term be truly fulfilling.

In joining the ranks of my colleagues, the current members of this Parliament, I wish to acknowledge our debt and the debt of all Victorians to the work of our esteemed predecessors in this place. I am both humbled and honoured by the privilege the people of the Eastern Metropolitan Region have conferred on me. I am delighted to join my two colleagues from the Eastern Metropolitan Region, the Deputy President, Bruce Atkinson, and the shadow minister for manufacturing and exports and scrutiny of government, Richard Dalla-Riva. Guided by my strong conviction, I commit to serve the people of the Eastern Metropolitan Region and in doing so, all Victorians.

While the region boasts a diverse industrial base, much of Melbourne's green wedge is within the boundaries of the region. It is also Melbourne's aspirational heartland. As their member in this place I pledge to underpin the needs of the people and champion their aspirations and the aspirations of the communities of today and tomorrow.

It is my intention to first and foremost be present among my fellow Victorians and to listen to them well. I have lived in the Eastern Metropolitan Region all of my adult life. I built my first home in East Doncaster in 1971 and my present home in 1980.

We Victorians are united across the generations by grand and enduring ideals. The blood of Victoria's pioneers runs in my veins. Over four generations they contributed to nation building. I dared to dream their dream when I grew upon their strength and self-reliance to establish an enterprise in Australia's fledgling computer industry.

As I move from private to public life, each phase of my life has prepared me for the responsibilities that lie ahead and influenced what I have become. Like many women, my life has been segmented, dictated in part by biology. The advantage of this is that I have been able to explore a number of vastly different paths. The most important part of my life was the time I spent caring for my two boys. My sons, Andrew and Stephen, have

grown to be strong, healthy, caring young professionals — proof positive of the importance of solid family values and a substantial investment in education.

My rock in this life is my husband, Mike Kronberg. I am truly blessed with a happy and harmonious marriage to a soul mate and best friend. My guiding star is my late mother, Eileen Alice Burgess nee Lindsay, who provided me with the genetic makeup, inspirational, spiritual and material bounty that allows me to stand before you today in this place. You may not hear the keening in my heart for her, but I mourn the fact that this remarkable woman, a woman ahead of her time, is not here to see me realise my dream.

My proud father, Roy Burgess, joined the Royal Australian Air Force in 1939. He saw active service in Dutch East New Guinea. He was one of the many Australians who fought off the Japanese invasion at Kirawina, Numfoor and Morotai. One of my most moving experiences in recent times was at the Mitcham RSL dawn service, just this year. A crowd of young shy boys sidled up to my 90-year-old father and said, 'Thank you'. It was his service, and the service and sacrifice of brave Australian servicemen and servicewomen, that ensured us the freedom to be part of the democratic process under way at this very moment. My prayers go out to our very brave servicemen and servicewomen fighting against terror and in other theatres.

I regret that I did not assiduously record each song, poem and the words of wisdom showered on me by my late grandmother, Vera Lindsay. The strength of my patriotism stems from her passion for this beautiful city, Melbourne, and her pride in our land, Australia. My nascent interest in politics stemmed from robust fireside chats with my grandfather, Andrew Lindsay. Legends in my family abound with the tales of building enterprises and surviving the extraordinary harsh conditions of the bush pioneer. Here in Melbourne my great-great-grandfather's business supplied the slate for the dome of Melbourne's Exhibition Building. In Gippsland's Sale cemetery lies the grave of my great-great-grandfather, John Brown. So early was his contribution to the district of Sale that upon his death in 1850 his grave had to be marked by a hand-adzed red gum headstone. It is historically classified.

My other forefathers displayed solitary toughness in a frontier environment. Before World War I my paternal grandfather, Alfred Burgess, and his brother, Walter, constructed the Russell Creek Road at Hill End in Gippsland with their bare hands. Their wrestle with nature continued through the Great Depression by

operating a goldmine at Ensay. While here in Melbourne Andrew Lindsay operated a car park during the Great Depression. This gave him the means to care not only for his family but also for neighbouring families. While never really wealthy, my family found its own form of charity. Others in my family used to lead cattle to the high mountain pastures year after year.

President, I make a commitment today to vigorously defend Victoria's cultural heritage and to arrest its steady erosion. In many ways I feel I have come full circle and returned home. Prior to establishing its present campus in Eltham, my last school, the Catholic Ladies College, actually neighboured this Parliament in Cathedral Place.

Most of my young life was spent building my first business. With three others I was instrumental in establishing one of Australia's first computer service bureaus. This era did much to form my character and fulsome commitment to the politics of free enterprise. We, too, were true pioneers, going where others had not, and facing the hardship of under-capitalisation and surviving the Whitlam era while dipping into our basket of dreams. We eventually built a brand and a reputation for quality. We did this by respecting our staff, paying them well, working for common goals, providing flexibility and standing by them during their highs and lows.

President, I come to this place equipped with an undying passion for private enterprise. I will champion those who risk both capital and their nerve to make something out of nothing, to create Victorian jobs and to contribute to nation building.

My own skills have been honed in tough competitive environments. As a young woman I joined a generation of women who were still uncertain as to whether they could be good wives or mothers while striving to achieve success in the workplace and an identity of their own. In my formative professional years I had to surmount extra hurdles of expertise and commitment in order to be judged the equivalent of male colleagues. As a result I believe I contributed to the legacy of equality of opportunity upon which young aspirational women so easily and readily draw upon today.

I joined the Liberal Party in 1983 as the Fraser government was defeated. My 23-year record in the Liberal Party is a proud one; my commitment has been strong and resilient. During this time I have made many, many friends. My sincerest thanks go to Robert Johnston, my electorate chairman and his fine committee, the Central Council of Women's Sections, the members of policy assembly, the administrative

committee, all staff at 104 Exhibition Street, the campaign teams, the members of the Donburn branch now lead by Hal Grix, my dear friend Dr Sandra Mercer-Moore and all the excellent members of the branches of the Eastern Metropolitan Region and the wider party for their support and confidence in me. I am proud to be a standard bearer for the Liberal cause. I am in this place today because they believed in me. What an honour!

The Liberal Party rose again and assumed the mantle of responsible government in this state, and thankfully still wears that mantle federally. I plan to be part of the next Liberal government, a Baillieu government in Victoria, and I pledge to work with every fibre of my being to bring that about.

President, these hands have stacked bricks, dug gardens, skimmed across piano and computer keys, cramped over exam papers, gestured in performances, signed contracts, expressed images and passion, written books and poetry, prepared 40 Christmases, wiped bottoms and tears, dressed wounds, caressed cheeks and patted shoulders, and these are the hands that will reach out to the community and make direct contact with the forgotten people. In his radio broadcast of 30 October 1942, Robert Menzies defined the forgotten people as those 'being ground by the upper and nether millstones of the false class war'. We all know that this class war is still being waged in this state, as are the politics of envy.

As the member for Eastern Metropolitan Region, it will be my task to reach out and listen to the backbone of this country. As a Liberal, I am both a beneficiary and an heir to a great and rich tradition. As a party we Liberals intend to bestow upon the people proper security and the conditions to optimise skills and knowledge acquisition, individuality and freedom of expression.

Our philosophy was honed in the crucible of post-World War II travails. It was built on a hope for a bright new future and tenacity for social justice, security, national power and national progress.

Our nation's success to date was achieved through the full development of the individual citizen. The dull, deadening yoke of socialism has no place in Victoria's future. The steady erosion of confidence brought about by the redistribution of wealth by stealth has no place either. Resting at the core of what I believe in is the supremacy of the individual in society — freedom of choice, equality of opportunity and a commitment to care for the disadvantaged.

My deep respect for the dignity of people springs from my faith in a loving God. Sacred to me are the Judaeo-Christian values. These values made Australia strong and stable. Some might say we live in a contaminated moral atmosphere, so solid family values must transcend current trends. These are the cornerstone of our society and must not be vanquished. I firmly believe in an excellence of attitude and accomplishments, and profit earned with honour.

As I strive to make a positive difference in Victoria I plan to encourage people to recognise that their body is a gift and that taking care of it is important. Baby boomers are in abundance. Many will be expected to pull their weight in the economy for longer than previous generations. It is my fervent hope that as a member of this collective, the largest demographic bulge in history, an exemplary approach to life, work and health eventually inspires others to look after themselves better than our current trends indicate.

Unfortunately ageism, like other 'isms', still finds expression in our society. Sometimes the victims of ageism make it a reality by their own attitude. As an economy reeling under the crisis of the skills shortage we already rue the day when we shepherded capable men and women into early retirement. My message to the people of Victoria is not to allow age to get in your way. Do not let chronological age define your identity or govern what you can or cannot do.

The coat of arms for the State of Victoria is emblazoned with the words 'Peace and prosperity'. Yet I know first-hand that many Victorians doubt the promise of prosperity. My electors, the people of Melbourne's east, certainly doubt that promise. Furthermore they bear the ignominy of belonging to the so-called outer east. Let us consider what they are on the 'outer' of: they are certainly on the outer as far as public transport is concerned. Left out of the equation for a regional solution, they desperately need a 21st century rapid transit system into the 'inner'. Transport options put forward by the government are disappointingly based on mid-20th century systems. Let us put rapid transit into the equation when considering new transport solutions.

Simultaneously whilst eradicating this notion of being on the outer of Melbourne, we must raise the standards and foster the dreams of those who choose to live amidst the verdant splendour of this garden state. Can Melbourne become a true economic node? Richard Florida, in his work of 2005, *The Flight of the Creative Class*, described cities such as New York, London, Tokyo and Paris as first-tier cities, based on the strategic function and role they play in the global

economy. They are so ranked because they have benefited from the drawing power of a creative class. Sydney is a second-tier city.

Melbourne is a third-tier city, along with 34 other cities such as Boston, Prague, Istanbul, Kuala Lumpur and Buenos Aires. The question for Melbourne, with the flight of our creative class to the first-tier cities and no long-term strategy for enlarging and retaining our home-based creative class, is: how far will we slip in the next decade?

If Melbourne is to prosper we should plan to become a global talent magnet. We have all of the natural attributes — attractive waterfronts, beautiful countryside, a great outdoor lifestyle, we are relatively safe and no war has ever been fought here. But we know our competitors are drawing upon our talent, and we seem powerless to arrest the outward flow.

Victoria must make a commitment to turn itself into a creative hotbed of ideas and talent. Melbourne's inner urban core is described as fashionable, innovative, diverse and prosperous. This has been attributed in part to the number of creative occupations to be had here.

Sixteen municipalities were characterised by the National Institute of Economics and Industry Research in its 2004 report *Melbourne Creativity* for the Innovation Economy Advisory Board, as making up Melbourne's outer regions. Six of these municipalities — namely, the cities of Casey, Knox, Manningham, Monash and the shires of Nillumbik and Yarra Ranges — are in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. My concern, therefore, is that these outer regions will continue to be starved of the resources, opportunities for interaction and discourse and access to the centres of inspiration and innovation which would allow them to join or augment the creative class.

Coming from a background in vocational education I plan to advocate for greater emphasis on and better funding regimes for experiential learning, study abroad programs, and music laboratories. We can no longer be myopic when developing public policy from the economic perspective and focus simply on science and engineering.

Education strategies must ensure an abundance of vehicles for enhancing and mobilising the creative capacities of all Victorian children.

We must develop models of education around real practice so children will be taught not just to think but to do. This would mean a change to the now totally inappropriate and outmoded emphasis where arts,

music and physical education classes are always the first to be sacrificed during a funding crisis.

Fundamental to my interest in public policy is my desire to convince others to think proactively, seek preventive measures, fund early intervention and avoid being problem centred. The Victorian government needs to create a paradigm shift to become mission directed — in other words, to be masters of our own destiny and not the victims of it. Many of the problems facing Victoria today could have been avoided, or at least ameliorated, with forward thinking. As path makers we need selfless and forward thinking based on what we can offer future generations and not wallowing in the imperatives borne of electoral cycles.

The government has not yet invested in infrastructure or even developed the mindset to solve our long-term water storage and conservation problems. In Victoria we have been staggeringly slow to respond to the challenges and opportunities associated with climate change. The question one must now pose is: what lies ahead for this proud metropolis and the state of Victoria?

In the 21st century we face the stark challenges and horrors for this planet and humanity. Surely the test for new industries in Victoria should be based on how they can continue to contribute to a reduction in the greenhouse intensity of our economy. The thoughts of Albert Einstein come to mind, and I would like to share them with members. He said:

We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.

It is my fervent hope that this statement and its compelling message will resonate beyond this chamber. To maintain prosperity we must adapt. It is my view that we are not adapting fast enough and that our future is not assured. In Victoria we need to embrace 21st century thinking and create a climate where 'patient money' is available to develop southern hemisphere solutions to the global environmental challenges.

Our population debate is overdue. As such it has become another strident example of our not being the masters of our own destiny. Now in 2006, and to our detriment, 20th century thinking still prevails. Among other things this thinking sustains our reliance on 'brownware', or the industrial base that saw us through previous centuries, instead of fostering innovative thinking centred on 'greenware' or the means for a prosperous and healthy future. Whilst implanting hope for future generations our credo must surely be that the

land is not inherited from our forefathers but rather borrowed from our children.

To maintain the peace in this state we need to ask all of our new citizens that, in exchange for the status of being an Australian citizen, they return our munificence with loyalty, reliability, trustworthiness and, hopefully one day, a love for this land. I want to see Victoria at its best and the world at its most hopeful. As a legislator I hope to bring forth the enduring values of our history and apply them to the care of our times.

Mr ELASMAR (Northern Metropolitan) — I rise proudly today to deliver my first speech and am humbled by the thought of the responsibility of representing my constituents. It is truly a privilege to stand before honourable members and have the opportunity to speak in this chamber. I like to think that my election is a reflection of the truly multicultural nature of this state. I congratulate the President on his election as our President. I also congratulate Mr Lenders, the Leader of the Government, and those re-elected and newly elected members with whom I take office. To those candidates who were unsuccessful, I offer my commiserations.

I am proud to be here, one of five elected members, representing constituents in the newly formed Northern Metropolitan Region, which covers 11 Victorian lower house seats: Broadmeadows, Brunswick, Bundoora, Ivanhoe, Melbourne, Mill Park, Northcote, Preston, Richmond, Thomastown and Yan Yean.

As a new member of this Parliament I have taken an oath and will make every reasonable effort to ensure that not only those who have elected me but all those whom I represent are heard and answered. I am proud to be here as a member of the Victorian Labor Party, a party which will always stand for values and morals. It is a party that is committed to policy reforms that are always relevant to our society and for the benefit of the people of Victoria. I am also proud to be here as the first Lebanese-born person elected to the Victorian Parliament, recognising at the same time that this state has been well served by another person of Lebanese descent, our Premier.

I am proud to have been elected to represent an electorate that is dear to me and about which I am passionate. It is the electorate that I live in and have worked in for the whole of my adult life. It is an electorate that is dynamic, diverse and multicultural, has a large indigenous population, is challenging and is a wonderful place in which to live and raise a family. It is an electorate where my three children attended local schools — St Joseph's Primary School and Santa Maria

College, both in Northcote, and Samaritan Catholic College in Preston. It is an electorate that contains the church where I was married in 1985, Our Lady of Lebanon in Carlton, which is the same church where my children were baptised. Sadly it is also the electorate where my late father is buried.

At the mention of my late father my thoughts turn a little to my background, which I would like to share with the house. In 1973, at the age of 20, I left Lebanon with my parents, two brothers and a sister. My father, who was always close to Lebanese politics, had the foresight to realise that there was a conflict looming which would be an all-out civil war. He made the difficult decision to uproot his family, to leave everything behind and to come to the land of freedom and democracy, Australia. We realised from the outset that that decision would never be regretted.

At this point I would like to acknowledge and pay tribute to my late father, as this may also reflect somewhat on my background. It is a large part of how I came to be here today. My father, Halim Elasmr, was a well-known academic, a poet and an author. After retiring as head of the land surveying department in Lebanon he went to establish the Al Riad School, to further pursue his love of knowledge and learning, which he conveyed to me. I was also to become a teacher at that school. I honour my parents who guided me, who showed me much love and taught me loyalty and forgiveness. I fondly remember my late father singing ballads about both Australia and Lebanon. I remember his advice:

Do not forget where you came from, but remember that you do not drink from the well that you then throw a stone in. This is our home, so respect and appreciate in good faith our adopted country, Australia.

My mother, Laurice, prayed that the seven of her nine children living in Australia would be good sons and daughters to both Lebanon and Australia. I am sure my parents are proud today.

Back to my earlier days: it was difficult to leave my roots, my remaining three brothers and their families, my friends and my home and migrate to Australia. When I arrived in this wonderful country unfortunately I did not speak English. I spoke French, which was indeed an asset, but I am self-taught in English. I am extremely proud of this fact. On arrival in Australia we were welcomed by my sister Teresa, brother-in-law Tony and brother Samir, who were already residing here. Along with my two brothers I commenced employment with the tramways, with what was then the Public Transport Corporation. In this land of opportunity I rose quickly through the ranks over

19¹/₂ years. My positions included depot starter, operations officer, special projects officer and acting northern regional officer.

I then had the great chance to be appointed as an electorate officer and work for the Honourable Theo Theophanous, a position I held for 10 years. During those years I was privileged to have the opportunity to be exposed to some of the electorate and community I now represent. I take this opportunity to thank Theo for the experience and for his friendship, support and advice.

During my earlier days I became interested in politics and the Australian Labor Party, as to me this was the true party of the people. This inspired me to enter local government and I became a councillor in the City of Darebin. In 1997 I went on to become the first Lebanese-born mayor in Victoria. I also held positions on various community committees, including being secretary of the Australian Lebanese Association, which is a Lebanese umbrella committee; secretary of the Australian Lebanese Cultural League; the establishment of an after-hours Arabic language school; secretary of Our Lady of Lebanon Church; member of Civil Liberties Victoria; and vice-president of St Joseph's basketball club in Northcote.

Over the years I received various acknowledgments and appreciations from many associations and communities for my contribution to the Lebanese and wider community. I was nominated for and was honoured to receive a Centenary of Federation award in 2001. In January 2006 I was further honoured to be a recipient of an Order of Australia award.

For me, being an Australian-Lebanese in Australia is about not only being able to uphold my traditions but more importantly, by integration and assimilation, we can maintain and uphold the Aussie values and traditions that exemplify our multiculturalism. As Australians we have a sense of fairness and a commonsense approach to the world. This makes me proud to be an Australian. I am proud of the many prominent Australians of Lebanese ancestry who make up our diverse and dynamic heritage and multicultural community; of course this includes the Premier of Victoria, Steve Bracks.

In our democracy freedom of speech is a privilege which should always be held in high esteem and never be taken for granted. We should respect and value our precious freedom, even more so when we witness and observe the many countries that lack our freedom and social equality.

I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words in my native tongue. They will then be translated into English.

بكل حزن وألم أرى لبنان الوطن الام جريحا ؛ وأنني بوجع وأسى ؛
اراقب شعبه خاسرا حريته وديمقراطيته وحقوقه
المعيشية التي نعيشها في استراليا

Sadly for me I see my ancestral home, Lebanon, being torn apart and allowed to slowly bleed — the situation is grave and deteriorating. To witness the anguish and suffering of the Lebanese people, losing their democracy and rights that we so enjoy here, is heartbreaking and frustrating.

This should not be allowed to happen in any country — human rights and civil liberties should be fundamental for every single person. I believe in fairness and that everyone should be treated decently and with respect. The more people I meet who have been dealt with unfairly, the more determined I become. I will ensure that people are treated decently and given every opportunity which we as Victorians deserve; that every person has the rights and privileges that we as Australians are entitled to; and that integration and multiculturalism are recognised when we develop education and health policies, policies for the disabled, for the ageing, for workers, for children and for mums and dads. That is what Labor is all about.

I would like to focus a little on our young Australians, especially the many from ethnic backgrounds who are an important part of this state and this great country. I would like to congratulate these young people on their many achievements and talents — they make us proud. However, young people today have to deal with so many problems and issues. They usually grow up too quickly. Surviving and integrating within two communities can be tough but developing networks and building links, as well as aiming to develop goals and objectives, is achievable. I encourage these youths to be involved and participate in the Australian and wider community as Australian citizens. By doing this our young people are promoting themselves as our ambassadors, by wearing not only their mother country flag but also the Australian flag in their hearts.

We are blessed to be living in Australia where young people's ambitions, ideas and efforts can be expressed and rewarded and their many talents, goals and objectives are attainable. These young Australians are making a substantial contribution in pursuit of a better society. In a rapidly changing world their contribution is now more important than ever. Our youths are embracing all religions and political affiliations as inherent parts of their identity and freedom. As youths

who are proud of belonging to this nation, they are our hope for the future.

I come to this Parliament with a passion and enthusiasm: a passion to ensure equality of opportunity for all — and Labor is the only party that can deliver this. We must work to create a state and nation where there is a fair share for every individual. We must listen and discuss, not lecture. Let us hold onto that shared belief, that common purpose that arises at certain moments in this country and let us truly be one state and one nation.

The only way to foster and maintain this realisation is with the backing and assistance of our constituents and supporters, by listening to and encouraging their views and priorities. It has been a foundation plank of Labor Party policy that we foster the development of human resources, and I look forward to being part of this continuing nurturing process and seeing Victoria resume its rightful place as the financial, economic and social engine room of this nation.

Victoria is already pre-eminent in the fields of medical, health and technology research and has made an enormous commitment towards modernising our water infrastructure, making it as efficient as the latest technology will allow. I am gratified that is an ongoing process and not merely a one-off reaction. Victoria is one of the few authorities in the world to have a commissioner for environmental sustainability reporting on government performance and environmental management. We are a world leader in the development of sustainable energy, with some of the biggest wind farms in Australia.

We have heard criticism in the past from those uninformed about the consultative processes undertaken by this government. I believe that is reflective of an attitude that because it is public money being spent, then it should be spent wisely. Taking into account economic and environmental impacts, any short-term quick fix could affect changes required in the future. A proper investigation can eliminate most potential risks and reveal hazards which may otherwise have been overlooked.

Families want better schools and the choice of technical education. Families want improved health care. Families want a clean environment, secure water supplies and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. And families want a fair go at work. My job now is to deliver on the issues that matter to those families.

Let us keep standing up for working families. I promise to keep working hard to meet the challenges ahead as I

represent Northern Metropolitan Region. We have done a lot, but we know there is a lot more to do. These are critical and fundamental roles and responsibilities of the Bracks Labor government. The views and input of the people are important to me and to this government.

Saturday, 25 November 2006 was an historic day for the Labor Party in Victoria. This was only the second time in 150 years that a Labor government has won a third term. But more importantly, it was a victory for working families around Victoria. For the future of millions of Victorian families who are living in a growing and changing society, Labor will continue to develop fresh and new policies of most importance and concern to every Victorian. In short I am proud to be a member of this government, to represent the people of my constituency and to assist in any way possible the advancement of this great state.

I will continue to serve the party and through it the people of Victoria in whatever capacity it grants me. In particular I will continue to devote all my energies to serving the people in my electorate of Northern Metropolitan Region, to carrying out my duties as their elected representative. I am inspired by my passion, my commitment and my loyalty. I believe in the Labor cause, and the duty and responsibility that is owed to Victorians cannot be underestimated. Steve Bracks has the experience, the ideas and the commitment that Victorians want in their Premier. As a team we will do the hard work to keep Labor competitive.

Let us continue with the Bracks government's good work. Let us continue making Victoria the no. 1 state. With the passion I have been witnessing lately I know this will continue to happen. It is Steve Bracks and his team who have put Labor in the winnable position we are in today. I pay tribute to our great Premier who is instilled with Labor values, courage, intellect and decency.

One never becomes a member of Parliament without the help and support of many people. The most important acknowledgment I make again is of course to those constituents in the Northern Metropolitan Region. They put me here, and it is them I represent. I thank the members of the committee of the High Street branch of the party who supported me from day one, particularly Elie Khalil, secretary of the branch. I am grateful and humbled by their support. I hope I can justify the faith they have shown in me. They have been the rock for the Labor Party and me, enduring the tough times over the past 15 years.

I thank my parliamentary and caucus colleagues and friends in the broader Labor movement for the support

they have given me over past years. I believe my caucus colleagues who know me know me to be loyal and trustworthy. My gratitude also extends to Senator Stephen Conroy, Bill Shorten, Jeff Jackson and David Feeney. I thank the many Australian Labor Party branches which have also supported and assisted me.

I thank my campaign manager, Michael Leighton, a former member for the seat of Preston in another place. I congratulate the new member for Preston, Robin Scott, for his election to the lower house. I thank and congratulate Fiona Richardson on her election to the seat of Northcote in the other place. She replaces the former member for Northcote, Mary Delahunty. I have a great appreciation of the hard work throughout the campaign of the secretary of the Labor Party, Stephen Newnham. I extend special gratitude to both Alison Donohue and Nesrene Asmar for their driving force and contribution.

I thank the many individuals and local businesses in my electorate who have supported me over the years and during the campaign — there are too many to name individually — for their utmost support and encouragement and for their faith and confidence in me. I thank the Lebanese and Arabic associations and committees and the many religious communities that make up my diverse electorate for their encouragement. I thank and pay tribute to Mr Martin Ferguson, the federal member for Batman, for his confidence, guidance and advice.

I acknowledge my eldest brother, Professor Riad Asmar, who once was my teacher. Still today I continue learning from him. One of his expressions which I remember is, 'To be like the wheat that grows full of life and greatness, whilst stooping humble and meek'. I have a dying gratitude to my brothers and sisters both here and in Lebanon — Riad, Samir, Gihad, Nabil, Walid and Ghassan, Teresa and Samira — my nephews, my nieces, my parents-in-law, Michael and Iquette, my brothers and sisters-in-law, relatives and friends for their undivided loyalty and support.

Lastly and most importantly, I want to acknowledge my dearest and loving family; my dear wife, Heam, who has been my rock, and also my three exceptional children, my wonderful sons, Riad and Robert, and my beautiful daughter, Adele, who are all present tonight. They all have had an enormous impact on my life and my path on this journey. To them I owe much appreciation and love. They are my proudest achievements.

In conclusion, I am absolutely committed to working for everyone in the Northern Metropolitan Region. I

take my responsibilities as a representative in the Victorian Parliament very seriously. I take this opportunity to wish everyone the best for Christmas and a safe 2007.

Finally, I thank God with all my heart for giving me faith, strength and guidance. Thank you all for your attention and presence here on this most significant day at the beginning of a key journey in my life.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mr P. DAVIS (Eastern Victoria).

Debate adjourned until next day.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Education) — I move:

That the house do now adjourn.

Dartmoor Primary School: relocatable classroom

Mr KOCH (Western Victoria) — My matter is for the Minister for Education and concerns the government's proposal to remove a portable classroom from the Dartmoor Primary School. The Dartmoor Primary School council has again had to fight to retain school facilities. Over the past seven years the department has tried to remove a portable classroom from the school, using as justification falling pupil enrolments. The classroom declared to be in excess has been in constant use for 30 years. Most recently it has been used as a music and art room. It is also used for visiting and specialist classes, and was used in recent weeks for rehearsals of the end-of-year school play. As a stand-alone classroom that is separate from the main school it is ideal for these types of uses, where noisier activities can be undertaken without disturbing other classes.

The department claims that according to its formula the Dartmoor Primary School is overentitled. Using the total roof area against the total students enrolled at a school does not take into account other considerations that affect isolated schools in smaller rural communities. The school is also used as a community meeting centre.

The Dartmoor school community is very involved in and actively supports its school. It has a great pride in the school, and this is justly deserved. Over the last year the school again won state awards recognising the school community's achievements. The school maintains an award-winning garden, and this is only

achieved with solid community involvement and commitment. The Dartmoor community fought hard over many years to have a new toilet block built and for the upgrading of the administration area. These basic amenities have been used by the department as an example of it modernising the school, yet these essential improvements, while very welcome, did not come easily, as this community attempted many times to secure funding so that the upgrades could be realised.

The insensitivity of what is apparently an uncaring bureaucracy in removing an ageing portable classroom for no reason other than to decommission it is at least wasteful, and coming at a time when rural communities are struggling with drought, falling farm commodity prices and at Christmas demonstrates a complete disregard for the untiring efforts put in by the community. Departmental representatives have never visited this school in recent years to see at first hand the hard work of the community.

The action I seek from the minister is that he give the Dartmoor school community a written instead of verbal assurance that the school will have security of its buildings for ongoing educational and community use.

Bushfires: recovery strategy

Mr DRUM (Northern Victoria) — My adjournment question is for the Premier. We have had nearly every parliamentarian in Victoria take to their feet in the last two days giving their best wishes and heartfelt thanks to the Country Fire Authority volunteers and Department of Sustainability and Environment employees who are currently putting their lives on hold and at risk fighting fires that are currently ravaging north-east Victoria and Gippsland. While I also join in those sentiments, I have a more urgent and pressing request: that the Premier immediately implement a bushfire recovery strategy.

The member for Benalla in the other place, Dr Bill Sykes, has been inundated with numerous letters detailing how desperate the situation is for small businesses that have been affected by not only the fires and the immediate threat of having their businesses damaged by the fires but more importantly by the number of people who have been warned to stay away from the north-east alpine areas. Not only do The Nationals call on the Premier to implement a bushfire recovery strategy but we ask that a potential strategy be worked out and that it be organised and implemented by local north-east businesses. It must be remembered that in 2003 a \$2 million strategy was mainly centred around having city-based companies work out how best to bring back the areas affected by those 2003 fires.

Following the 2003 fires the federal government made \$3000 grants available practically immediately, which were much appreciated. The current fires have now burnt out an area approaching 1 million hectares, and these fires will be significantly bigger than those experienced in 2003. Fortunately there has been minimum direct destruction of private assets, mainly due to the outstanding efforts of the Country Fire Authority, Department of Sustainability and Environment and other support agencies.

But it is the massive social and economic impact on these areas and the businesses in the region that is causing enormous grief. A variety of accommodation houses, as well as wineries, cafes, restaurants, quilting businesses, cellar door outlets, golf clubs and a whole range of others businesses have been impacted. Effectively any business that has a tourism aspect to it has been impacted.

The bushfire information line is clearly telling anybody with an interest in going to the areas that the towns are dangerous, that it is unsafe to be in those areas, that they are subject to road closure and that if you go there, you will have to boil your water. There is a real need for the Premier to implement a bushfire recovery strategy using local businesses for its implementation.

Ajax Fasteners: employee entitlements

Mr PAKULA (Western Metropolitan) — I address my issue to the Minister for Industry and State Development. It regards the workers at Ajax Fasteners in Braeside who recently lost their jobs in an environment where it appears their earned entitlements are at significant risk. I ask the minister to investigate what actions he can take to help ensure that those workers are paid their entitlements.

Unfortunately, the set of events at Ajax has some disturbing parallels to the corporate collapses of companies like Ansett, Empire Rubber, Icon and Kemalex. They all involve situations where companies have initiated significant redundancies in an environment where the employees have not been paid either their redundancy entitlements or their accrued annual leave and long service leave.

Even in my time as a union official I was never big on the idea of locking up employee entitlements. I was always concerned about the impact on cash flow and about the concept of pushing companies, which are already struggling, over the edge. But I have to say that what has been going on lately with regard to these corporate collapses has been a disturbing trend, as part of the circumstances, of employees losing their

entitlements. It is not something that used to happen in the past, and I must say it is causing me to rethink my position.

Cash flow is important, paying creditors is important and paying suppliers is important, but these companies should not forget the people that make their products. They have earned those entitlements, and they are entitled to be paid them.

It is bad enough to lose your job; you do not need the added indignity of having the leave that you have accrued and the entitlements that you have built up over many years flushed away along with your job. With that in mind, I ask the minister to investigate what he can do to help ensure those workers receive what is rightfully theirs.

Rail: Epping–South Morang line

Mr GUY (Northern Metropolitan) — I raise an issue and make a request of the Minister for Public Transport in another place. While I acknowledge that the minister is new to the portfolio, I would like her to take some action on the Epping–South Morang railway line. This is a critical piece of infrastructure for the northern suburbs. In fact this important and most vital piece of infrastructure needs to be built in the very near future, as in the next 10 years an extra 38 000 people will be living in the city of Whittlesea in the northern part of the metropolitan area.

Unfortunately, the promise by the government in 1999 for this piece of infrastructure seems to have gone awry. The government promised it again in 2002 but decided not to implement its promise until 2011. I note that in the Melbourne 2030 statement it is listed as a priority piece of infrastructure. I would hate to know what is not a priority piece of infrastructure, considering that a blow-out from 2004 to 2011 — given that it may be on time and may be built by the government — would be quite amazing. I note that the Cranbourne East extension has also been shelved, and I fear that this piece of infrastructure may never be built. The government has used examples, saying that it will cost something like \$240 million to build 5 kilometres of railway track. That is amazing, because in Perth it cost \$422 million to build 70 kilometres of railway track. Whether the government has got a consultant to do its numbers and then added on some figures I do not know, but it beats me. I just cannot understand why this piece of rail infrastructure is not being built.

What is also interesting to me and to other members of Parliament who represent the northern suburbs and who are not of the government's persuasion is the silence

from local members in the northern suburbs. I note that the member for Thomastown in another place, who was the transport minister for seven years, did not mention this once in the last term of Parliament. Why would he not do so? Probably because he would be too embarrassed about his own record of delivering this project for those in the northern suburbs. I note that the members for Mill Park and Yan Yean in the other place have mentioned this matter only a handful of times — in fact less than five between them.

In conclusion, I hope the new Minister for Public Transport will take an approach a little different from that of her predecessor, who unfortunately was from the northern suburbs but was found not to be wanting to act in any way for those suburbs, and will actually take action and have this vital piece of infrastructure built within a reasonable time frame — that is, as soon as possible.

Blackburn High School: upgrade

Mr LEANE (Eastern Metropolitan) — My issue is for the Minister for Education. I would like to highlight the importance of funding received by schools in my electorate since the election of the Bracks government. One announcement I was particularly pleased with during the campaign was the commitment to upgrade the Blackburn High School. On 25 November there was an obvious message from the electorate that it was happy with the work being done by the Bracks government. As the Premier mentioned at that time, there is still more to be done, and the commitment to the Blackburn High School upgrade is recognition of that. I ask the minister to take action on this commitment to ensure that the upgrade is delivered over the next four years.

Human Services: freedom of information request

Mr DALLA-RIVA (Eastern Metropolitan) — My adjournment matter this evening is to pose a query to the Attorney-General in the other place. It relates to the perennial issue that is dear to my heart and also dear to the hearts of many members of the opposition. I refer to the matter of freedom of information (FOI) — or, as I like to say, freedom from information — under this government.

A situation has been brought to my attention which relates to what was mentioned in the Governor's speech yesterday. It indicated that the government was proposing to put forward amendments or changes that were recommended in an ombudsman's report in the last Parliament. I am concerned about one example that

has been brought to my attention. A gentleman from Carnegie, Mr Hugh Doherty, made a request under freedom of information to seek certain documents relating to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans*. He made this request on 13 February 2006.

You would assume that the ordinary course of action would have been to apply for the information through the existing process, but we know that the ombudsman was quite critical of the fact that this government fails to respond to FOI requests in the recommended time. Mr Doherty's request was not responded to for some 58 days, which is well in excess of the 45 days recommended under the act. He was then further informed that he would need to seek clarification, which is a normal process that concerns me and, I am sure, members on this side of the chamber. Indeed the new members who have come in, including the Greens and others, will experience the delights of the FOI process under this government.

Mr Doherty was very tenacious, and I commend him for that, but what causes me concern is that the advice he got back was that there were no documents. He then pursued the matter with much vigour by going to the ombudsman and to various other sources. He sought an internal review and again nothing came back. On 26 October the Department of Human Services wrote back saying it had made an error and asking Mr Doherty to resubmit his request. The DHS had received Mr Doherty's application on 10 October and, lo and behold, the documents were found and given to him in November.

This is an indictment. Citizens of Victoria should not have to go through this process. What I seek through this adjournment debate is that the Attorney-General take action to implement the ombudsman's recommendations immediately or as soon as possible.

Schools: ultranet

Ms PULFORD (Western Victoria) — I would like to address my issue to the Minister for Education. During the recent election campaign the Bracks government made a commitment to provide the ultranet to all schools. As many members have indicated in their inaugural speeches, education is the government's no. 1 priority and a great investment in Victoria's future. I recently had the privilege of visiting the new education hub in Maryborough — the Maryborough Education Centre. This school precinct is an amazing glimpse of what Victorian schools of the future will look like. When it is finished it will comprise two primary schools — Maryborough and Maryborough East — as

well as Maryborough Specialist School and some of the facilities of Maryborough Secondary College. Ultimately it is hoped the precinct will also incorporate some TAFE, preschool and early childhood facilities.

The centre's design encourages minimal environmental impact, and it is in a very beautiful bush setting. However, the setting is just one thing; another essential part of delivering quality education is that the children learning at the Maryborough Education Centre have the best technology to support their learning. The ultranet will connect the entire school community — the students, teachers and parents — using revolutionary technology.

I ask the minister to take action to ensure that all schools be provided with the ultranet technology during the term of this government, having particular regard to small schools in isolated regional communities to ensure that all Victorian children benefit from the Bracks government's plan for educational excellence.

EastLink: tolls

Mr ATKINSON (Eastern Metropolitan) — I wish to raise a matter for the Minister for Roads and Ports in another place. He may well need to discuss this matter with the Premier and the Treasurer, but in the first instance I direct it to the Minister for Roads and Ports. It regards the tolls on the EastLink project. As we know, the government introduced tolls after the 2002 election. At this latest election paid a price in some of the seats in the eastern suburbs as a result of its failure to honour a promise that the EastLink road would be delivered without tolls.

Of considerable concern to residents in the eastern suburbs now, however, is the way those tolls are being applied on that project to vehicles using the road. I refer to the cost of a one-way trip from Ringwood to Springvale Road. I hope Springvale Road is the road concerned, by the way. It was put to me during the election — I did not actually raise this as part of the election because we could not verify it — that contractors had been asked for expressions of interest in putting the gantry at Blackburn Road rather than Springvale Road, which would have significant implications for traffic in the eastern suburbs and would represent another massive change of policy by this government at the expense of those suburbs.

However, for the sake of this argument I will take Springvale Road as being the starting point for the tolls. The cost of a one-way trip between Springvale Road and Ringwood is \$2.15 while the cost of an entire trip to Frankston is only \$4.67. In other words, 46 per cent

of the cost of the toll for using EastLink applies to this one very small section of EastLink. The government might very well say that is because there is a tunnel. I, my colleagues on this side of the house and the residents of the eastern suburbs ask why we should pay for some extra privilege of having a tunnel in our section when the tunnel is integral to the function of the entire project. The entire project cannot work without that tunnel, therefore everyone ought to be apportioned an equal cost in regard to those tolls.

The action I seek from the minister is that he go to the people who built EastLink under government benevolence and seek to renegotiate those tolls to ensure that a fairer toll will apply to the section between Springvale Road and Ringwood.

Albert Park College: future

Mr THORNLEY (Southern Metropolitan) — I address my adjournment matter to the Minister for Education. I have already congratulated the minister on his re-election both to the Southern Metropolitan Region and as Leader of the House, and I congratulate him on the terrific portfolio he now has, which is the no. 1 priority of the Bracks government. As part of that no. 1 priority, as everyone is well aware, we are rejuvenating every school in the state over the next 10 years — those that we have not done already. Not only are we rejuvenating them, but there are a number of schools which will get special treatment and opportunities. In particular some will gain access to the Selective Entry Accelerated Learning (SEAL) program.

One that particularly concerns me is Albert Park secondary college in the Southern Metropolitan Region; it is located very close to the heart of the Albert Park electorate of the Deputy Premier. It has been a difficult challenge as the school has evolved over the last few years, but now we have a commitment to a really exciting future for that school where we can have both a normal curriculum and the SEAL curriculum in a new and rejuvenated school.

Given the importance of the school to the local electorate and the importance of what we are doing in schools throughout Victoria, I ask the minister to make sure that he takes all action necessary to ensure that the college is reopened in 2009, as committed. It was my great pleasure during the election campaign to visit a wide range of schools in this electorate. There is nothing more pleasing than meeting with a group of dedicated parents, teachers and others in the school community who have been working hard on the plans for rejuvenating a school — as I did, for example, at Elsternwick Primary School at the beginning of the

campaign — and being able to return to see their wishes and dreams for their school and community fulfilled, with this government providing the funding for the sort of quality education we are committed to. It is fabulous to see that for the children, but it is also fabulous to see it for the parents, teachers and others who work so hard to make these things happen.

With Albert Park College about to be reborn, not just with a normal curriculum but with SEAL as well, I ask the minister to make sure that the commitment is met on time in 2009 and to take all necessary action to do so. That would be a terrific service to the community and an improvement that everyone is looking forward to.

Responses

Mr JENNINGS (Minister for Community Services) — President, thank you for the opportunity to respond to members who have raised matters for the attention of various ministers. I will make sure that the ministers have their attention drawn to these matters and that they respond in the appropriate fashion.

Mr Koch raised a matter for the Minister for Education regarding the allocation of portable classrooms which may well be for the attention of the Minister for Skills, Education Services and Employment in the other place, but one way or another we should be mindful of that. In fact Mr Koch raised an issue that I had not thought about much: the ratio between total roof area and total student numbers — obviously something I have not been sufficiently privy to — which may adversely affect the allocation of portables, and he is worried about the Dartmoor Primary School. I hope that matter will be addressed.

Mr Drum raised a matter for the attention of the Premier, calling upon him to institute a bushfire recovery strategy. I can say that the Premier takes these matters extremely seriously, and I know from first-hand experience of dealing with emergency matters in terms of my portfolio responsibilities that the Premier and other relevant ministers are paying much attention to bushfire issues. I am not sure whether that attention will be encapsulated in something published as a bushfire recovery strategy, but I will ask the Premier to respond.

Mr Pakula raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Industry and State Development, asking him to exercise his mind about what may fall within his responsibilities to deal with the circumstances in which workers at Ajax Fasteners find themselves, now that the company has fallen short of providing for the accrued

entitlements of its work force at a time of economic downturn.

Mr Guy raised a matter for the Minister for Public Transport about the much-discussed extension of the — —

Mr Atkinson — Much promised.

Mr JENNINGS — Interestingly enough, the issue of price is something that — —

Mr Atkinson — Much promised!

Mr JENNINGS — I find it very hard to believe that the Liberal Party would raise in such a timely — or perhaps untimely — fashion the issue of the price of extending the railway line to South Morang given that during the election campaign its commitment to a \$12 million extension of the line was ridiculed far and wide throughout not only the northern region but also the Victorian community. This was a \$12 million commitment that was pretty much blown out of the water from the very moment it came out of the leader's mouth. I think we pretty much understand that \$12 million would not provide for that extension. I hope that the Minister for Public Transport does rise up and meet the needs of that community, but it will certainly have to be done at a greater cost than \$12 million.

Mr Leane raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education. He encouraged the minister to provide for the redevelopment of the Blackburn Secondary College and sought an assurance from the minister that that will be delivered during the course of this term in office.

Mr Dalla-Riva eventually — I was a bit worried — got to his query and his action. He called upon the Attorney-General to implement the recommendations of the ombudsman in relation to a particular matter and the evidence he gave in relation to a freedom of information matter raised by Mr Doherty of Carnegie.

Ms Pulford raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, seeking his support for the rollout of the ultranet system throughout the Victorian public education system. She gave examples of schools that are being redeveloped within Maryborough and identified the benefits that could come to that school cluster and which could be derived by schools in smaller isolated areas through the introduction of the ultranet. She was very enthusiastic about the potential for that service to be provided to schools throughout her region and called upon the minister to provide it.

Mr Atkinson raised a matter for the attention of the minister for transport, but I reckon he meant the Minister for Roads and Ports, who has responsibility for the ongoing implementation of contractual arrangements that relate to the EastLink construction and its the pricing mechanism. Again it is an issue that I did not think the Liberal Party would have ever wanted to go near — the pricing structure of the tollways. In fact given — —

Mr Guy interjected.

Mr JENNINGS — Absolutely it is a tollway. There is no doubt about it — it is a tollway. It is a matter where I thought Mr Atkinson was leading with his chin in relation to the grief that it caused his side of the house in relation to the pricing structure and the mechanism by which that road was going to be funded and paid for, and not only from sovereign risk issues but a whole range of contractual issues that were going to create some difficulty. I think that if Mr Atkinson is concerned with the pricing structure of that tollway, that is a matter that the minister can pay attention to, but I think it is a matter that maybe he might be leading with his chin on.

Mr Thornley raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education, seeking his support for the speedy and early redevelopment of the Albert Park secondary college, and again joined with a number of colleagues on this side of the house in identifying the important commitment made by the Bracks government to the redevelopment of education in schools throughout the Victorian community and the important role that education plays within the Victorian community. Mr Thornley recognises that it is the no. 1 commitment of the Bracks government, and he called upon the minister to implement the redevelopment of the Albert Park secondary college at the earliest opportunity.

That is the range of matters that were raised on the adjournment.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 10.13 p.m.