

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

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

Tuesday, 13 June 2006

(Extract from book 8)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Hirsh, Hon. Carolyn Dorothy ¹	Silvan	ALP	Vogels, Hon. John Adrian	Western	LP

¹ Ind from 17 September 2004
ALP from 10 November 2005

² Ind from 7 April 2005

³ Ind Lib from 30 November 2005

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Tuesday, 13 June 2006

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

ROYAL ASSENT

Message read advising royal assent to:

Energy Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act

Infringements (Consequential and Other Amendments) Act

Planning and Environment (Growth Areas Authority) Act

Primary Industries Acts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Act

Victorian Urban Development Authority (Amendment) Act.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Government: financial reporting

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — My question without notice is to the Minister for Finance, Mr Lenders. On 4 May I asked him in question time how many irregularities had been reported to him under section 54B of the Financial Management Act, and further, in my supplementary question on that day, what action he took in relation to the iSOFT tender irregularities, and would he make the Victorian Government Purchasing Board report into that tender available to the house. What action has he taken on these matters since 4 May, a period of some 40 days or nearly six weeks?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I thank Mr Forwood for his question. I always welcome Mr Forwood's questions and acknowledge his ongoing interest in all matters of public administration; and I acknowledge the time he has spent as chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and, more recently, as deputy chair of that committee. I took that question on notice from Mr Forwood, I recall, as he reminds me. I will get him a reply to that promptly.

Hon. Philip Davis — When?

Mr LENDERS — The Leader of the Opposition asked when. I am proud to say that we are very timely in this area. There are very few questions of mine on the notice paper that have not made the 30-day period. I will always be happy to take questions in this place on

my portfolio, and I welcome them. I will take that question from Mr Forwood on notice, and I will make sure he gets a rapid response. I can assure Mr Forwood that this government is always open and transparent. We published the reports of the Victorian Government Purchasing Board. We publish annual reports of all departments.

Hon. D. McL. Davis interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Mr David Davis once again does not understand open and transparent government. The Premier had said that all the reports this year will be brought forward to meet the closure time of Parliament, so I look forward to Mr Forwood's supplementary question and hope I can be of more assistance to him on that.

Supplementary question

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — Given that the iSOFT share price has plummeted from £4.60 to 53p since the Victorian government entered its \$22 million contract late last year, and given that iSOFT's chief executive officer, Tim Whinston, is likely to be sacked today or tomorrow, what action will the minister take to protect Victoria's position?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — It is appropriate for Mr Forwood to ask if he has any concerns about how we operate on a contract or where it goes, but in assuring Mr Forwood about whether this government looks at the share price of a company every time we have a contract, I will just use Multiplex as an example. It is a company that has done fantastic work for the state of Victoria in building a convention centre, in building the showgrounds and in a range of other things. Its share price has gone up and down, which has not in the slightest way affected its performance in delivering those two great projects for the state of Victoria. Mr Forwood is drawing a very long bow on the issue of whether the share price of a company is relevant to a contract with government.

As to the issue of the chief executive officer of a company or those other issues, I will certainly take those on notice. It is prudent for members to be concerned about those issues, but there is more than just the share price to consider in seeing whether a company can actually perform and deliver its contractual obligations to the state of Victoria. If it does not, we will obviously enforce them and seek restitution.

Soccer: government support

Hon. C. D. HIRSH (Silvan) — I have a question without notice to the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

I think I can remember what it is, although I am very bleary-eyed from a late night! Given the enthusiasm for the world game known as soccer and the success of the Socceroos in their first-round match last night, can the minister inform the house what the Bracks government is doing to improve grassroots participation in this great sport?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — No doubt there are a lot of excited members in the chamber based on the result of last night's World Cup game, and we would like to congratulate the Socceroos on an outstanding performance. It is worth appreciating that in Victoria over 100 000 young people play soccer and that 80 000 of them are members of Football Federation Victoria. Government funding of soccer, or the world game as we might well refer to it, and of player participation in that sport's development has been of the order of \$1 million over the past six years. A substantial amount of that funding is directed to junior development through primary school visitations and the GoalKick program. Mr Drum no doubt appreciates the high degree of investment in grassroots community sport. As well as that, major and minor soccer bodies have received of the order of \$4 million over the past five years for both new facilities and improvement of existing facilities.

Friday a week ago I had the good fortune to attend my seventh annual Active Girls Breakfast, which provides an opportunity to inspire young women to continue to involve themselves in sport. It is worth appreciating that it is important to reverse the trend we have seen in relation to under-participation across Victoria. In particular during the Active Girl Breakfast I highlighted some of the great achievements in women's sport. One of the great achievements I want to talk about is happening in the sport many of us grew up calling soccer but which we now refer to as the world game or football.

While we know that the Socceroos are performing particularly well in the World Cup in Germany, I would bet Mr Drum did not know that the Young Matildas, Australia's under-20 women's football team, have just qualified for the World Cup. This means they will be going to the under-20 World Cup in Russia in August. I would like to congratulate all of the team's members and encourage them to perform particularly well. I make particular mention of five of the Young Matildas in that under-20 team who are also members of the senior Matildas side, which shows just how well they are performing. They were part of the team that beat Mexico 2 goals to 1 goal at the Melbourne Cricket Ground a few weeks back before the men's Australian

team played against Greece. Our attention may have been on the later game, but prior to it we saw the Matildas beat Mexico. What an outstanding performance that was. It is a great reminder that you can achieve amazing things if you stay involved in sport.

Football Federation Victoria has also had a great achievement. At the Melbourne Active Girls Breakfast it was able to field a full team. It had 11 women from the premier soccer — or, should I say, football — competition as role models on that day. We have seen 16 000 registered girls or women playing soccer, which is a significant increase of 10 per cent over the past five years. Over that time we have invested \$200 000 directly towards the development of women's participation in soccer.

As I have talked about on a number of occasions, we are seeing increased participation in sport in this state right across the board, but particularly in the world game, because of the fantastic contribution we are making as a government when it comes to developing and supporting grassroots sport, and particularly the world game, in this state. We are making Victoria a better place to live and raise a family, and also to participate in the world game.

Government: financial reporting

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — My question is to the Minister for Finance. I would like to ask rhetorically whether he would invest in a company that had lost 90 per cent of its value in seven months, but my actual question is: can the minister confirm the finding of the Victorian Government Purchasing Board inquiry into the iSOFT tender, that Anthony Bibby — a senior Department of Human Services employee who was then and still is the manager of patient and client management systems under the HealthSMART program and who was the go-to person in relation to the tender — had breached Victorian Government Purchasing Board guidelines in his dealings with iSOFT?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — In response to Mr Forwood's rhetorical question at the start, I suggest that a lot of Australians invested in Telstra. Given that his federal leader's misadventure with the Snowy float has probably stripped a few billion dollars off the price of Telstra, a lot of Australians are probably questioning why they had faith in the ability of the Prime Minister, Mr John Howard, to manage the economy.

Leaving Mr Forwood's rhetorical question aside, he raises a couple of issues. Without shirking the question — and I have taken this on notice — as Mr Forwood well knows, individual contracts are the responsibility of the portfolio minister. The Minister for Finance is responsible for setting whole-of-government guidelines, which individual ministers are then required to comply with. We have 600-plus agencies, as Mr Forwood well knows. The whole point of guidelines — whether they be the purchasing board guidelines, the directions of the Minister for Finance or others — is to ensure we have the best possible practice and that these bodies adhere to a high standard. These bodies are accountable to portfolio ministers.

Beyond that we have the issue of what happens if they do not comply, and I guess that is what Mr Forwood's supplementary question will be about. First and foremost, it is the responsibility of the portfolio minister to ensure that contracts meet the guidelines and criteria. If they do not, as we know, this government has empowered the Auditor-General — and I will not go through my normal recitation of what the Kennett government did when Mr Forwood chaired the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee as the agent of the executive government and nobbled the Auditor-General by taking his powers away —

Hon. Bill Forwood — You just did!

Mr LENDERS — I will not digress one more time on that, but I will say there are a number of tests in relation to any contract that does not meet its objectives. Clearly if there is a reporting mechanism, the Auditor-General, first and foremost, can of his own volition, or if requested, advise on those areas. There are a number of other checking areas if there is a breach of things like credit cards, or a number of other things which are reported to me as Minister for Finance. At the end of the financial year, any outstanding matters from the Auditor-General are put into a single report which is brought to the Parliament so that questions can be asked about it.

I guess that Mr Forwood can have the assurance that in the end, when you have a government with a budget of \$30 billion, much of which is in contracts, there will always be one or two that get through. The test of a good government and a good system is how you learn lessons when a contract does not work well, how you hold those accountable who have not done the right thing and then, obviously, how you apply those lessons for the future. I look forward to Mr Forwood's supplementary question, which I am sure is designed to make me look not good.

Supplementary question

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — Given that it is a fact that the Victorian Government Purchasing Board held an inquiry itself into the iSOFT tender, was the minister made aware, one, of that fact; and two, of its findings as the minister responsible for the Victorian Government Purchasing Board?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I do not recall that being drawn to my attention, although I will obviously go to my office and check whether this was the case. Again, as to Mr Forwood's case and the process involved, the role first and foremost of a department is that the responsible minister is advised, and second, lessons learnt come to me as the minister — and these tend to come at the time the annual report is compiled or when I have a meeting — about every six months — with the Victorian Government Purchasing Board, when I discuss ongoing issues, directions and agendas with its members. I cannot recall such a report, but obviously I will look into it when I get back to my office and make sure that Mr Forwood has a prompt response to his question without notice.

Olympic Park: rectangular sports stadium

Hon. H. E. BUCKINGHAM (Koonung) — I direct my question to the Minister for Major Projects. Australian football fans are on a high after a scintillating and deserved come-from-behind victory against Japan last night. In this light, can the minister inform members of the house of the Bracks government's efforts to provide a highly modern and visually spectacular stadium for football in Victoria?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Major Projects) — I thank Mrs Buckingham for her question and I noticed she has called the game football. Mrs Buckingham is certainly and absolutely in the spirit of most Australians who were watching the World Cup last night. Sadly I was being responsible and went to bed, unlike many members here, but one of my sons gave me a blow-by-blow description as to how the game went when he came home at 2:30 a.m., so I feel I was there.

Anyone who was not there but who read the papers this morning or saw the replay will know the excitement of what the game was and the disappointment when Mr Nakamura scored a goal 26 minutes into the game. Many people thought that was wrong and that the referee had it wrong.

Mr Gavin Jennings interjected.

Mr LENDERS — No, Mr Nakamura! Whether it was right or wrong, in any case, Mr Nakamura scored a goal. At 84 minutes, Tim Cahill got the first goal for Australia; we got the second goal just before the 90-minute close off; and a third goal from Mr John Aloisi just after the time on. Clearly there is an enthusiasm about where the game is, but Mrs Buckingham asked about our world-class venues here.

The rectangular stadium which the Premier, the Minister for Sport and Recreation and I announced just two weeks after the Commonwealth Games will be the home to a number of sports which use a rectangular stadium, among them world football, or soccer. Twenty thousand spectators will be able to watch the soccer at this venue when it is completed. We also know that it will be the home of Melbourne Victory, which is Victoria's premier soccer club.

In many ways it will be interesting how we see this as we watch the world soccer now. We can but wonder as we see some of the world-class stadiums in Germany like Kaiserslautern, where the match was last night, which seats 46 000 people and has \$81 million invested in it by a state government. We can look at how that goes and we can certainly look to Munich when next week Australia will — hopefully and likely — beat Brazil. Some of us can live in hope.

Hon. Bill Forwood interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Mr Forwood may be a defeatist, but I am confident we will do our best against Brazil next week.

There is a \$470 million stadium in Munich, which is the Bayern Munich Football Club's stadium — again we are looking at classy and state-of-the-art facilities. Going forward to the game the following week at Stuttgart, where Australia will hopefully dispatch Croatia in much the same way as it dispatched Japan last night, that city has a fantastic stadium for watching football. I could even be more ambitious and go forward to the round of 16, but I will not take the time of the house on that, although I have great confidence that we will be in the round of 16.

From all of this we learn lessons as to what is a true —

Ms Mikakos interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Ms Mikakos wants to lead a delegation to the group of 16, but we will have to leave that to others rather than people in this chamber!

If we are looking at what is a world-class football stadium, we can look at the rectangular stadium at Olympic Park, which will be a world-class stadium. Not only will it have a unique world-class roof, which Minister Madden and I have followed very closely — it uses half the steel, thereby reducing the environmental effects of a typical stadium roof — but it will also have facilities that would probably make some of the managers of these German facilities envious. We will have facilities such as an elite training centre, a gym, a pool, medical facilities and office accommodation for soccer, Rugby and Australian Rules football — a number of codes — in the one place.

The Bracks government is absolutely committed to building world-class facilities so that we can play world-class soccer as well as other codes or sports here in Melbourne. In partnership with our community we will build a great stadium. It is one I look forward to seeing completed — and I look forward to seeing Melbourne Victory and other clubs continuing with great success in the game of soccer, which Australia is doing so well at as we speak.

Major projects: rural and regional

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — My question without notice today is directed to the Leader of the Government in his capacity as Minister for Major Projects, and I ask: how many major projects funded by the government and managed by Major Projects Victoria are projects based in country Victoria?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Major Projects) — I do not have an exact figure in front of me. Obviously the very complex long-term containment facility which Mr Hall's colleague Mr Bishop regularly regales this house about is clearly one. The Bonegilla migrant resource centre in Mr Baxter's electorate would be a second one. There are also other projects. Ms Hadden is normally a very vocal member here; the redevelopment of the Hepburn Springs bathhouse is certainly being done.

Hon. W. A. Lovell interjected.

Mr LENDERS — Ms Lovell is being extremely vocal here today. She would know the Parkside Gardens estate in Shepparton is being done by VicUrban, in the major projects portfolio. Similarly in Mr Drum and Mr Bishop's electorate we have the Tower Hill development in Swan Hill, which over a period of I think about 30 years will see 1200 houses developed.

In Mr Koch and Mr Vogel's electorate, the Shire of Southern Grampians has asked VicUrban to assist with developing 300 houses on the edge of Hamilton to deal with issues like the Iluka mining project and the growth that is coming there now. A few weeks ago in Hamilton I was speaking to a teacher who had moved there from Kyneton just a few weeks earlier and was trying to find housing. She had to wait for a period of time to get rental housing in Hamilton and even longer to purchase housing. So Hamilton has a great need, and VicUrban, which is part of the major projects portfolio, is assisting with that. There are a number of projects going on.

The major projects portfolio covers only one part of the Bracks government's Building One Victoria framework. As Mr Hall would know, I think we have something like 280 cattle underpasses, mainly in Gippsland Province. These are being done by my colleague the Minister for State and Regional Development in the other house through Regional Development Victoria.

Hon. Philip Davis — What has that got to do with major projects?

Mr LENDERS — The Leader of the Opposition asked, 'What have cattle underpasses got to do with major projects?'. I remind Mr Davis that with Mr Viney and me, we on this side of the house have milked more cows than the entire parliamentary Liberal Party, other than Mr Vogels. And I dare say Mr Viney and I have milked more cows than have all of The Nationals' members in this place.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There has been enough interjection from both sides of the house. I ask members to stop interjecting.

Hon. D. K. Drum — On a point of order, President, the minister knows full well that what he has just talked about is not factual. The minister is not telling the truth.

The PRESIDENT — Order! There is no point of order. The Minister for Major Projects, to continue his answer.

Mr LENDERS — My point is that the Bracks government is building infrastructure for the whole of Victoria. Part of that infrastructure is the cattle underpasses project. I am surprised by the Honourable Philip Davis. He represents the rural electorate of Gippsland that probably has more dairy farmers than any other place on the planet with the possible exception of New Zealand, yet he asked, 'What is the importance of cattle underpasses?'.
Wearing my Transport Accident Commission hat, cattle underpasses make our roads safer. Wearing a Victorian hat, they make the traffic move more smoothly — —

Hon. Philip Davis interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The Leader of the Opposition should stop interjecting!

Mr LENDERS — They certainly make life more efficient for dairy farmers in Mr Davis and Mr Hall's electorate. Undoubtedly Mr Hall's supplementary question will try to confine my answer to the major projects portfolio which, as I have said, in a number of areas outside Melbourne is dealing with particular projects, whether it be the one in Hepburn Springs or some of the others I have mentioned.

The Bracks government's holistic approach to capital works has seen the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund — which The Nationals and the Liberal Party opposed on its first iteration — invest in regional Victoria. Whether it has been investment in police stations, schools, hospitals, roads or rail, we have seen massive investment from the Bracks government in all those areas, right through to cattle underpasses in the Gippsland electorate. There is a holistic picture delivering for the whole state. For us, country Victoria is a good place; it is not the toenails, as Jeff Kennett — —

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

Supplementary question

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — It is hard to ask a supplementary question when I did not hear a word the minister said, apart from the last 30 seconds when he referred to major projects. I refer the minister to the major projects web site where 16 major projects are listed as having either been completed or as currently being under construction. The only ones relating to country Victoria are the industrial waste management proposal, or toxic waste dump, and the Bonegilla Migrant Experience Heritage Park, a \$2 million project that has already been completed.

By way of supplementary question I ask the minister: apart from the toxic waste dump, what major projects has this government got planned for country Victoria, or is it a fact that it cannot think of any and is waiting for The Nationals to suggest a few?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Major Projects) — I always welcome positive suggestions from The Nationals, but I can assure Mr Hall that major projects in the infrastructure department like the regional fast

rail to Traralgon; major projects in the human services department like the Latrobe Valley hospital, major projects in the education department like more schools than Mr Hall can name and major projects in the justice department like every police station or prison in regional Victoria are all part of the government's infrastructure projects.

Those are the major projects in regional Victoria. The Office of Major Projects deals with infrastructure areas outside those four government — —

Hon. P. R. Hall interjected.

The PRESIDENT — Order! Mr Hall has asked his question!

Mr LENDERS — What I would say to Mr Hall is that he should look up the major projects across government and he will find \$2 billion invested in infrastructure each year, with the first — —

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

Housing: Homeless World Cup

Ms ARGONDIZZO (Templestowe) — My question is directed to the Minister for Housing. Can the minister inform the house how the Bracks government is kicking goals by assisting homeless Victorians to become active community members?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Housing) — I thank the member for her question. The Bracks government certainly believes that everyone deserves a decent home along with the security and stability that it provides. That is why we continue to find innovative ways to address homelessness, reduce disadvantage and build Victorian communities.

The Bracks government has joined forces with the *Big Issue* to bid against the United Kingdom, Italy and Switzerland for the Homeless World Cup in 2008. A team from Melbourne, the Street Socceroos, took part in last year's Homeless World Cup in Edinburgh. The Bracks government believes this high-profile event is a chance to demonstrate the ability of homeless people to tackle personal obstacles and become active community members when they have the right opportunities. This project helps homeless people by raising awareness, changing attitudes, encouraging partnerships and transforming lives.

Weekly soccer training offers people who have experienced homelessness, substance abuse or disadvantage the opportunity to get fit and to make new

friends and contacts as well as to seek support and advice. That is why the Bracks government has approved a \$500 000 package to support the extension of soccer training programs into regional centres and to run the event in 2008 in Melbourne, if Melbourne wins the cup. Three hundred and fifty thousand dollars of this funding will go directly to extending the programs in Melbourne and setting up new soccer training programs in Ballarat, Geelong and Shepparton. Through the new funding we expect the number of people engaged in regular soccer training and mentoring programs across Victoria to grow from 100 to more than 300 people. Ultimately this project is about like-minded people helping one another by harnessing the positive power of sport.

The name of the competition, Street Soccer for Social Change, encapsulates the reason the Bracks government is supporting the project. I understand it has also received strong support from Melbourne's business community and from many of the agencies that provide support to homeless people, in addition to the involvement of the *Big Issue*. Street Socceroos is a proven success. Already many of its participants have found secure accommodation and employment as well as appropriate drug and alcohol programs to help them get their lives back on track.

Since 1999 the Bracks government has boosted its funding for the supported accommodation assistance program for homeless Victorians by more than 83 per cent. Our contribution to securing the Homeless World Cup is on top of that 83 per cent. That is certainly in contrast to the cuts made by the federal government to funding support for homeless people, which needs to be addressed. The government hopes that the current focus on the Australian Socceroos in the World Cup will assist Victoria's bid to host the Homeless World Cup in 2008.

Greater Geelong: councillors

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Local Government, Ms Broad. Following his investigation into the Greater Geelong City Council, Municipal Inspector Merv Whelan stated:

During the investigation I received allegations about breaches of the conflict of interest provisions of the Local Government Act. My terms of reference did not include examinations of breaches of these provisions, and I have referred correspondence received by me on this issue to Local Government Victoria for attention.

I ask: what action will the minister take to address these conflict of interest allegations now that they have been brought to her attention by the municipal inspector?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) — I believe that the member asked a very similar question to this last week. I am more than happy to respond again to him about these matters. As I indicated to the member, to the house and publicly last week, the Bracks government expects all elected representatives to demonstrate the highest standards of integrity. That is why, as local government minister, I instituted an investigation through a municipal inspector following the receipt of complaints.

The member may recall that at the time I put that investigation in place I also drew attention to the fact that some complaints had been made to the Ombudsman about matters to do with conflicts of interest. It is not appropriate that I make any comment on those matters. As the member is well aware, the Ombudsman reports to the Parliament, not to the local government minister, so those are matters for the Ombudsman. If the member has any inquiries about those matters, clearly he should direct them to the Ombudsman.

But in relation to matters for which I have responsibility under the Local Government Act, those matters have been fully investigated and reported on to the Parliament. My department is taking the necessary action. Complaints in relation to matters of conflict of interest are matters which the Ombudsman is pursuing — —

Hon. J. A. Vogels — What's your job?

Ms BROAD — Clearly it makes no sense whatsoever to have my department and the Ombudsman investigating the same matters. That is why at the time I announced the investigation I indicated — perhaps members have forgotten — that those were matters the Ombudsman was investigating. The Ombudsman has been provided with all the information my department has, and that is appropriate. If the member has any inquiries about those matters, he should direct them to the Ombudsman.

Supplementary question

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — The municipal inspector clearly said in his report that he passed on information about conflict of interest to Local Government Victoria for its attention, and I thought the minister was responsible for Local Government Victoria. However, the Whelan report identifies five elected councillors who received donations totalling

\$84 028 from businessmen in Geelong. The people of Geelong deserve to know who received what money from whom, and how each of those councillors voted on vital projects. Will the minister investigate if there were conflict of interest issues when decisions on projects were made around the council table, as many of these decisions are made behind closed doors under claims of commercial in confidence?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) — Members opposite might think the Ombudsman's investigations do not count for anything. That is not the view of the government. The view of the government is that we fully support the Ombudsman and his investigations into these matters. He has the full cooperation of my department and has access to all the information provided to my department. I have every confidence that he will deal with these matters and report to the Parliament independently of the sort of interference which was run by members opposite when they were last in government and tried to nobble the Ombudsman. In contrast, this government fully supports the office of the Ombudsman and its investigations, and I expect he will report to Parliament when he has concluded those investigations.

Consumer affairs: soccer equipment

Mr VINEY (Chelsea) — My question is to the Minister for Consumer Affairs. Given Australia's success at the World Cup and the likelihood that more and more Victorian children will take up soccer, what steps has the Bracks government taken to ensure that soccer equipment is as safe as possible, and is there anything that parents need to be aware of when their children take up soccer?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — I thank the member for his question.

Hon. J. M. Madden — It's very serious!

Hon. M. R. THOMSON — It is a serious question. Given the success of the Socceroos — and whilst I share the enthusiasm of the Leader of the Government for the game against Brazil and would hope for the best, I am not sure I am quite as confident as he is about the outcome — more and more Victorian children will look to take up soccer as a consequence. It is very important therefore that we secure the safety of young soccer players who may be potential Socceroos of the future.

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. M. R. THOMSON — Or Matildas. It is true to say that a lot of schools and soccer clubs use moveable soccer goals. It came to our attention that

some very unsafe soccer goals that could cause accidents and injury by collapsing on young players are being used. The government has banned moveable soccer goals that do not comply with minimum standards. Moveable goals that are not designed properly present a significant risk and can cause quite serious injury.

The Bracks government has introduced a requirement for moveable soccer goals to adhere to minimum design standards to ensure that they are safe, stable and secure. These standards ensure that unanchored soccer goals are properly secured and stable, that there are no exposed corners and that the edges are rounded so that children are not put at risk of being cut or scratched by the equipment. There is also now a requirement that moveable soccer goals have a warning printed on them that unanchored goals can tip over causing serious injury or death.

Community Affairs Victoria, in conjunction with the Soccer Federation of Victoria, has by mail informed all soccer clubs, sporting bodies and primary and secondary schools of the ban order. Victorian children who take up soccer after Australia's success at the World Cup will now be safer as a result of these mandatory safety standards. This is an example of the Bracks government kicking goals for young Victorians so that they can kick goals in the future.

Greater Geelong: councillors

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Local Government, Ms Broad. The Whelan report identifies \$50 000 in cash and cheques made out to cash delivered to Cr David Saunderson's work address at the electorate office of Mr John Eren. I ask: will the minister investigate whether another 2004 candidate at the Greater Geelong City Council elections, Cameron Grainger, campaign manager of Mayor Peter McMullin at the last federal election, who also benefited to the tune of \$21 697 from this slush fund, has breached any provisions of the Local Government Act, or are dummy candidates exempt from this act?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) — When the Bracks government was elected there was absolutely no requirement for candidates to make any disclosure of campaign donations or gifts of any sort. It is the Bracks government that has legislated to bring in requirements for all candidates, whether they are successful or not, to declare any gifts and donations they received following the election in which they were a candidate. That is a clear demonstration of the Bracks

government's commitment to openness and transparency.

I contrast this with the actions of the Liberal Party at a federal level, which is seeking to raise the threshold to \$10 000 before anything has to be declared as far as donations are concerned. In contrast the Bracks government has introduced new requirements which were never there before. We have set those thresholds at what we think are appropriate levels, unlike the federal government where the Liberal Party is going 100 miles per hour in the opposite direction to ensure that members declare as little as possible insofar as these matters are concerned. The Bracks government absolutely stands by its actions to strengthen the Local Government Act to apply not only to councillors but to all candidates, and those matters will ensure that at every future council election both candidates and councillors are required to declare all of these matters.

Supplementary question

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — I thank the minister for her answer. It is interesting to note that Cameron Grainger also works in Geelong in the ALP electorate office of the member for Bellarine in the other place, Lisa Neville. Presently there are many ALP councillors working for ALP MPs. We have ALP staffers who are elected councillors or failed candidates at Brimbank, Casey, Whitehorse, Frankston, Greater Dandenong, Wyndham, Port Phillip, Greater Geelong, Melton, Mitchell, Hume, Moonee Valley and Hepburn councils, just to name a few. Will the minister ensure that taxpayer funds are not exploited by ALP local government candidates and their dummies working in ALP electorate offices using parliamentary resources?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) — If the member has a question about the use of parliamentary resources that are used by government members in relation to election campaigns, federal, state or local, and wants to pursue those issues, members know very well they should direct those questions to the Speaker or the President of the Parliament.

Aboriginals: sport programs

Ms CARBINES (Geelong) — My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Can the minister advise the house how the Bracks government's support for sporting activities is helping to build economic and social capacity within the indigenous community?

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS (Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) — I thank Ms Carbinés for her question and

her concern about the wellbeing of Aboriginal people. This day we are noting the capacity of our nation and those who represent us to dig deep to find strength and courage to overcome adversity. Those are the sorts of inspirational values we are hoping will also apply to members of the Aboriginal community. Time and time again we see that on the sporting field. We have seen many circumstances where Aboriginal people have dug deep, have overcome a degree of resistance, racism and a whole range of impediments and have found success through sport. We are hoping to build on that and we are hoping to do that in a variety of ways.

On a number of occasions this Parliament has heard about the great work done through sport and recreation and through the Commonwealth Games to build strength in Aboriginal communities. Previously on occasions I have talked about the support the government has provided to the Rumbalara Football and Netball Club; and the football that is played by the Rumbalara Football and Netball Club is Australian Rules, because football in the parlance of today is the world code which we have seen on display, with great admiration for our nation's representatives.

I am sharing with the Parliament today some good news about the support we have provided to the Hellenic soccer club in Mildura, which has gone out of its way to truly live up to its name as the Mildura United Soccer Club and has embraced the rich cultural heritage of the Mildura region. Today we see not only the great faces of multicultural Australia represented through that football club but in fact a very hefty component from within the Aboriginal community.

About 140 young Aboriginal people play under the auspices of that football club. It brings them together in a great multicultural spirit, just as the faces of our nation's soccer team are together a great representation of what is the great strength of this nation — the way we live in harmony, work, play, strive and struggle together. That is the underlying ethos of Mildura United and, its embracing of the indigenous community is the reason we have provided support.

Through the offices of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria and the Victorian Multicultural Commission we have provided some sponsorship to that club to provide for it to grow and thrive in the Mildura region and play a positive role in bringing the community together in a spirit of harmony and great achievement. We have seen great successes, and we hope to build on that model into the future so that we see the capacity and potential of young Aboriginal people — in fact all people in our community — to thrive on the sporting field and build confidence.

That is not the only program we are embarking upon. We are using that model of engagement through sport as the building block of the Academy of Sport, Health and Education in Shepparton, which we supported with \$2.7 million from this budget in an attempt to attract members of the Aboriginal community who have been disengaged from education to participate in certificate training at the academy and to build on their expertise in relation to community recreation, Aboriginal health and other health-related matters. We see the crucible of sport as being a wonderful, uniting feature of this nation. If not for the fact that many members of the chamber are half asleep after having watched the football last night, we might be united by that moment. Indeed the spirit of the Commonwealth Games lives on by us being united by the moment of the World Cup.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I have answers to the following questions on notice: 7482, 7776, 7875, 7877, 7878, 7884, 7886, 7887, 7917, 7919, 7920, 7926, 7928, 7929, 7962.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Montsalvat: funding

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — Last week I was very disappointed to see that Montsalvat, which resides in my electorate, is under significant difficulties. Sigmund Jørgensen and the Jørgensen family, have made a significant and longstanding commitment to the cultural life of Victoria, and I well remember the jazz festivals that were held at Montsalvat in the early 1990s.

What seems strange to me is that at a time when this government has the capacity to spend vast sums of money on football stadiums to help an organisation like the Australian Football League, which is not exactly broke, it is unable to help in any way with an organisation such as Montsalvat. Our cultural heritage is important to us all, and it seems that rather than washing its hands of organisations such as Montsalvat the government should have a long, hard look at what it can do to help.

For example, I am aware that the Premier's wife is the patron of Heide, another fine institution in my electorate, which is getting outstanding and significant federal and state government support. One would believe that if Heide is worthy of support, then perhaps

Montsalvat might also be worthy of support. I note that Ziggy Jörgensen was a Labor Party candidate who stood against Wayne Phillips in a recent election. One would have thought that on this occasion the Labor Party might try to look — —

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

Bernie Byrne

Hon. J. G. HILTON (Western Port) — Last week I was very pleased to announce a \$48 000 grant to install lighting at the Nar Nar Goon Recreation Reserve and to build an additional netball stand. At the announcement I met a number of people who are involved in the recreation reserve and the football and netball clubs.

I would particularly like to mention Bernie Byrne, the president of the Nar Nar Goon Recreation Reserve Committee of Management. Bernie is now in his 80s and has been involved with the recreation reserve for over 50 years. Whilst I was at the reserve he took me on a tour of the facilities, and his passion for improving the reserve's facilities is undiminished. He talked with great enthusiasm about a new BMX track which is currently being developed at the reserve.

Bernie is yet another example of the unsung heroes who make such a wonderful contribution to our community. In the past 50 years he has contributed many, many hours of his free time to developing the reserve and improving the facilities that it can provide to the Nar Nar Goon community.

It was a great pleasure meeting Bernie and all the other community-minded people. I would like to wish them every success in the future.

***Duyfken*: Melbourne visit**

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — This morning I stayed up and watched the Socceroos beat Japan 3 to 1. The Socceroos controlled much of the play but were finding it very difficult to score. Once again it was Dutch coach Guus Hiddink who pulled a rabbit out of his hat and brought on Tim Cahill, who immediately managed to score two goals, putting the result beyond doubt, for our first win in World Cup history.

This is not the first time the Dutch have come to the fore in Australia's history. Over the long weekend the replica sailing ship, the *Duyfken*, sailed into Port Fairy. This Dutch ship put Australia on the map in 1606 when, captained by Willem Janszoon, it touched our shores. It was not until some 150 years later that the Poms turned up.

The *Duyfken* is sailing out of Port Fairy today on its way to the ports of Geelong and Melbourne. While here it will moor at Williamstown and Docklands. I would encourage as many people as possible to take the opportunity to look over this wonderful replica ship — to get on board, meet the crew and wonder in amazement at how such a small vessel managed to sail thousands of kilometres to uncharted waters some 400 years ago. But then again, it was crewed by Dutch sailors — and as Guus Hiddink has shown, never underestimate the tenacity of the Dutch!

Cystic Fibrosis Community Cup

Mr PULLEN (Higinbotham) — Last Saturday I had the pleasure of attending the Southern Football League versus the Victorian Amateur Football Association annual challenge football match for the Cystic Fibrosis Community Cup at Clayton football ground. At the pre-game cocktail party VFAA vice-president, John Bell, who stood in for the president, Bruce McTaggart — who was at the Gabba in Queensland for a VFAA under-19 game against the Queensland under-21 team as a curtain raiser to the Brisbane-Adelaide clash — and Southern vice-president, Emmys Lloyd-Griffiths, who represented president Tony Troon, who was ill, gave very impressive addresses. Tony has been ill for some time and everyone wishes him a speedy recovery.

Jennifer Lockman, president of Cystic Fibrosis Victoria, informed the gathering with a moving address about cystic fibrosis. CF is the most chronic inherited, life-shortening illness amongst young Australians today. People living with CF are continually battling lung infections, malnutrition and exhaustion, and require 2 to 3 hours physiotherapy and 40 to 60 enzyme tablets daily, and there is no cure.

The footy match was an absolute ripper and of an exceptionally high standard, even though played in gloomy conditions. When it looked as if Southern had the game sewn up, the Amateurs popped through a goal with 18 seconds to spare to win 13.8 to 11.15. The VFAA best were Tim Davis, of Fitzroy Reds; Michael Miller, of Ormond; and Paul Groves, of St Bede's/Mentone Tigers, while Southern was best served by Heath Barnes of St Paul's, McKinnon; Ryan Flack, of Chelsea Heights; and Matt Kennedy, of Balwyn. The whole day was a credit to both football bodies.

Automotive industry: imports

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra) — There is no doubt that the car and car parts sector in

Victoria has been hit hard by the massive imports from new sources such as South Korea, China and other Asian countries. Australian car production reached a 22-year high of 411 000 in 2004. However, it has dropped 6 per cent to 388 000 units in 2005. Despite the appearance that all is bad, exports from the automotive manufacturing industry have been significant, rising to over \$5 billion in 2005. However, that must be compared with imports, which are now at \$23.5 billion.

I am therefore pleased to recognise the federal government's initiative in dealing with a potential looming crisis in this manufacturing sector. The federal industry minister, Ian McFarlane, has approved an initial grant of \$7.2 million to the Automotive Industry Strategic Action Group. The group comprises the four chief executive officers of the four car makers, the executive director of the Federation of Automotive Products Manufacturers, or FAPM, and a representative of a significant parts maker.

I must say that in my role as shadow minister for manufacturing and exports I have seen many manufacturers in the car industry who are suffering, so I welcome this measure. As the chief executive of FAPM says, the parts suppliers who want to participate must understand that they need to look outside the domestic and into the international markets. I welcome this initiative.

Soccer: World Cup

Ms MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — I rise to congratulate the Socceroos on their 3-1 victory over Asian champions, Japan, in their first World Cup match in 32 years. It was the greatest moment in Australian football history, representing the team's first World Cup win ever and breaking the drought that has existed since 1974.

Last night's match was a rollercoaster ride of emotions. After staring at defeat, with 7 minutes of time left, Tim Cahill equalised with Japan, and then 5 minutes later scored again. Only 3 minutes later John Aloisi, who is already a hero for scoring the winning penalty in the qualifier against Uruguay, scored the final third goal.

The whole team deserves congratulations for its never-say-die attitude, as does the brilliant strategy of Dutch coach Guus Hiddink, who has already earned himself the title of honorary Australian.

I would argue that last night was one of the definitive moments in Australian sport. The world game is already Australia's biggest junior sport. The Socceroos'

success at the World Cup, the biggest sporting event in the world, will see the popularity of football in Australia continue to grow.

Whatever happens next, football fans around Australia are already proud of the Socceroos. Congratulations, Socceroos; a whole nation is behind you. Bring on Brazil — and go Socceroos!

Rail: rural and regional crossings

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — With the number of rail crossing accidents increasing, it is time the government had a decent look at the options available for appropriate warning signals.

Whilst it would be difficult to have conventional flashing lights at each crossing, we do have new, innovative ideas coming forward that deserve consideration. I have raised a few, such as flashing lights on the train itself, lights and reflective tape on the sides of trains, electronically controlled gates in favour of trains, rumble strips on the road approaches to the crossing, including even rumble strips with a sensor to activate caution lights and a GPS-based system. So there is a wide range of systems that should be investigated for their suitability in various situations to speed the job up and make our rail crossings safer.

This reminds me that the rail crossing signals were to be installed at Main Avenue, Merbein, some two years ago but to date have not been installed. I quote in part a memo from the Mildura Rural City Council which states:

VicTrack advise that the signals have not yet been commissioned due to a requirement to get agreement from train drivers to manually switch the signalling, until such time as automatic signal switching is installed. The automatic switching is apparently complex due to shunting operations in close proximity to and across Main Avenue.

All that might be right, but it is nonsense that rail crossings such as the one at Merbein have not been done.

I call on the government to have a decent look at these new, innovative ideas so that we can have appropriate warning devices fitted to our rail crossings.

Queen's Birthday awards: Templestowe Province

Ms ARGONDIZZO (Templestowe) — I take the opportunity to congratulate the recipients of the Queen's Birthday awards announced on 12 June 2006. I was pleased to see a number of recipients from the Templestowe Province being recognised for their

outstanding contribution to the community. They include the Reverend Canon Alan Charles Nichols of Montmorency for services to the community through charitable and refugee organisations; Francis Paul Bartoli of Templestowe for services to sport for people with vision impairment as a competitor and in other roles; Eric Ning Chen of Bulleen for services to the Chinese community, particularly with senior citizens; William George Noonan of Greensborough for services to the transport industry, particularly through the development of road safety programs, and to the trade union movement; Nancy Jennifer Willis of Montmorency for services to education as a teacher of chemistry, as an author and through the promotion of the study of science; and Bryan Douglas Robertson of McLeod for winning the Victoria Fire Service Medal. Again I extend my congratulations to all the recipients and acknowledge the outstanding contribution they make to our community, especially those who reside in Templestowe Province.

Students: rural travel assistance

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — Every year on 1 July fines, fees and charges are indexed in line with the consumer price index and become nice little revenue earners for the government. If the government is going to play that game, benefits and allowances paid out by the government should also be indexed. One allowance that is not indexed is the conveyance allowance paid to some 41 000 students across the state to assist them travel to school. They are generally students who have no bus services and who live more than 5 kilometres from the most appropriate school.

Over the years there have been many reviews of school bus services. The last occurred in 2002, when, to its credit, the government introduced an allowance based on the distance travelled to school. Since the allowance came into effect in 2003, its value has been severely eroded, especially with the increase in petrol prices. To save another major review and in the spirit of fairness the allowance needs to be indexed and the indexation backdated to 2003, when the allowance was first introduced. I am extremely disappointed that in recent correspondence the Minister for Education Services has informed me that the government has no intention whatsoever of indexing the allowance. I think that is shameful. It is another example of this government ignoring the needs of country people.

Cervical cancer: Gardasil vaccine

Hon. H. E. BUCKINGHAM (Koonung) — I would like today to speak about the world's first vaccine against cervical cancer, Gardasil, which should

be available in Australia in August. In America last Friday the US Food and Drug Administration approved the vaccine for girls and women aged between 9 and 26. The vaccine, which is based on discoveries by Australian of the year, Ian Frazer, has been shown to be 100 per cent effective in protecting girls and women from infection from four strains of human papilloma virus, two of which cause 70 per cent of cervical cancer cases. This is wonderful news. Australia continues to lead the way in many areas of medical research.

I trust the federal government will consider a nationwide free immunisation program for all girls aged between 9 and 12. Studies have shown this is the best time to vaccinate girls, before they become sexually active and when their antibody responses are at their best. I commend Ian Frazer for his research and look forward to seeing a drop in mortality rates for the second-biggest killer by cancer of women worldwide.

Ambermere, Shepparton: redevelopment

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA (Melbourne West) — I want to let people know how delighted I was to be in Shepparton on Friday with my parliamentary colleague Daniel Andrews, the Parliamentary Secretary for Health in the other place. We were in Shepparton for the announcement of the \$6.5 million redevelopment of the former Ambermere psychiatric hospital. It was particularly pleasing for me to be at this launch because I started my nursing training at Ambermere and my younger brother was born there when it operated as a maternity hospital. It is terrific to see this very fine heritage homestead being redeveloped to deliver high-quality psychiatric services.

The redeveloped hospital will have 20 short-term and long-term beds and will offer some of the best quality psychiatric services and programs in the Goulburn Valley. It was a pleasure to be up there with Daniel Andrews and to know that not just the old heritage building but also its very fine grounds and lovely gardens — some of the trees are heritage listed — will again be utilised by people who suffer from mental illness and trauma.

Ferntree Gully Residents Action Group: quarry site

Hon. C. D. HIRSH (Silvan) — I pay tribute to and congratulate the Ferntree Gully Residents Action Group. The group worked persistently and highly successfully for many years, firstly, to have the CSR Ltd quarry in Butlers Road, Ferntree Gully, closed, and secondly, to be involved in the planning and development of the area for present and future

residents. The development includes public open space, a lake where the old quarry was and new housing — an estate to be called Peregrine Heights, which will be great.

Cathy and Bill McCullen, Harry Russell and the current member for Ferntree Gully in the other place, Anne Eckstein, are all very active members of the group. Karen Olpen, the ward councillor, was involved in ensuring that a very good development was put in place by CSR. It is good to see the company developing parkland and attractive housing instead of digging and producing dust. Anne Eckstein is working harder than she ever has in representing her constituents in Ferntree Gully now and — —

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

PETITION

Racial and religious tolerance: legislation

Hon. W. R. BAXTER (North Eastern) presented petition from certain citizens of Victoria requesting that the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 be repealed (78 signatures).

Laid on table.

SCRUTINY OF ACTS AND REGULATIONS COMMITTEE

Alert Digest No. 6

Ms ARGONDIZZO (Templestowe) presented *Alert Digest No. 6*, including appendices.

Laid on table.

Ordered to be printed.

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

Interpretation of Legislation Act 1984 — Notice pursuant to section 32(3)(a)(iii) in relation to Statutory Rule No. 131/2005.

Project Development and Construction Management Act 1994 — Order in Council of 9 May 2006 of an amendment to a nominated project application order.

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

Environment Effects (Amendment) Act 2005 — 30 June 2006 (*Gazette No. G23, 8 June 2006*).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Program

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That, pursuant to sessional order 20, the government business motion to take note of the budget papers 2006–07 and the orders of the day, government business, relating to the following bills be considered and completed by 4.30 p.m. on Thursday, 15 June 2006:

State Taxation (Reductions and Concessions) Bill

Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill

Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill.

In the last couple of years it has not been usual for the government to move business program motions. They were obviously quite contentious at the start of this Parliament, and the government seldom moves them now. The reason I am moving a business program motion and seeking the support of the house on it is that the budget and the taxation bill that goes to the implementation of the budget have, as a critical time, 30 June 2006.

The government has a modest program for this week. If this motion is agreed to, some certainty would be added that the house will focus its mind on these bills. If this program is supported, and these pieces of legislation are passed, we would also seek support to get the Electoral Act amendments through the house later this week. The government would not see the need to come back next week for the further two days of Parliament that were initially foreshadowed to deal with those 30 June bills.

As the house will recall, in the equivalent week of last year, there was a big ask — both houses were asked to support five bills. We have sought to smooth that out, but this would be the final piece to assist in the orderly progression of legislation. I urge the house to support the motion.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — I am disappointed that the Leader of the Government feels the need to move such a motion given the extraordinary level of cooperation there has been in the house over recent times. That cooperation is best demonstrated by the fairly slim business program the government is proposing for the week. The three bills are the State Taxation (Reductions and Concessions) Bill, the

Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill; and the Transfer of Land (Alpine Resorts) Bill.

The Leader of the Government indicated that the government aspires to get the Electoral and Parliamentary Committees Legislation (Amendment) Bill through as well. I note that we have three sitting days left this week — and, if needed, Friday — and we have scheduled in our diaries another two sitting days for the remainder of this parliamentary sitting.

It is beyond belief that the Leader of the Government should come into this place and so insult its members who have cooperated with the government in achieving its legislative program in an orderly fashion as to, frankly, incite a high level of resentment about the heavy-handed and arbitrary nature of the way the government proposes to act at this time. The opposition is continually amazed and provoked by this sort of action. We have more than enough time to give proper consideration to all the matters before the house.

I suspect that the minister is therefore inviting the opposition to consider the appropriation bill in the committee stage, because it could only be that he wants to establish the mechanism to exercise the guillotine on the basis that he is inclined to think it would be a useful thing for the house to examine the minister in some exquisite detail on the appropriation bill. If it is the case that the minister is inviting us to do this, I would be pleased to assist in the process. I therefore make the point that there is no profit to the government, to the opposition or, importantly, to the democratic operation of the house in bringing in a government business program at this time. It has not been warranted previously, it is not warranted today.

This action further demonstrates the cavalier attitude this government has towards the Parliament — that is, that it is just a plaything of the executive and that the views of the community as a whole are secondary to the government's use of the prescriptive sessional orders it has instituted to subvert the proper, democratic functioning of Parliament. Therefore I confirm the opposition will oppose this motion.

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — I also find such a motion as this — the government business program — completely unnecessary. As the Leader of the Opposition says, there has been a lot of goodwill extended by both the Liberal Party and The Nationals in getting government business transacted during the course of this week. I do not know how many weeks we have now gone without a government business program, and things have worked absolutely fine, with cooperation and commonsense shown by everybody.

The same could be achieved again this week. I see no necessity for this motion to establish a government business program.

Moreover, I find this motion for such a program counter-productive when the Leader of the Government has already indicated that he wants something else done beyond this government business program. The Electoral and Parliamentary Committees Legislation (Amendment) Bill is going to be added to work this house will transact during the course of this week. It seems ludicrous to move and vote on a government business program knowing we are not going to stick to that program as additional work will be asked of the Legislative Council. I have no doubt whatsoever that within the three days which are planned for this week — with the potential for a fourth day — we could easily accommodate this program.

I agree in some respects with the Leader of the Opposition when he said that this government business program motion is somewhat provocative given the history of the last few months during which time it has been demonstrated that we do not need a government business program to get through a week's work. The Nationals are disappointed that the government has moved this motion. As I said, it is completely unnecessary that it has done so.

House divided on motion:

Ayes, 22

Argondizzo, Ms	Madden, Mr
Broad, Ms	Mikakos, Ms
Buckingham, Mrs	Mitchell, Mr
Carbines, Ms	Nguyen, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Darveniza, Ms	Pullen, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)
Eren, Mr	Romanes, Ms
Hilton, Mr	Scheffer, Mr
Hirsh, Ms	Smith, Mr
Jennings, Mr	Somyurek, Mr
Lenders, Mr	Thomson, Ms
McQuilten, Mr	Viney, Mr

Noes, 18

Baxter, Mr	Hadden, Ms
Bishop, Mr	Hall, Mr
Bowden, Mr	Koch, Mr
Brideson, Mr	Lovell, Ms
Dalla-Riva, Mr	Olexander, Mr
Davis, Mr D. McL.	Rich-Phillips, Mr
Davis, Mr P. R.	Stoney, Mr
Drum, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)	Strong, Mr
Forwood, Mr	Vogels, Mr (<i>Teller</i>)

Pair

Theophanous, Mr	Atkinson, Mr
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Motion agreed to.

APPROPRIATION (2006/2007) BILL

Second reading

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That, pursuant to sessional order 34, the second-reading speech be incorporated into *Hansard*.

In doing so I advise members of the house that the paragraph in the budget speech that referred to the sale of Snowy Hydro has been removed from the second-reading speech.

Motion agreed to.

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Incorporated speech as follows:

This budget is what good government in the 21st century is all about.

This budget invests in the things that Victoria needs to meet the challenges ahead: an educated and skilled work force, healthy people, first-class infrastructure and a competitive business environment.

As we head further into the 21st century, these are the investments that every Australian government — state or federal — should be making.

And these are the investments that form the heart of Victoria's 2006–07 state budget.

Six years ago — in our first budget — we set out to undo the damage left behind by the previous Liberal-National government.

We set ourselves the task of restoring services in education and health that had been closed down and run down by years of funding cuts and underinvestment.

We set ourselves the task of growing the whole state and reversing years of decline in provincial Victoria.

We set ourselves the task of helping Victorian businesses to succeed in an increasingly competitive global environment.

It is worth recalling the legacy left behind by the previous government:

350 state schools closed

9000 teachers removed from our schools

3500 nurses and 6500 support staff taken out of our hospitals

6 passenger rail services closed.

These are facts. That is the legacy we inherited. That is the damage that has taken more than six years of leadership, hard work and substantial investment to repair.

It is true that we inherited a strong financial position.

But we have made that position even stronger.

In 1999 Victoria's net debt was 3.1 per cent of gross state product. Today, net debt is just 0.9 per cent of GSP and will rise to 2.5 per cent by 2009–10.

In 1999, net financial liabilities were 10.6 per cent of GSP. Today, net financial liabilities are less than 7 per cent of GSP.

Governments are defined by the choices they make — and the Bracks government has made very different choices to the previous Liberal-National government.

In this budget, we have chosen to use the strength and stability of Victoria's financial position to invest for the future.

We have chosen to build schools and hospitals — not close them down.

We have chosen more investment in public infrastructure — not less.

We have chosen to grow our regions — not let them sink into decline.

We have chosen to tackle disadvantage — and create new opportunities.

We know that Victoria faces challenges. And we know that this is not a time to do nothing when we have the capacity to do so much.

This budget — the seventh budget of the Bracks government — meets the challenges and makes the right choices for Victoria's future.

A great track record on economic management

This budget reaffirms the government's success in delivering sound financial management while investing in the drivers of a strong, growing and robust economy.

In 2006–07 Victoria's economy is forecast to grow by 3.25 per cent — maintaining the state's consistent record of growth.

Jobs growth remains strong, building approvals are at record high levels and business investment per capita is above the Australian average — with the \$8.4 billion invested by Victorian businesses in the December quarter of 2005 the highest on record.

Our strong economy and quality of life continue to attract more and more people to Victoria.

In June 2005 Victoria's annual population growth exceeded the national average for the first time in 41 years — and in 2004–05 provincial Victoria's population grew by 1.3 per cent, the highest growth on record for 15 years.

Victoria is performing strongly — but we cannot afford to be complacent.

The challenges that face our state — and our nation — are as big as they have ever been.

The minerals commodity price boom, the strong Australian dollar and increasing competition from China and India are all placing Victorian businesses — especially our manufacturers — under pressure.

We also face the challenges of rising international oil prices, the continuing impact of dry climatic conditions and managing the impact of an ageing population.

The 2006–07 budget tackles these challenges by making Victoria the most productive and competitive economy in Australia.

And we continue to do that within a strong framework of sound financial management.

For the seventh consecutive year the government will meet its commitment to deliver an operating surplus in excess of \$100 million. We will deliver a surplus of \$317 million in 2006–07 and surpluses averaging \$316 million over the following three years.

Victoria's balance sheet remains comfortably within the AAA credit rating parameters.

An unparalleled investment in infrastructure

When we came to office, the Liberal-National government had invested \$6 billion in infrastructure over the previous six years.

Over the last six and a half years we have more than doubled that investment to \$13 billion.

In this budget, we deliver the largest capital works program in Victoria's history, with a record high investment of \$4.9 billion — almost as much in one budget as the previous government delivered in six years.

This investment is crucial to boosting productivity and participation, attracting even higher levels of business investment and gearing up our economy to make the shift to the high-value industries and jobs that will maintain our quality of life.

And not only have we massively increased investment in infrastructure, we have also extended that investment across the whole state.

Through our *Moving Forward* provincial Victoria statement, the budget delivers an additional \$200 million to renew the highly successful Regional Infrastructure Development Fund.

We are also making sure that infrastructure, services and jobs in Melbourne's growing outer suburbs keep pace with the needs of the increasing number of Victorian families who now live in these areas.

In the city of Casey, for example, the average annual population growth over the last five years has exceeded 4 per cent. That is why this budget provides \$35 million for a new 100-bed aged care facility in Doveton; major upgrades to two primary schools; a new technical education centre in Berwick; and \$17 million to duplicate the Berwick-Cranbourne Road.

That is on top of seven new schools built across the area since 1999, major upgrades to 16 schools and the new Casey Hospital.

Just two weeks ago the government released *Meeting Our Transport Challenges*, which sets out a \$10.5 billion action plan over the next 10 years to ensure that our transport system supports Melbourne's and Victoria's growth in a responsible, sustainable way.

The 2006–07 budget marks the start of this action plan.

Over the next four years we will provide \$737 million for a major package of improvements to the Monash–West Gate corridor and more than \$850 million to extend and improve bus, train and tram services, improve rail safety and upgrade rail stations.

We will also provide \$345 million to upgrade arterial roads across the state, including the duplication of Mickleham Road and the Western Port Highway, and the replacement of the Barwon Heads bridge.

These transport projects will reduce congestion on our roads, deliver better freight connections for industry and significantly improve the comfort, safety, frequency and reliability of travel for a great many Victorian families — particularly those in Melbourne's outer suburbs.

Making Victoria the best place to do business

Ford Australia's recent commitment to a \$1.8 billion investment in Victoria, including a new global R and D centre, highlights the importance of an attractive, competitive business environment to driving jobs and economic growth.

When we came to office, Victoria had the second highest number of state taxes. Today, we have the second lowest.

We have cut payroll tax from 5.75 per cent to 5.25 per cent.

We have slashed the top rate of land tax from 5 per cent to 3.5 per cent.

We have abolished six taxes under the intergovernmental agreement — and announced the abolition of a seventh tax, rental duty, from 1 January 2007.

Today I am pleased to announce that, at a time of growing cost pressures on Victorian businesses, the government will further reduce business costs by a massive \$1.4 billion over the next four years.

We will cut payroll tax from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent over the next three years — saving over 20 000 Victorian businesses more than \$530 million and bringing to 13 per cent the total reduction in payroll tax since the government came to office.

We will introduce further land tax relief worth \$167 million over the next four years.

We will reduce the middle rates of land tax by 20 per cent.

We will cut the top land tax rate to 3 per cent from 2006–07.

We will cap increases in land tax liabilities for a further year.

We will eliminate indexation factors.

And — for the first time — we will allow people to appeal their land valuations at the time they receive their land tax assessments.

These changes mean that most Victorian businesses with site values between \$400 000 and \$3.4 million will now pay the lowest land tax of any Australian state.

In each of the last two years, the government has cut WorkCover premiums by 10 per cent.

In this budget — for the third consecutive year — we will again reduce WorkCover premiums by 10 per cent, saving Victorian businesses a further \$170 million a year.

This reduction will take Victoria's WorkCover premiums to an historic low — and 25 per cent lower than New South Wales.

These measures will boost the capacity of Victorian businesses to attract investment and generate jobs — and make Victoria the best place in Australia to do business.

Driving jobs and growth

While these cost reductions will significantly relieve the pressure on Victorian businesses, the global environment remains especially challenging for some industries.

That is why this budget delivers a \$73 million boost to the tourism and events industry — including \$52 million to attract exciting new events to Victoria, \$8 million to attract major business events to the new Melbourne convention centre and \$12 million to market Melbourne and Victoria in interstate and international markets.

By making the right choices now, we will build Victoria's industry base for the future — giving ourselves a competitive edge in a world where economic growth and high-value jobs are increasingly driven by innovation, knowledge and creativity.

Victoria is now the leading biotechnology location in our region — home to one in every two people who work in the Australian biotech sector, and attracting around half of all National Health and Medical Research Council grants.

The 2006–07 budget consolidates this leadership by providing \$230 million to support growth in Victorian medical research and life sciences through the *Healthy Futures* statement, released in April.

We will also increase funding to Victoria's film, TV and digital media industries by \$8.9 million; invest \$15 million to develop Victoria's dynamic and growing design industry; and provide \$15 million to boost cutting-edge research in information and communications technologies.

Victoria is now a major hub for financial services, and this budget will provide \$1.4 million for the APEC regional finance centre, which will become the leading international financial regulation and training centre in the Asia Pacific.

Maintaining Victoria's livability

A strong economy is obviously critical to Victoria's capacity to meet the challenges ahead. But so too is a strong environment and a high quality of life.

Funding provided in this budget will help to maintain Victoria as one of the most livable places in the world.

We will invest more than \$90 million to ensure that all Victorians have access to arts and cultural activities, including

improvements to the Arts Centre and the State Library of Victoria.

We will provide \$20 million for a new heritage strategy that will help communities to better understand, care for and manage Victoria's heritage.

And we will provide \$13 million for the Great Parks for a Liveable City program, creating three new metropolitan parks in Werribee, Craigieburn and Melton.

We will also continue to protect and manage Victoria's environment, with a strong focus on managing the state's water resources wisely and responsibly.

We will provide an extra \$160 million for vital water projects, including:

\$30 million towards building a new pipeline to secure Bendigo's water supply and the future of surrounding irrigators;

contributions of \$50 million to the Gippsland Water Factory and an extra \$50 million to the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline; and

an extra \$25 million to vital work being carried out by the Murray Darling Basin Commission.

The government will also release a major sustainability statement later in 2006.

Our leadership on regulation and national reform

The government's leadership in pushing for a comprehensive new national reform agenda is also contributing to jobs and business growth.

Last August, the Premier released *A Third Wave of National Reform*, which outlined Victoria's proposals to raise living standards and lift productivity and work force participation through reforms in health, education, regulation and competition.

In February of this year, the Council of Australian Governments largely accepted Victoria's proposals and agreed to work together on a new national reform agenda.

Victoria remains well ahead of this national reform effort.

The 2006–07 budget reinforces our strong reform credentials by providing \$42 million for new measures that will cut red tape for businesses and non-government organisations by 15 per cent over the next three years.

Delivering high-quality health services

Victoria is also making a substantial contribution of \$124 million to the COAG national reform initiative in health.

We will provide \$87 million to fight obesity, promote health and fitness, and tackle chronic conditions, such as diabetes.

More than 45 per cent of Victorians are overweight or obese — which is not only costing lives but also adding to our health costs.

This new funding will encourage more healthy and active lifestyles for Victorians of all ages — including a new Kids

Go for Your Life program in primary schools and new chronic disease management teams around the state.

And it is just one element of the \$2.5 billion investment in health and community services delivered as part of this budget.

Since coming to office, the government has brought an extra 1300 doctors and an extra 6000 nurses and health care workers back into our health system.

We have rebuilt — or are rebuilding — more than 25 hospitals across the state.

And in 2005–06 our hospitals will have treated 250 000 more patients than were treated in 1999.

In this budget, we will provide funding for the largest health project in Australia's history — the redevelopment of the Royal Children's Hospital.

When this project is completed, Victoria will have one of the most advanced children's hospitals in the world. It is a project that reflects our choice as a government to build new hospitals, not close them down — and it will stand as one of the enduring legacies of the Bracks government.

We will also double the size of the Royal Melbourne Hospital's emergency department, provide a new dialysis and outpatient centre at Box Hill Hospital, rebuild Rochester Hospital, build a new community health centre in North Richmond, and provide funding for a new medical school in Geelong.

We will invest \$498 million to treat an additional 37 000 patients in 2006–07 in our hospitals and to boost areas that are coming under the greatest strain, such as intensive care, maternity services and neonatal care.

We will fund a \$10 million blitz on waiting lists and invest \$114 million to extend successful diversion programs that are reducing hospitalisations for people with chronic and complex conditions.

In a few days time, we will also launch the new Nurse on Call line — a very significant new service that will give Victorians access to health advice provided by registered nurses who will be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week — and that will also help to reduce demand on our hospital emergency departments.

A Fairer Victoria

In 2005, the government released the *A Fairer Victoria* statement.

That statement set out — for the very first time — a clear and unequivocal commitment from a Victorian government to tackle entrenched disadvantage and create new opportunities for disadvantaged people, families and communities.

Again, these are starkly different choices from those made by the previous government.

In last year's budget, we provided \$788 million to fund 85 specific actions under *A Fairer Victoria* — actions that are already making a difference in the lives of many Victorians and their families.

In this budget, we will provide a further \$818 million for *A Fairer Victoria* — with a strong emphasis on giving Victorian children the best start in life.

It is now very clear that investment in the early years of a child's life not only gives them a solid foundation for developing social and other skills, it also generates greater returns for governments than spending money to fix problems later in life.

We are providing a massive boost of \$268 million to protect vulnerable children, improve the wellbeing of children in care, deliver more early intervention services for families and employ more than 100 extra child protection workers.

We will provide \$10 million to provide greater support for disengaged young people who need help to get their lives back on track.

And we will provide \$25 million to boost services for children in Melbourne's fastest growing areas.

Through *A Fairer Victoria*, the government will also deliver:

\$170 million to improve mental health services;

\$67 million for additional disability support services, including \$21 million in new support for young people in nursing homes; and

\$62 million to continue to work with indigenous Victorians to tackle disadvantage and strengthen local communities.

Improving community safety

The government also continues to direct substantial resources towards improving community safety.

Victoria now has the largest number of police officers ever — and our crime rate is more than 16 per cent below the national average.

In this budget, we will provide \$53 million to continue to upgrade our police stations and courts — including a new station at Yarra Junction — and \$109 million to protect Victorians against terrorism and organised crime.

We will continue our tough approach to road safety — an approach that has led to the three lowest road tolls for Victoria since records have been kept.

In this budget — along with an expansion in roadside drug testing — we will invest more than \$520 million through the Transport Accident Commission for the next phase of our road safety strategy.

The government makes no apologies for our approach to road safety. We are determined to get drivers to slow down and to stop driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs to save lives and reduce the numbers of Victorians who are seriously injured on our roads each year.

Making provincial Victoria the best place to live, work and invest

In this budget, the Bracks government continues to meet the commitment we made in our very first budget to grow the whole state.

The budget provides more than \$800 million for provincial Victoria — including major new investment in schools, roads and health and community services.

In Warrnambool, for example, we will provide \$11 million to complete the redevelopment of the South West Institute of TAFE and \$4.6 million for a major modernisation of Warrnambool College.

In Warracknabeal, we will provide \$22 million to redevelop Warracknabeal Nursing Home: one of 39 regional aged care facilities that have been upgraded since 1999.

And in Wodonga, the budget provides a further \$55 million towards the construction of the Wodonga rail bypass.

This budget also provides funds for the \$502 million *Moving Forward* provincial statement, released late last year.

Alongside the extension of the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund, we will provide \$100 million for an entirely new Provincial Victoria Growth Fund to help Victoria's regions continue to drive investment, business and population growth.

As part of Moving Forward, we are also providing significant new support for key regional industries, including:

- an \$11 million package of support for the dairy industry;
- \$27 million for the energy and resource sector; and
- a \$27 million boost for regional tourism.

This budget also provides additional support for farmers, including an extra \$1.5 million to help Victoria's horticulture industry explore new opportunities to improve productivity, upgrade skills and secure jobs.

Giving high priority to schools and skills

As I said at the start of this speech, an educated and skilled work force is crucial to Victoria's future prosperity.

Education has been — and continues to be — this government's highest priority.

We want Victoria to lead Australia in education and skills.

That is why we have made an unprecedented investment in education.

That is why we have built 28 new schools, upgraded hundreds of schools across the state, and brought an extra 6200 teachers and staff back into our school system.

That is why last year in Victoria more apprentices and trainees completed their training than in any other Australian state.

And that is why in this budget we will invest more than \$1 billion in schools and skills.

Today, I announce that the government will introduce a new \$300 School Start bonus for every Victorian child starting prep or year 7.

The bonus will be paid directly to families, with around 125 000 children benefiting each year from this initiative.

We all know that uniforms, books and other equipment can place additional financial stress on families with children starting primary and secondary school.

The new School Start bonus will assist parents to get their children off to school with everything they need — supporting families and highlighting the importance of education.

The full bonus will commence at the start of the 2007 school year.

For the current school year, families with children enrolled in prep or year 7 will receive a half-payment of \$150 to be paid at the commencement of term 3.

In this budget, we will also invest an additional \$448 million in education and training infrastructure.

We will build or complete nine new and replacement schools across Victoria — and provide \$58 million to buy land for 11 new schools in Melbourne's growing outer suburbs.

We will upgrade a further 33 schools and build new specialist facilities at secondary schools in areas such as music, design, science and sport.

But we are not stopping there.

This budget provides \$100 million of those funds to modernise 23 schools, build 4 replacement schools, and build permanent school facilities in 3 country schools at Boneo, Little River and Traralgon.

We will also provide \$20 million to commence major regeneration projects across 25 school sites — projects that will provide the bold new leadership and excellence in education that is needed for Victoria's future.

These projects will include the new John Monash Science School, which will be a leading school for science, technology and innovation located within the Monash University precinct.

Another project will be the Maribymong Sports School at Maribymong College — which will become the school of choice for students seeking excellence in sport and academic performance.

Other schools and communities to benefit from these regeneration projects will include Broadmeadows, Bendigo, Altona and Echuca.

We will also inject \$50 million into school maintenance — bringing forward funds to enable all government schools to immediately fast-track maintenance works.

The government understands just how much this state's future relies upon equipping young Victorians with the right set of skills.

That is why this budget invests \$241 million to deliver the *Maintaining the Advantage* skills statement, released earlier this year.

In addition, the government will introduce a new \$500 trades bonus to give young Victorians an incentive to continue with their apprenticeships — and to improve the current situation where around one-third of apprentices drop out of their apprenticeship in the first year.

The new trades bonus will be paid directly to apprentices in two instalments — with \$250 paid six months into the first year of their apprenticeship and \$250 paid when they re-enrol for their second year.

The new bonus will help around 17 500 young Victorians through a critical time in their apprenticeships — and help to provide the skills that are in demand by Victorian business and industry.

Appropriation bill

The Appropriation (2006/07) Bill provides authority to enable government departments to meet their agreed service delivery responsibilities in 2006–07.

The bill supports a financial management system that recognises the full cost of service delivery in Victoria, and is based on an accrual framework.

Schedule 1 of the bill contains estimates for 2006–07 and provides a comparison with the 2005–06 figures. In line with established practice, the estimates included in schedule 1 are provided on a net appropriation basis.

These estimates do not include certain receipts that are credited to departments pursuant to section 29 of the Financial Management Act 1994.

Last year’s budget continued Victoria’s record of leadership in accounting practice, presenting one of the first financial reports in the nation to be prepared under the Australian equivalents to the international financial reporting standards. The 2006–07 budget consolidates Victoria’s transition to these new standards.

The budget has once again been reviewed by the Auditor-General, as required by the high standards of financial reporting and transparency established by the Bracks government in 2000.

Conclusion

A little over two months ago, Melbourne hosted the biggest and the most successful Commonwealth Games in history.

Nearly 6000 athletes and officials from 71 countries came to Melbourne — supported by around 14 000 enthusiastic volunteers.

The Commonwealth Games have delivered a significant legacy to Victoria — and not only in terms of their economic contribution to the state or in world-class sporting facilities.

They have left their mark in the pride Victorians felt in successfully hosting such a great event and showcasing our state to the rest of the world.

The games might be over, but Victorians can look with confidence to the future.

And just as the Commonwealth Games showed Victoria’s capacity to deliver a world-class event, the 2006–07 budget takes Victoria forward as a world-class state and economy.

In the years ahead Victoria will face many challenges.

The 2006–07 budget makes the right choices to meet and to master those challenges.

It is the finest budget of the Bracks government’s term in office — and it will deliver a stronger, fairer and better future for Victoria.

I commend the bill to the house.

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

Debate adjourned until later this day.

APPROPRIATION (2006/2007) BILL and BUDGET PAPERS 2006–07

Concurrent debate

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — By leave, I move:

That this house authorises and requires the President to permit the second-reading debate on the Appropriation (2006/2007) Bill to be taken concurrently with further debate on the motion to take note of the budget papers 2006–07.

Motion agreed to.

TRANSFER OF LAND (ALPINE RESORTS) BILL

Second reading

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated on motion of Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government).

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) — I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

Incorporated speech as follows:

The amendments to the Transfer of Land Act 1958 and the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 in this bill are agreed actions in the Alpine Resorts 2020 strategy.

This bill makes amendments to facilitate the registration of leases by allowing for variations to any registered lease or sublease to be recorded in the Land Registry. This provision will give more flexibility for all registered leases, whatever their nature, including Crown leases. The bill also facilitates lease registration by clarifying which of the leasing provisions in the Transfer of Land Act 1958 applies to Crown leases. Further, the bill requires only the original lease to be lodged for registration and allows for the immediate conversion of original Crown grants to electronic form.

This bill also makes an amendment to the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 to give the alpine resorts management boards the power to grant leases or licences for a stratum of land. This is required to provide for leases or licences over a dimensioned area below, on or above the

surface of the land for purposes such as overhanging balconies and pedestrian overpasses and also above and below roads in the resorts.

I turn now to the particulars of the bill.

Clauses 3 and 4 of the bill deal with the present provisions in the Transfer of Land Act 1958 that require that when a Crown lease is created, both the original and duplicate lease must be lodged at the Land Registry. The original is registered and a duplicate is returned to the lessee or other appropriate person. The purpose of the amendment is to do away with the duplicate Crown lease documents and provide that the registrar of titles immediately convert the Crown lease to electronic form, in accordance with the manner in which the bulk of land titles and related information are now held.

Clause 5 allows for the variation of a registered lease to be recorded. The type of variation that will be permitted to be recorded will not include parties to a lease, the land that is leased or the term of the lease.

Clauses 6, 7 and 8 of the bill deal with the current requirements in sections 68, 69 and 70 of the Transfer of Land Act 1958. These provisions clearly apply to leases under the Transfer of Land Act 1958 but it is not clear whether they also apply to Crown leases. The amendments make it clear that the provisions apply to Crown leases as well as leases of freehold. The provisions are machinery provisions and I explain this in more detail.

Specifically, clause 6 of the bill extends the provisions of section 68 to Crown leases. Section 68 provides that if the lessee becomes bankrupt, and if the trustee in bankruptcy disclaims interest in the lease, in certain circumstances the mortgagee may become registered as to the lessee's interest, or the landlord may apply for a surrender of the lease. The new provision makes it clear that section 68 will apply to the situation where the lessee of a Crown lease becomes bankrupt.

Clause 7 provides for a substitution of section 69 to extend the provision of the clause to Crown leases. There is a machinery provision that requires the surrender by an appropriate form. This is an alternative method of surrender to the more usual method of transfer to the landlord and will make it possible for this procedure to be followed for a Crown lease and for the procedure to match the general process for other applications in the Land Registry.

Clause 8 extends the provision of section 70 to Crown leases. Section 70 allows for ending the lease in the circumstances where a landlord has re-entered the leased property under a court order, because of the provisions in the lease or because the lessee has abandoned the property. This clause allows for the Crown, as landlord, to take advantage of this provision on the same conditions that apply to any other landlord.

Clause 9 is a transition provision that allows the Transfer of Land Act provisions concerning duplicate leases in section 8(2) or section 28 to apply, as if they had not been amended by this bill, to leases issued before the bill commences.

Clause 11 amends the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 to give the alpine resorts management boards the power to grant leases in stratum. This provides for leases over a dimensioned area below, on or above the surface of the land

and will allow the boards to lease, for example a building where the upper levels overhang the footprint of the building.

The boards currently have general leasing powers in the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 that allow them to grant leases either under the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 with ministers consent or under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978. In addition, power currently exists to allow the minister to grant a lease of land in the Falls Creek Alpine Resort for a stratum of land, although only for limited generation of electricity purposes.

This clause will give boards greater flexibility in the shape of the land and airspace they lease, subject to the same controls that apply to exercising any of their leasing powers. There are additional controls in the clause that mean that before a lease for a stratum of land can be granted, proper consideration must be given to easements and services, and access by a lessee or licensee of other land. The clause also provides for the consent of VicRoads where the stratum is over or under land that is a freeway or an arterial road within the meaning of the Road Management Act 2004.

Clause 12 inserts a new section in the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 which provides similar powers to clause 11 but relating to licences rather than leases. In particular, the clause gives examples of a licence for a stratum where the applicant owns or occupies two pieces of land and wants to pass between the two, or where the stratum is to be used as a crossing over or tunnel under the surface of land. Where a freeway or arterial road is involved, the consent of VicRoads must first be obtained.

Clause 13 amends the Alpine Resorts (Management) Act 1997 to refer to communications systems rather than telephone to account for modern practices.

I commend the bill to the house.

Debate adjourned for Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) on motion of Hon. W. A. Lovell.

Debate adjourned later this day.

APPROPRIATION (2006/2007) BILL and BUDGET PAPERS 2006–07

Second reading

Debate resumed from earlier this day and 8 June; motion of Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance); and Mr LENDERS's motion:

That the Council take note of the budget papers 2006–07.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — At the outset of my contribution I wish to say how sad and shocked I was by the untimely death of Ian Little, the Secretary of the Department of Treasury and Finance. I got to know Ian first when he joined the public service in 1994. As honourable members know, I have had a long interest in matters economic and financial in this place, and I worked with Ian both at a party level, in my

capacities as chair and deputy chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee and in my capacity as parliamentary secretary to the former Premier.

Ian was not just a fine human being, he was an exemplary public servant. He was extraordinarily straight in his dealings with everybody and a pleasure to deal with. He was also a person who thought outside the square. He always put the interests of Victoria first, and we lost a great servant of the state with his untimely death. I send my condolences to his wife and daughters.

I have listened with some amusement to the contributions of government members to this budget debate. One would think, firstly, that they knew what they were talking about and, secondly, that they were responsible for what happens in Victoria. I can say that any detailed analysis of their contributions would show, firstly, that most of them have absolutely no idea what they are talking about; and secondly, that the extent to which they credit the Treasurer, Mr Brumby, for the strength of the economy in Victoria is vastly over the top.

Let us be clear about this: Australia has gone through a period of very strong economic growth. It has done so off the back of the original Hawke and Keating economic changes followed up by the Howard changes. No one party does it all; we have had a succession of changes which have made this economy stronger. Of course, we have been greatly benefited by two things: one is the extraordinary growth of China, which will continue, and the massive demand that that has provided for our resources, leading to a significant increase in the prices that we have been receiving for our commodities. That is not to mention also the federal government's fine effort in achieving a free trade agreement with the USA. Our traded goods sector has been strong as well. Secondly, the boom in the share market has been of significant benefit to Australia.

So rather than the Bracks government congratulating itself on how well it thinks it has done in relation to Victoria's economy, we need to put it in the context of the rest of Australia. There is no doubt at all that the Bracks government and its Treasurer, John Brumby, have done a job miles better than that done by the New South Wales government, which over recent years has behaved as badly as the Cain-Kirner government did.

I hear the groan from members opposite, but just as some people in this place are prepared to recognise that the strength in the Australian economy comes from the work of both the Hawke and Keating governments and the reforms of the Howard government — —

Mr Somyurek — And the world economy.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — And the world economy — so Victorian members of the Labor Party should one day start to recognise that Cain and Kirner turned Victoria into a basket case and that despite the rhetoric that Labor members use, Victoria was dragged out of the hole by the actions of the Kennett government. There is absolutely no doubt about that at all. I saw Brendan Donohue's arguments recently in the newspapers, and he said just that.

It would be nice if periodically the Minister for Finance or some other member might acknowledge that, as New South Wales is now, Victoria was a basket case and that significant actions taken in a timely manner by the Kennett government set us on the path to recovery. The Bracks government has not destroyed that yet! I laugh when I see how proudly it trumpets the fact that it is planning to have an operating surplus of \$100 million. I know the Minister for Finance can do this sum very quickly: what is \$100 million as a percentage of the state's forthcoming general revenue of \$33 billion or \$34 billion? The answer is: not very much.

Mr Lenders — What we promised.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Okay, the government promised \$100 million. I have to say that \$100 million is nothing. If you turn to the budget papers, as I would if I had more time, you will see that in risks to Victoria a 1 per cent change in the economy would wipe out the government's surplus in no time at all.

As I am already running out of time, let me turn to a couple of matters of real interest. Let us talk about state final demand in Victoria. State final demand is a fundamental measure of economic activity. It is an estimate of the level of spending in the local economy by the public and private sectors. Spending is reported on the basis of capital investment and the consumption of goods and services.

What is Victoria's state final demand? In the last quarter it was plus 0.1 per cent. Only two jurisdictions had weaker state final demand than us. One was the Australian Capital Territory at minus 0.2 per cent; the other was New South Wales which did not move at all. In other words our state final demand was behind the comparable figure for every other state — not just the resource-rich states but also South Australia and Tasmania. Excuse me! The government cannot claim it is running the economy well when our state final demand for the last quarter is below that of Tasmania and South Australia. You can see that the Australian average for domestic final demand, which is the

Australian equivalent of state final demand, was plus 0.8 per cent. Victoria's was plus 0.1 per cent — in other words, we are going backwards. There are all sorts of reasons why we are going backwards, but one is that despite the fact we are flush with funds they are not being properly spent.

Mr Lenders — It would be better if we had a fairer GST distribution.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Let me pick up the interjection. It is not fair — I only get 7 more minutes! As an ex-Territorian I think it is important that states like Victoria help the mendicant states — —

Mr Lenders — Are you from Tasmania?

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — No, I am a South Australian and a Territorian.

The GST, about which I remember there being great angst from members opposite, has provided a boon to the state government. But despite that, the funds are not being spent as well as they should be and there is significant concern about the growth in the public sector, both in numbers and in wages. If we get, as the minister knows we may, a further significant reduction in the share market, it will put additional pressure on the government. He is ripping \$600 million from the Transport Accident Commission, which is his portfolio area, and he is doing it by selling it on the Australian Stock Exchange. He is probably out there today selling it because he has to have it all sold by 30 June. Another reason why there was less pressure on the economy this year was the significant returns that came from a high stock exchange, which meant that not as much money as usual needed to go towards funding our ongoing superannuation commitments. This government needs to be careful of how it goes about managing the state's economy.

Despite record tax windfalls we are not seeing the benefits we should. For all the extra taxing and for all the extra spending, we are not getting better services. You can look at anything you like. As members know, I often talk about disability services and I have a few statistics about that. In relation to people on a disability service needs register for shared supported accommodation at 31 December 2005 there were 269 people with carers aged 70 or more. There were 98 people on the needs register for Home First at 31 December 2005 who have carers aged 70 or more. There were 36 people who had carers aged 65 to 94 years, and 163 people with carers aged 55 to 64 years.

Do members know that on average the people who waited for shared supported accommodation places and who obtained a place in a community residential unit had waited for 218 weeks? They are waiting for a place in a community residential unit for more than four years and yet, as I have shown, their carers are getting older and older. Frankly, you worry about the level of service provision in some areas, but you are also greatly concerned that if we can find \$50 million to chuck at the Australian Football League to fix up football grounds, a few funds for the carers and a few funds for the disabled might be a better use of the funds that we have available.

I only have 3 minutes left so I will not go down the Snowy Hydro route to ask what happens about the \$600 million black hole. The government will say it is only \$150 million, but the budget papers note the \$600 million for Snowy Hydro all the way through. As sure as — —

Hon. Andrew Brideson — Night follows day.

Hon. BILL FORWOOD — Thank you, Mr Brideson. As sure as night follows day the money from the sale of Snowy Hydro that was to have been used for schools will have to be found somewhere else, and that will mean a need to cut other programs and other funds in order to finance them. You just cannot believe the things this government says. I can quote so many examples of this government not telling the truth, and I will mention just a small one. Recently the Minister for Housing, who is at the table, said that under former Premier Kennett the government spent \$6 million, yet the Bracks government is now spending \$13 million or \$14 million, or whatever the figure is. The economy has grown, so why is the minister comparing a seven-year-old figure? The minister shakes her head, but she was not comparing apples with apples.

The opposition put a question on notice to the Minister for Aged Care: what was the total capacity of disability services residential care? The response was:

Information collected through the reporting system captures the number of clients accessing residential accommodation services. The capacity of the system is not reported.

There is only one word to describe that answer: bunkum. It is absolute bunkum. The answer is that the government does not want to tell us. How many beds are there in the system? The government knows, but it just does not want to tell us because then we will compare it with the waiting list, which we know is over four years. Despite the strength of the economy and

despite the massive growth in taxes, this government cannot provide the services.

Let me make another couple of quick comments. Will the government please stop saying that there is a \$680 million cut in WorkCover premiums because there is not. There is \$170 million this year but — would you believe it? — the government will count the same \$170 million next year and also in the year after. So to get \$680 million the government counts one figure four times. There are not \$1.4 billion of tax cuts because \$680 million of it is made up of one WorkCover premium reduction — which I welcome — of \$170 million.

It is just not true, and that is the problem with this government. It is full of spin and rhetoric, and it hides and hides and hides. Yes, the economy is strong, but this government has not done anything to put away for the seven bad years. Like New South Wales, the chickens will come home to roost and it will need another Alan Stockdale and another Jeff Kennett to drag us out of the mess that we inherited from the —

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

Ms HADDEN (Ballarat) — I rise to speak on the motion to take note of the budget papers 2006-07; but I must, in following Mr Forwood, agree that the seventh budget delivered by the Bracks Labor government is full of spin and rhetoric and really has failed country Victoria and especially my electorate of Ballarat Province. Country Victoria is not a big winner from this budget. In order to attract the Labor vote, the big winners are the Labor seats around Melbourne and in the outer suburbs of Melbourne.

Let us talk about the sale of Snowy Hydro. It is in the budget papers, and of course the government made a lot of mileage out of it. The Treasurer, Mr Brumby, was quoted in the *Age* of 31 May under the heading 'Spending the surplus: our biggest capital works program' as saying:

We are planning to deliver the biggest one-off investment in school building projects in Victoria's history by providing \$600 million from the sale of Victoria's share of Snowy Hydro.

I could not believe what I was hearing and seeing when the Treasurer was interviewed on *Stateline* on 2 June, and he sat there, stony faced and very serious, saying that of course the schools program would continue. The \$600 million Snowy windfall — which now had him fall flat on his face — would not affect the state's finances!

We know it has and we know it will because we note that the government has proposed to remove that important paragraph from the budget papers. It proposes to delete, on page 11 of the Treasurer's speech, the paragraph:

We are planning to deliver the biggest one-off investment in school building projects in Victoria's history by providing \$600 million from the sale of Victoria's share of Snowy Hydro.

So they are deleting that paragraph and removing from the budget \$600 million which was to go towards the school building program.

Page 94 of budget paper 2 also states:

Of the expected sale proceeds received by Victoria a total of \$600 million will be invested in a once in a generation school building fund — Building Tomorrow's Schools Today ...

Perhaps they ought to rename it 'Building Tomorrow's Schools Tomorrow or Perhaps Into the Next Century' because that is what it will take under this government. Budget paper 3, at page 293, sets out the Building Tomorrow's Schools Today Fund. It has \$56 million out of that fund in the 2006-07 year, and another \$44 million in the 2007-08 year. Yet that entire amount was contingent upon the sale of the Snowy Hydro and we know that it has collapsed so the funds are not going in. The government is in a bit of a mess, but it simply says, 'It will take longer'. It should cut the spin and be honest because country people are not silly.

In relation to the impact that that black hole of \$600 million is having on education I will give some examples. The Roman Catholic Archbishop, Denis Hart, was reported in the *Herald Sun* of 5 June, where he slammed the budget for failing to help his church schools. He said:

It seems that our schools, which are doing such a good job, and are so deserving and are so committed to high standards, don't seem to be being recognised ...

The article goes on to say:

In Victoria, 22 per cent of students attend Catholic schools. They urgently need \$100 million for important capital works.

Yet the government only provides 16 per cent of the funding required. I say: not good enough, Mr Bracks, not good enough.

What the government has also failed to do is to allocate the urgently needed funding for our rural roads and bridges; there is nothing in the budget for that. There is nothing in the budget for the rail standardisation program which he promised over two elections. There was nothing in the budget for irrigation and water

management infrastructure; nothing for critical on-farm infrastructure investment upgrades; nothing for elimination of internationally uncompetitive insurance taxation conditions; and nothing for reasonably delivered and agriculturally relevant education.

In fact the Victorian Farmers Federation was also very critical of the state budget. It said on 30 May:

Big spend misses the mark for farmers.

It went on ABC rural radio as well, saying that the government, with its Victorian budget has:

failed to target pressing road, rail and water infrastructure needs in rural Victoria.

If we look at page 207 of budget paper 3, we can see that the government has cut \$28 million in funding from agriculture. This is vital for the state, given the tenth year of drought, especially in the western part of the state. Yet the government cuts funding that is needed in country Victoria.

Water and the environment are also one of the big losers in the budget, except for Bendigo, where \$30 million was committed for the Erskine pipeline to connect the Goulburn system to Lake Eppalock and to carry water from the Waranga Channel to supply Bendigo. They were very lucky. My electorate got nothing.

And of course, as John Ferguson said in the *Herald Sun* of 5 June:

Bracks is dam lucky.

And 'dam' is spelt 'dam'. He certainly is because when Prime Minister Howard announced that he was no longer selling the federal government's share of the Snowy Hydro, John Ferguson said:

Howard has done Bracks an electoral favour, in one sense.

...

The promise to fix up Victorian schools with \$600 million of Snowy money was always a political ruse.

How true! The Ballarat *Courier* of 5 June, had an article headed 'No Snowy Hydro impact on education pledges'. That was what the government was saying then. It tried to allay fears that education boosts pledged to Ballarat schools would not be shelved with the Snowy Hydro's collapsed sale. And of course those schools are at risk now of not receiving the money that was committed in the budget — for example, \$2.9 million for Urquhart Park Primary School, \$2.4 million for Mount Pleasant Primary School, and \$1.9 million for Creswick Primary School. Schools

have been crying out for funds for those vital infrastructure works for the last seven years, and this government has turned its back in the past and will turn its back again.

Of course the ludicrous part and the spin and rhetoric was that the government spokesperson had the gall to say in this article that the spending was not contained in the forward estimates, and stated that the funds were still there to carry out the education program. Well, hello, have a look at budget papers 2 and 3 — I have just quoted the page numbers. I say to the Premier that he had better sack his media unit because its members are not doing a good job at all. They are disgraceful and embarrassing to him.

The Ballarat *Courier* also had an article on 6 June headed 'Schools are in need of upgrades'. Mary Bluett, Australian Education Union (AEU) Victorian branch president, met with school principals in Ballarat because they were crying out for the government to invest in a long-term plan for public education. The article states:

Ms Bluett said it was estimated that it would cost \$1.9 billion to replace all the buildings.

The schools in the Ballarat central region that need and urgent upgrade are Ballarat Secondary College, Creswick Primary School and Yuille Primary School. Ms Bluett called on the government to come out with a plan that principals could work on, because that was what was needed.

In another article the following day, on 7 June, under a heading 'Quick fix not enough: AEU' Mary Bluett has another dig at the government, because she had met with the principals in the Ballarat region to discuss the need for the Victorian government to keep investing in a long-term plan for public education. She said to the government:

You —

meaning the government —

have got to tell us if you've got a plan, even if it is a 10-year plan.

She is pleading with the government to do something for country schools, and she said that the principals needed a support system in place to let them do the job they were trained to do.

Creswick Primary School principal Rob Dixon said that principals have to take on the roles of plumbers and electricians due to the state of disrepair in the schools and the urgent need of upgrades.

The Ballarat *Courier* of 31 May had a heading, 'Big spend-up puts government on election track'. That was before the Snowy Hydro sale fell over, and that was before the government had to remove that vital paragraph from its budget speech. It then said it would find \$600 million, but I do not think it will now, since it has removed it from the budget speech, accordingly to Mr Lender's announcement earlier. The Ballarat *Courier* reports, in that article:

The budget estimates a 3 per cent drop in total revenue of around \$750 million as a result of the cuts to middle and upper land tax rates.

I will speak about that a little later, if I have time, but I want to go on. The editorial says that private homebuyers have missed out, with stamp duty on homes remaining untouched. That is true, and it really hurts families, small businesses and other people buying their first home or property. The Ballarat *Courier* editorial also states:

The government will continue to reap the benefits of payroll taxes, stamp duties and gaming taxes, all of which will contribute a combined total of more than \$7 billion to the state's coffers.

Ballarat has around 674 gaming machines — that is, 218 more than the state average — and \$55 million a year leaves Ballarat from the pockets of the struggling and vulnerable families of those who gamble and goes into the state treasury. Ballarat cannot afford that, so I say remove the extra gaming machines and bring the number back to the state average, at least. Victorian gamblers lose more than \$4.3 billion a year, and pokie players lose \$2.4 billion a year, but still there is no promise by this government to reduce the number of gaming machines. Shame on the government because its lack of action impacts on and attacks vulnerable people who cannot afford to be addicted to those ghastly machines.

The Ballarat *Courier* showed another mixed budget reaction in an article on 1 June which states:

The state budget was a budget of missed opportunities, according to the Australian Medical Association's Victoria president Dr Mark Yates.

Dr Yates, of Ballarat, said the budget was disappointing and lacked vision for the future of the state's health care.

He said that Treasurer Brumby had failed in the areas of hospital beds, mental health and the medical work force. There was also criticism from Ballarat Trades Hall secretary Graeme Shearer, who was looking for the government to be generous and increase the level of benefits paid to injured workers.

Municipal Association of Victoria president Cr Geoff Lake, a member of the Labor Party, attacked the lack of funds for local government which were needed to take the pressure off community services infrastructure. He went on to say in his press release of 30 May that local government had been largely ignored despite mounting cost pressures and crumbling infrastructure.

I called for appropriate funding in the budget for an increase in police numbers in Ballarat. There was no money in the police budget for that; that was not granted. I called for a special accommodation home in Ballarat for young disabled adults. A sum of \$20.8 million was committed, subject to matching funds from the commonwealth, which means Ballarat will not see that. I called for provision of a water purification plant at Cosgrove Reservoir at Creswick, which was committed and promised by Central Highlands Water back in 1998-99, but that was not provided for in the budget. I called for level crossing upgrades on the Ballarat-Ararat passenger line and especially for boom gates, flashing lights and warning bells at the Ercildoune Road level crossing after the Trawalla train crash fatalities on 28 April, but that was not provided for in the budget.

I called for upgrades of the Ballarat-Mildura freight line. I think the only commitment in the budget was the sum of \$53 million to upgrade some of the track, which will cost in excess of \$200 million. But, again, the fine print says 'subject to commonwealth funding', which means that money will never be spent and the work will never get done. I called for rail standardisation of the Ballarat-Mildura railway line, as was promised in 1999 and 2002 in preparation for the promised return of the passenger service to Mildura. That was not in the budget. I called for a massive injection of funds to local government for urgent road and bridge maintenance and upgrades, and for local planning policy reviews. That was not in the budget. I called for money to complete natural gas reticulation to all of Creswick, including its industries, as promised by Premier Bracks at the Creswick town hall on 10 November 2002. That was not in the budget. There was not much in the budget for my electorate, I can tell you.

Let us talk about state debt increasing from 1 per cent to 2.5 per cent of gross state product, or from \$2 billion to over \$7 billion by 2010. The government has a bit of a problem, and I think it might have something to do with the fact that it has a schoolteacher running the state treasury and not an economist. Treasurer Brumby will know what I am talking about there.

The land tax threshold is \$200 000 in this state. Why do we not take the lead from Queensland, which has just

released its budget? Its tax threshold was increased from \$450 000 to \$500 000. Why do we not follow suit? Queensland's share of the GST is \$7.97 billion, our share is \$8.5 billion. Queensland has also reduced its stamp duty costs on the purchase of property. Why do we not do that? The impact of that in Queensland is that it has a population growing by 1500 people every week. Why do we not follow suit? Queensland is doing a pretty good job. Its economy is growing by 4.25 per cent. Our economic growth is 2.5 per cent. We are way behind Queensland. I say to this government: have a chat to Peter Beattie. He seems to be running his state pretty well in that respect. Stamp duty ought to be reduced in line with Queensland, I suggest, because it has a big impact on young families and small businesses.

Land tax — what a joke. There is a — —

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

Ms ARGONDIZZO (Templestowe) — I am very pleased to make my contribution in support of the 2006–07 budget. I would like to join with my colleagues on this side of the house to congratulate the Treasurer on the delivery of a budget which I believe has something for everybody in our community. I read an article in the *Herald Sun*, I think it was, last week or the week before, when the budget was delivered, in which somebody in their mid-30s said there was nothing in the budget for them. Indirectly there is lots in it for most people. I am sure he drives a car on our roads, and the new roads, traffic signals and pedestrian crossings et cetera are there for that person as well, even if they are not a direct contribution to that person.

The \$300 School Start bonus that is being given to families who have a prep or year 7 child is extremely welcome. I have had many thankyou calls to my office for the \$300 that people are going to get next year. The \$150 each that 1200 families in my electorate are going to benefit from in July has been welcomed. Anybody who has had a prep starter or a year 7 student knows there are many things that need to be provided for during that time, and the \$300 will be welcomed by those parents.

The \$500 trade bonus, of which 50 per cent will be paid six months into the apprenticeships and the balance on completion of year 1, is subject to re-enrolment as an incentive to a group of young people because they earn very low incomes and often need an incentive to continue with their apprenticeships. It is difficult in some cases and for all kinds of reasons for these young people to go on to their second year, be it a financial

difficulty or their having lost interest. I believe the \$500 will be an incentive which will reduce the drop-out rate of apprentices and encourage them to complete their apprenticeships.

The additional funding for neighbourhood houses is more than welcomed. I have been an advocate for many years of neighbourhood houses and the great work that they do. I am a member of the parliamentary Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee. We have received many submissions from neighbourhood houses across Victoria, highlighting the need for their services to be supported and funded.

This year's budget recognises the importance of the work undertaken by neighbourhood houses through an increase in allocated funds. I have also had representations from local neighbourhood houses that do a fantastic job in the area. Many groups of different nationalities with different socioeconomic backgrounds gather to find common threads or interests within those communities. I congratulate them for the work that they do, and I am pleased with the increase in funds.

Some \$50 million was allocated for the maintenance of schools throughout the state. Many schools, of which there is quite a list, in Templestowe Province will benefit from the funds. I point out that last week the member for Doncaster in the other place, in his contribution to debate on the budget, claimed that, for example, Birralee Primary School had not received funding in the budget. He was wrong, because that school has received funding in excess of \$200 000, with over \$100 000 for maintenance for the school and in excess of \$100 000 for desperately needed improvements to the administration area.

There are other schools on the list, but that is the example I have used because the member for Doncaster made claims that were untrue. There are other schools in Templestowe Province that will benefit from maintenance funding, which I welcome.

In relation to transport, the Manningham area will benefit from \$83 million bus upgrades, which will not only result in additional services but also increases in the frequency of some of the current services. Bus users in the area will welcome this initiative. They continually call us and express their concern about the need for additional services and increases in the frequency of services. I hope \$83 million will buy a substantial number of services in the area.

Funds for other initiatives include \$600 000 for controlled signalling at the intersection of Victoria and King streets, Templestowe. I have worked tirelessly

towards achieving funding for controlled signals, which will make this an excellent initiative for safety reasons. The intersection has been very difficult for drivers, pedestrians and bike riders to negotiate. This upgrade will not only allow vehicles and bike riders to safely use the intersection but pedestrians will be able to cross the road safely. Prior to the budget an allocation of \$400 000 was made for bus shelters on King Street, and they are in the process of being built. They look sensational. They will encourage bus patronage and public transport use.

Four intersections have been funded in the budget: Manningham–Bulleen roads, which had \$95 000 allocated to it; Manningham Road–Grand Olson Avenue, Bulleen, received \$136 000; Reynolds–Blackburn roads, Templestowe, received \$257 000; and Williamsons Road–Lynnwood Parade–King Street, Lower Templestowe, received \$137 000. These four intersections desperately needed updating and upgrading, and a total of \$625 000 was allocated to them.

The Heide Museum of Modern Art has had substantial funding in past years. Again it will receive \$194 000 in this budget and a further \$776 000 in the next budget. The Heide gallery is a fabulous asset to the area and a worthy recipient of the funds. It has a brilliant exposé of artwork, and anybody who has not visited Heide should do so.

The outpatients, dialysis centre and associated redevelopment works at the Box Hill Hospital will receive \$38.2 million. Templestowe Province has the new Austin and Mercy hospitals as well as a new mental health facility that is currently being built in the same grounds. Now at the eastern end of the province there will be improvements of \$38.2 million to the Box Hill Hospital — a very welcome initiative. Many people at the Doncaster end of the electorate use the Box Hill Hospital, and I am sure they will be pleased with the allocation of funds towards it.

I believe this is a balanced budget that will provide savings to Victorian business through cuts in payroll tax, land tax and WorkCover premiums and allocate necessary funds to services that are needed to maintain a strong, resilient community. This is an excellent budget, and I commend it to the house.

Hon. E. G. STONEY (Central Highlands) — I shall restrict my comments mainly to fire management and the general management of public land. I draw the attention of the house to page 227 of budget paper 3 and the heading ‘Fire prevention, operations and planning’. The line item under ‘Quantity’ states:

Fuel reduction burning completed to protect key assets.

That shows that the 2006–07 target is 130 000 hectares, that the 2005–06 expected outcome is 130 000 hectares, that the 2005–06 target is 130 000 hectares, and that the 2004–05 actual figure was 127 000 hectares.

I am not the only one who finds the budget papers hard to decipher. I understand that when it relates to fire management, the figures have been collated using financial years, but I point out that we are nearly at the end of the current financial year. The figures I have just read out indicate that 130 000 hectares will be burnt as a fuel reduction measure this year, and indeed, next year. As I said, the budget claims that next year the expected outcome will probably be 130 000 hectares.

I have been doing some digging, and it appears the true figure for 2005–06 was 43 000 hectares which were burnt up to 26 May. My information is that 43 000 hectares were cool burnt — protectively burnt — not 130 000 hectares as has been claimed in the budget.

I have here an internal publication which is not for public consumption but which was widely circulated within the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). It is dated 26 May 2006 and reveals the true figures. It shows that the budget figures are indeed a sham. Under the heading ‘Prescribed burning’ it says:

Since the last report 30 burns were conducted. In addition, 24 burns were conducted for regeneration purposes.

... 262 fuel reduction/ecological burns have been conducted. DSE has ... conducted 169 burns for regeneration ... The area treated to date this year is about 43 000 hectares ... and is about 33 per cent of this year’s program.

This document also goes on to show that DSE has got around to planning and done the paperwork for only 83 000 of the 133 000 hectares listed in the budget. Over the page there is a column which shows that the program in 2005–06 was for 131 000 hectares but that the total estimated area treated was 43 000 hectares. I understand the department has now moved to using the calendar year rather than the financial year, probably to obscure things a little further. A footnote states:

... actual program will vary in response to weather conditions and other external factors.

A further footnote states:

... area treated may vary by up to 10 per cent.

I need to explain that 43 000 hectares is 33 per cent of the 130 000 hectares listed in the budget. It is quite obvious that the government has completed only 33 per cent of the program. As Professor Julius Sumner Miller,

who appeared on television some years ago, would ask: why is this so? It appears that we are facing a cover-up of major proportions. You would ask, 'Why would the government cover this up?'. Of course you have to look at the history and the pressure the government is under on the whole issue of bushfires. We remember the alpine fires, which were followed by the Grampians fires and many other fires. It became quite obvious that the government was not doing enough fuel reduction burning. The public reaction was severe. The government needed to be seen to be doing a lot more fuel reduction burning, and if it could not do the actual burning I guess it decided to deflect criticism by using spin. It submitted figures that sound good but are not correct. That is all that really matters to the government — that it appears to be doing the right thing.

I am claiming that the figure in the budget of 130 000 hectares to be cool burnt — protectively burnt — is not correct. I am claiming there is a major cover-up in the budget figures pertaining to the area that was actually burnt to reduce fuel. The budget claims that for the 2005–06 financial year the expected outcome of prescribed burning will be 130 000 hectares. The budget was brought down on 29 May. In the same week the DSE internal web site revealed that only 43 000 hectares had been burnt, as I have just said. There is a major discrepancy between what the budget said and what the internal web site in the same week showed had actually been done. There are only three weeks until the end of the financial year. The burning season has almost finished in most areas and has not started in others, so the government is never going to achieve its target — and it must have known that when it printed the budget.

In 2004–05 the actual figure claimed was for a prescribed burn of 127 000 hectares, but given what I have just revealed, how do we know that was correct? How do we know this practice has not been going on for some years? Anecdotal evidence and leaks from embarrassed DSE employees suggests there has been a fudging of the figures for some years. It is worth noting that between 1997–98 and 2001–02 the Auditor-General had a look at the fuel reduction figures and found: in 1997–98 there were 25 000 hectares burnt, in 1998–99 there were 80 000 hectares burnt, in 1999–2000 there were 60 000 hectares burnt and in 2000–01 there were 40 000 hectares burnt. Since then the Auditor-General has not looked at the government's claims that it has burnt as follows: in 2002–03, 57 000 hectares; in 2003–04, 96 000 hectares; in 2004–05, 127 000 hectares; and, as I said, in 2005–06, 130 000 hectares.

It would be terrific if the Auditor-General had a look at the government's claims of how much has been protectively burnt in the past few years, including this year. I think he would probably find that the government has fudged the figures, as I have just demonstrated conclusively. It is quite obvious that the government does not intend to burn any more than 130 000 hectares, despite the budget announcing another \$27.6 million over four years for this activity. When you look at it, you realise that is not much per year over four years.

Fuel reduction burning has to be done over a short period. In the mountains it is mostly in the autumn; in the Mallee and East Gippsland it can be at other times of the year. A basic problem is that there is simply not enough staff available at those critical times to do the burning in the window of opportunity that is available. I have always said that I think DSE and the government need to be braver in the way they burn — and they need to explain to the public that they need to be braver. Back in the 1970s and 1980s the Forests Commission was braver. It got a lot more done, and it got it done quite safely. Another problem is that these days DSE is distracted. It has many other things on its plate — the built environment, the coast, deciding what colour people are allowed to use on houses in the city — and unfortunately fire prevention is well down the list. There are simply not enough dedicated fire management staff to do the job at peak times of the year, and money alone will not fix the problem.

It is a fact that perhaps four times the target figure of 130 000 hectares has to be burnt each year to have any long-term effect, so if DSE cannot burn even 130 000 hectares, we have an enormous problem. A further issue is that there has to be so much signing-off by other agencies before a burn can be completed. Without Parks Victoria, in particular, signing off, the DSE protective burning programs just stop dead in their tracks. This is very frustrating for DSE. We are bogged down in bureaucracy.

There are several main issues: lack of staff at the critical times, the difficulty of dealing with other management agencies and the diversion of DSE staff from their core business, such as fire prevention. It is glaringly obvious that we need one agency that is solely responsible for forests and public land management. We need an agency that does not have to get agreement from other agencies on fuel reduction burning. We need to remind ourselves that the Bracks government will go down in history as presiding over some of the worst destruction by fire ever seen in this state.

We had the Alpine, Mount Buffalo, Snowy River and Wyperfeld national park bushfires, then we had the Lind National Park and Wilson's Promontory bushfires, and then we had the Grampians, Brisbane Ranges and Kinglake major fires, which destroyed an enormous number of beautiful trees. Now the alpine ash trees that were killed in the bushfires are being sent as woodchips to Japan because they are practically worthless for anything else.

The Premier and his staff should take a bit of time out from encouraging people to go up and look at how wonderful the forest regeneration is, and dig deeper to find out the cause of some of those bushfires. Failed fire management procedures are the cause, and regrettably there is nothing in this budget that will fix that basic flaw in our whole system.

The state of the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and of Parks Victoria and the lack of fuel reduction burning has concerned many people and groups. In no particular order I name but just some that have given voice to these concerns. They are the Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria, BUG, Country Voice, blog sites such as Save Our Snowy, the Stretton Group, Forest Fire Victoria, and the Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF). Every neighbour of our state forests and national parks has an adverse view on how good the department's management is.

Many knowledgeable individuals, including Rod Incoll, Peter Attiwill, David Packham, Athol Hodgson, Ralph Barraclough, bless his heart, and many more people have come out and expressed concern. They cannot all be wrong. Over the summer several eminent bushfire experts, including Rod Incoll and David Packham, who are two eminent and experienced people, went and looked at Wonnangatta. I happened to be there with the mountain cattlemen and others.

Hon. Philip Davis — Just by chance.

Hon. E. G. STONEY — Just by chance. They saw the fire there and pulled up at the fire. It was pointed out that Wonnangatta has been closed to grazing since 1988. Wonnangatta is a fire trap. One day there could be a major, major incident in the whole of the Wonnangatta Valley. David Packham said to me, and I am speaking from memory, 'If a major fire started and swept up the valley, some people might survive'. In the summer 200 or 300 people could be camped in there.

In a report about it Rod Incoll said:

Fire is the essence of eucalypt forests, and therefore must be the mainspring of their conservation. Systematic broad-scale fuel reduction is the way it has to be done.

Perhaps because an increasingly urban Australia is no longer connected to the landscape, public land policy makers seem to view fire management as 'negative', 'difficult', and too demanding of resources. By contrast, systematic fuel management has been shown to be the answer in other Australian states.

Successive high-intensity bushfires prove that glossy posters and rhetoric are no replacement for action.

This is the key bit:

Until a broad-scale program of fire management is widely implemented across forested public lands, continuing widespread and serious bushfires will occur in the mountains. You can rely on it.

Rod Incoll was the department's chief fire officer for some years, and he certainly knows his stuff.

Professor Peter Attiwill was there as well. A bit later he went in with Chris Commins of the Mountain Cattlemen's Association, which sponsored that trip. *Stock & Land* did a big feature article on the trip, which states:

Alpine, botany and fire specialists all say there should be a management burn as soon as possible. Park management should also reintroduce seasonal grazing of cattle as an accepted and valuable management tool.

...

Professor Attiwill said there should be an immediate assessment of the infestation of cape broom and other weeds and appropriate control measures taken.

He said the concept of banning cattle grazing to return the high country to its 'pristine' pre-European settlement condition was flawed.

I think they are some sensible comments from a very eminent professor who certainly knows what he is talking about.

I draw the attention of the house to a major problem. There is a major problem with the ethical reporting of hectares of fuel reduction burning. The government needs to be more realistic about it. If it is having trouble with it, it should come clean. We all know it is a very difficult thing to do, but it is just deceiving the Victorian public for the government to claim that it is burning vast areas of land when it is not.

Mr SCHEFFER (Monash) — The 2006–07 budget will have a very positive impact on the residents of Monash Province. This budget represents the latest instalment in a consistent and coherent policy strategy that has shaped every budget since the election of the Bracks government in 1999. This budget demonstrates again how well this government has kept its election promises made to Victorians in the 2002 state election.

The government has been focused on delivering the election commitments as detailed in *Labor's Financial Statement 2002*, known as the LFS. The LFS contains 138 commitments that were drawn from the 2002 ALP platform Listens then Acts.

Budget paper 2, *Strategy and Outlook*, says that all of our 138 output commitments were funded for implementation following the 2004–05 budget, and that following the 2005–06 budget there are now five remaining partially funded asset initiatives. Budget paper 2 says these remaining initiatives have now, in the current budget, been fully funded and it directs readers to the details in budget paper 3, chapter 4, 'Election commitments — implementation report card'.

In the current term, the Bracks government has released two documents that have listed progress in delivering on its election commitments as set out in *Labor's Financial Statement 2002*. But accountability is more than simply ticking off the specific commitments made during an election campaign. Accountability should also be measured by how consistently and successfully the government shapes overall policy directions. The document that informs everything the government does is *Growing Victoria Together*, first released early in our first term and updated in March 2005. *Growing Victoria Together* sets out the challenges facing Victoria and the government's broad strategic objectives to tackle these challenges and how we will measure the success of these strategies.

In the 2005 update the government considered Victoria's changing environment and identified some crucial challenges ahead, involving job creation, industry development, redeveloping and expanding transport networks, improving health, community services and education and training, better environment protection and community building. These challenges and the programs to address them can also be found in the budget papers, and they are the basis of the objectives of the 2006–07 budget.

I mentioned in this house last week that the *Age* state budget editorial of Thursday, 1 June criticises the government for failing to get the politics versus policy balance right and for having no grand vision. I want to say again now, in the context of the budget debate, that while there is always opportunity in a democracy for different views about our policies and administration, and there are of course matters that we can improve upon, I think the government has plenty to be proud of.

As I said last week, I am absolutely comfortable with a government that rejects triumphalism and grand gestures. The evidence is that we have been very

successful in getting the policy and politics balance right, and we need to look no further than the high level of support we have amongst the voters.

The government's vision is clearly stated in *Growing Victoria Together* and in the raft of detailed policy papers that have been developed out of it, such as *Meeting Our Transport Challenges*; *Moving Forward — Making Provincial Victoria the Best Place to Live, Work and Invest*; *Maintaining the Advantage: Skilled Victorians*; and *Healthy Futures*, just to name a few. All the initiatives contained in the budget draw their coherence from the budget's objectives and priorities on financial management, delivering quality infrastructure, better service delivery and promoting a fair and efficient tax system.

I think the state budget is good evidence of the kind of accountability that Victorians want from Labor governments, because its links to government policy are clear.

I turn now to some of the specific measures in the budget that have been welcomed in Monash Province.

The first is the \$23.5 million allocation for the start of the major building upgrade at the Caulfield General Medical Centre that has been very widely welcomed. Everyone in Caulfield and Glen Eira knows that since its election in 1999 the government has been committed to the comprehensive rebuilding of the Caulfield General Medical Centre and that the master plan is now almost settled.

The first stage of the full redevelopment will establish a logistics building and provide new facilities for the receiving kitchen, engineering services, materials management and plant. The works will replace critical elements of the electrical engineering infrastructure and support further planning and preliminary design for the full development of the site. The \$23.5 million for Caulfield is part of a \$188 million allocation to develop almost 300 aged care beds throughout Victoria.

The budget also provides \$20.2 million to redevelop and upgrade the Alfred hospital's intensive care unit. The Alfred provides high-quality intensive care medical services, and the \$20.2 million upgrade will mean those services can be maintained and improved.

Overall the budget provides an additional \$130 million in the 2006–2007 year — and \$508 million over four years — to help hospitals better manage the growing demand for hospital services, to treat more patients and to work out new models of care to reduce the pressure on emergency departments and acute care services. This funding maintains the recent performance gains

made in hospital services and will improve patient access to critical care, elective surgery and specialised programs targeting chronic and complex conditions. This budget allocation enables a continued focus on developing better preventative care for inpatients, for example, and for alternative services so that people have less need to be admitted to hospital.

Overall this budget provides an additional \$10.6 million, or \$44.03 million over four years, under the Supporting Our Seniors initiative, including home and community care (HACC). In areas such as Caulfield in the city of Glen Eira, which has an ageing demographic, HACC services play a critical role in supporting elderly people and younger people with disabilities to maintain independent living at home and in the community. As the number of older people grows and the demand for services for people with disabilities increases, HACC funding becomes more important than ever. The other important purposes that HACC plays is in supporting individuals and health services by helping reduce the length of hospital stays and avoiding having people admitted to residential care.

There are three Universities of the Third Age (U3As) in Monash Province — in Glen Eira, Stonnington and Port Phillip — and they do a fantastic job in running high-quality community education programs. U3As pride themselves on their level of self reliance and the fact that they do not depend on government money or charities. Nonetheless, like all community organisations U3As appreciate support, and I know they welcome the additional \$53 million budget allocation under the Supporting Our Seniors initiative because it has included funding for them.

Another initiative that will make a big difference to older people is the extra \$2 million over the next four years to make sure an additional 1200 older Victorians will be able to have a personal alarm system to help them live independently and safely; a total of \$8.24 million for monitored alarm services will assist 20 255 older people in the community.

Education continues to be a top priority of the Bracks government. The state budget allocates an additional \$1.2 billion to the building of new schools, the refurbishing of existing schools and improving literacy skills. It is worth remembering that the state government has invested \$6.3 billion in education since its election in 1999. Half of all government schools — about 687 of them — will receive some funding for major works. Skills formation is especially important, and the government is investing \$367 million to boost the skills of our work force with \$36 million over four years to be directed at apprentices, giving each of

them \$500 in their first year as an encouragement for them to complete their courses.

As well, the government is tripling the current apprentice and trainee accommodation allowance to help apprentices and trainees attend off-the-job, away-from-home training at TAFE or private training organisations. The government has allocated \$241 million for skills development and \$15.5 million for new training opportunities in areas of high regional demand.

The budgets also sees continued support for the schools renovation and excellence program. This program brings together clusters of primary and secondary schools to work together to improve student learning. The allocated \$24.1 million over two years will employ 250 leading teachers to continue their work on improving the learning of years 5 to 9 students and allow teachers time to improve their class room teaching.

Another \$11.6 million is allocated to develop the skills and expertise of school leaders, and this will improve the quality of teaching; and another \$11.7 million is allocated to employ 45 literacy specialists to work with classroom teachers in government schools as part of new literacy improvement teams.

The government has announced further funding for A Fairer Victoria. In addition to the \$788 million allocated in last year's budget the government has announced A Fairer Victoria — Progress and the Next Steps, which invests a further \$848 million in the 14 strategy areas that include meeting the needs of Victoria's growth areas and Victoria's disadvantaged places, giving children the best start possible in life, addressing disadvantage caused by homelessness, tackling disadvantage within multicultural communities and improving community transport.

As part of A Fairer Victoria the government has allocated an additional \$16.7 million, or \$63.7 million over four years, for disability services. The government is determined to ensure that accessible services will enable people with a disability to live independently and has just allocated over \$3 million — \$12.66 million over four years — to help young people's participation in day services.

As well, \$1.7 million has been allocated under the commonwealth-state matching funding arrangement to help reduce the number of people under the age of 50 years living in residential aged care services. This funding will be used to support moving young people

from inappropriate placement in residential aged care facilities.

Improving accommodation options for younger people with a disability combined with a \$10 million disability housing trust will give all people with a disability more and better housing choices and the best chance to improve their quality of life and participation in the community. The establishment of an Office of Disability within the Department for Victorian Communities has, along with so much else in this budget, been very widely welcomed.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the government on the allocation of an extra \$14.4 million over four years to enhance language and interpreter services that will increase assistance to multicultural community groups and for multicultural events and multifaith initiatives promoting racial and religious harmony.

Throughout the budget debate we have heard the opposition and The Nationals say that the Victorian government is cashed up because of a supposed GST windfall and that Victoria's strong financial position is the result of the federal government's good management, so I was very interested to hear on *Lateline* last Friday the Macquarie Bank's Rory Robertson say that the so-called GST bonanza is a gross exaggeration and that this financial year the states combined received combined \$1.2 billion while the federal government received \$25 billion. Robertson said that in an economy that is \$1000 billion in size the so-called GST bonanza to the states is 0.1 per cent of 1 per cent of GDP. He said it is essentially a rounding error in the federal budget. Phillip Lasker ended his story by saying that the GST could well prove to be an inadequate source of funding for state governments if it is not increased.

The 2006–07 Victorian budget is a sound budget that is financially responsible, and it provides considerable benefits to many Victorians, especially those who are doing it tough. I commend it to the house.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — If ever I heard an absurd speech, that was it. Mr Scheffer talked about the commonwealth government receiving \$25 billion. What a foolish statement for any member of this place to make! The previous speaker should be ashamed. He should go back to his colleagues and ask them to explain the revenue-sharing arrangements in relation to the GST.

I will not be diverted from what I intend to say by the distraction of absurd comments from members of the government. My speech will reflect entirely on the

failure of the Bracks government to deliver anything of meaningful benefit to rural Victorians over the last seven years. We have seen seven wasted years, because of — —

Honourable members interjecting.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon. R. H. Bowden) — Order! There is too much cross-chamber conversation.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — There have been seven wasted years. Notwithstanding the fact that this is the highest taxing and highest spending government in the history of Victoria and that this is the highest taxing and highest spending budget in the history of Victoria, the debt truck of Steve Bracks and John Brumby has arrived — or perhaps it would be better described as a wheelbarrow being pushed uphill by a boy who has a job in front of him. The problem is that this debt truck or wheelbarrow has a big hole in it. It took less than 72 hours from the bringing down of the budget for this hole to be revealed. What is the hole? It is the money referred to as the proceeds of the sale of Victoria's interest in Snowy Hydro Ltd.

The government had claimed that around \$600 million would be received from the sale of the Snowy, and this was understood to be a conservative estimate. The market estimates were more of the order of \$900 million. The government had factored the receipt of at least \$600 million into its calculations and commitments, in particular to education. Those funds are now unavailable, simply because the government did not understand the consequences of the policy initiative it had taken with respect to the proposal to sell Snowy Hydro.

Having seen the collapse of the Snowy sale, let us understand that this was but one of a number of illusory accounting vehicles to improve the government's public face in terms of its outlays. Firstly, it accounted for a one-off proposition of selling the Snowy Hydro; secondly, it stripped \$600 million of motorists' funds from the Transport Accident Commission in addition to the usual dividends it takes from it on a regular basis; and thirdly, it cashed in \$2.9 billion in future payments due from Transurban for a quick return of \$609 million. That is similar to borrowing money at an interest rate of 9.7 per cent when it could have been obtained in the market for around 6 per cent.

It is evident that the market has factored in this special deal between John Brumby and Transurban by an increase in Transurban's market capitalisation — that is, the value of Transurban on the market — of

\$220 million. The net result is therefore that Victorian taxpayers miss out, because Steve Bracks and John Brumby are going back to the Cain-Kirner era of doing funny-money deals. The reason is a mystery to all of us, given the extraordinary revenue situation of the state of Victoria.

Taxes have been increasing incrementally. Land tax has gone up by 104 per cent; stamp duty has increased by 120 per cent; police fines have increased by 226 per cent; fees, fines and charges are increasing automatically by the consumer price index; insurance taxes have doubled to more than \$1 billion; and the poker machine levy doubled last year from \$46 million to \$91 million, which is a \$45 million increase. In addition we have seen the introduction of land tax on properties owned through trusts, a \$800 city car-parking tax, an infrastructure levy that will add around \$8000 to the cost of an average block of land, a 5 per cent water levy, and last week we saw in this house the introduction of a further infrastructure development tax. All these tax measures have, along with the additional revenue from GST, put Victoria into an extraordinarily rich cash flow environment. So it is beyond belief that the government should now, in its projections, be taking the debt route.

Over the budget forecast period debt rises from \$1.5 billion in 2005 to \$7.1 billion by June 2010. That is a massive increase of 373 per cent in just five years. Why should we be concerned about that? We should be alarmed that this debt is accreting in a period which is, without exception, one of the nine financial indicators, yet the state government is unable to get its spending under control. What do we see for this increasing debt, increased spending and increased taxes? We see very little. What do people have to say about the state budget just from the limited perspective I am presenting in speaking from a rural Victorian point of view? Predictably some people had something to say about this.

The Victorian Farmers Federation—I would say quite independently and objectively—had something to say about this on page 29 of the *Geelong Advertiser* of Tuesday, 6 June. The article states:

Farmers will be disappointed the biggest infrastructure spending in Victoria's history has ignored the top priorities of the farm community, according to the Victorian Farmers Federation.

...

'The VFF is also very concerned about the scheduled long-term decline in the Department of Primary Industries budget', Mr Ramsay said.

...

'Farmers across Victoria will be extremely disappointed to learn that no funding has been allocated to repair or upgrade their deteriorating local roads and bridges.

It is interesting that Mr Ramsay said that. The Minister for Agriculture in another place, Mr Cameron, has identified, singled out and attacked Mr Ramsay because he is not someone who is politically sympathetic to Mr Cameron. I would argue that he has been vilified by Mr Cameron, which is an extraordinary situation given that the Minister for Agriculture and the president of the Victorian Farmers Federation should have a cooperative working relationship. My point is that Mr Ramsey is not the only one who is making these comments.

Mr Geoff Lake, the president of the Municipal Association of Victoria, who is a well-known Labor Party activist, indeed a Labor councillor, said on 30 May in his media release that the budget disappoints councils. The press release also says:

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) said today's state budget fails local government with no new funding to take the pressure off community services or infrastructure.

MAV president, Cr Geoff Lake, said early analysis shows local government has largely been ignored despite mounting cost pressures and crumbling infrastructure.

Geoff Lake said further:

Ratepayers are increasingly bearing the costs of roads, public libraries, maternal and child health services and infrastructure as highlighted by the MAV in its budget submission to the state government.

I simply make this point to members of the house: it is becoming increasingly evident that, notwithstanding the capacity of the state to invest in the infrastructure required in the country with the cash available to the state, it is beyond the competence of the government to manage its budget effectively to allow that infrastructure investment to be made. That is because of the waste and mismanagement which is replete across the whole public sector and in particular in relation to any significant projects. I am not going to bore members of the house with a recitation of those projects, but we know there is virtually no project which has either been managed or initiated by the Bracks government which has not blown out significantly in terms of cost or time lines, and the projects themselves have been underwhelming in terms of the outcomes for the community.

It is fair to say that the concerns of the community are summarised in these terms with respect to country Victoria: there has been a spending cut of \$28 million

in primary industries. That is apparently an insult to farmers and country Victorians given the important place that primary industry plays as the engine room of the Victorian economy. There is no doubt at all that this is a reflection of the poor standing, ability and lack of advocacy of the Minister for Agriculture.

No financial support has been offered to country councils which have been crying out for assistance with country road and bridge infrastructure. Labor obviously does not see road safety as being important in country Victoria, despite road and bridge infrastructure being identified by the Victorian Farmers Federation as a top budget priority.

The reannouncement of free public transport for seniors on Sundays within the Melbourne central business district and regional cities is of no benefit to those living in country Victoria. Senior country Victorians are being unfairly discriminated against by the Labor government. No funds have been allocated to address the water crisis in Ballarat and Geelong. The Labor government has also ignored the need for urgent infrastructure in country Victoria's irrigation districts to stop water seepage and evaporation. The sum total is that the budget is disappointing for country Victoria.

It is interesting to note that notwithstanding the commitment the Liberal Party made to match the current level of funding provided by the commonwealth through the Roads to Recovery program beginning from 1 January 2008, thus far the Bracks government has been unable to be shamed into matching that commitment, when in fact that is the primary message that we receive on -an ongoing basis from municipalities right across country Victoria.

In my own electorate, Gippsland Province, I am concerned about a number of aspects. The time permitted does not allow me to go into a lot of detail. However, I am particularly concerned about Gippsland Southern Health Service, which missed out on funding for the Leongatha hospital redevelopment. That is a huge blow to the local community as that health service had everything in place for this redevelopment. My constituents were confident that the government recognised the need for it and would support the project. I have made ongoing representations for several years on their behalf. I am stunned to think that no funds have been allocated for this project. Even an uninformed visitor to that hospital would know how urgent these works are.

I am also surprised and disappointed that safety issues in Narracan have been left unaddressed by the government, with no commitment to fund a third

crossing over the railway line in Warragul. The need for a third rail crossing is a matter of significant community concern, and I urge the government to rethink its approach of ignoring this project and to ensure that funds are provided for it in the short term.

In conclusion, I repeat what I said in a debate last week:

The art of taxation consists in so plucking the goose as to obtain the largest possible amount of feathers with the smallest possible amount of hissing.

That was said by John Baptiste Colbert in 1665. I think this budget demonstrates just what a lot of goose-pluckers members of the Bracks government are.

Debate adjourned for Hon. S. M. NGUYEN (Melbourne West) on motion of Hon. J. M. Madden.

Debate adjourned until next day.

ADJOURNMENT

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

That the house do now adjourn.

Neighbourhood houses: funding

Hon. DAVID KOCH (Western) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Local Government and relates to funding shortfalls for educational programs at community and neighbourhood house learning centres. Community and neighbourhood houses offer a range of social, recreational and educational opportunities for thousands of Victorians every year. They are important places for people to meet and for many to connect with their local communities. The government's funding allocation of \$27.8 million over four years for Victoria's 355 neighbourhood houses will do little more than keep the doors open. The package includes \$16.5 million for extra opening hours and \$10.2 million to increase the hourly rate of learning centre coordinators, but there is no additional funding for adult education classes or equipment.

The Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres has been seeking a five-year, \$84 million funding boost to address the urgent need to make neighbourhood houses and learning centres financially viable and sustainable into the future. Horsham community house is an active adult education provider that delivers a range of programs for people aged from 18 to 86 from across the region. The budget allocation will see community houses like Horsham's

forced to cut back on important programs and will result in reduced access for adult students seeking to gain basic skills. As the minister is aware, many of these programs are simply not available elsewhere in regional communities.

It is of major concern to voluntary committees and administrators of community and neighbourhood houses that there is a lack of funding to maintain these vital programs. The government's continued slashing of annual funding is forcing Horsham's community house and others to cut back on popular programs and to delay equipment upgrades. Funding cuts to community and neighbourhood house learning centres directly affect access to basic adult education. The cuts have an impact on the programs offered, the facilities and equipment in the centres and the resources available for students and staff. Much of the equipment, especially computers and printers, is old and outdated and is in urgent need of upgrading. There are now insufficient funds to provide enough resources for all student needs. Community and neighbourhood houses are also reporting that there is now a lack of funding to employ adequate qualified instructors.

I call on the government to restore adequate funding to community and neighbourhood house learning centres so that education programs and equipment can be upgraded and maintained to meet student and staffing needs. My request is: will the minister review budget allocations in order to restore vital funding for community education programs at local community and neighbourhood houses across Victoria, especially in Western Province?

Wurdale: trail bikes

Ms CARBINES (Geelong) — I wish to raise a matter with the Minister for Environment in the other place, the Honourable John Thwaites. It concerns the difficult issue of managing trail bike usage on public land. Last Friday I met with members of the Wurdale Landcare Group, Wurdale residents, officers of the Surf Coast Shire and Cr Libby Mears, the mayor, to discuss their concerns about the increasing number of people who are using trail bikes in state forest areas around Wurdale. Wurdale residents told me that some trail bike riders are not using designated tracks and are causing environmental damage such as erosion and the destruction of flora and fauna. They also spoke of the incessant noise from the bikes, which destroys the peaceful rural amenity. Members of the Wurdale Landcare Group spoke of their frustration at seeing areas that they have spent many hours revegetating destroyed by careless riders, particularly in the area of the headwaters of the Wormbete Creek catchment.

As Parliamentary Secretary for Environment I am well aware that the conflict between trail bike usage, the environment and local residents is not isolated to my region and can often be difficult to resolve. I believe there needs to be a statewide approach to find the right balance between the desire of residents for peaceful anonymity and the protection of our fragile environment on the one hand and the rights of trail bike riders to pursue their recreational sport on the other. I therefore call on the minister to direct resources into tackling this issue to assist communities across the state such as Wurdale work towards a resolution.

Libraries: funding

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — I raise an issue with the Minister for Local Government, Ms Broad, concerning the deteriorating level of recurrent funding for our public libraries. Over the past four years recurrent funding for the 43 library service providers — that is 16 regional library corporations and 22 individual council providers — has increased only in line with the consumer price index. In 2005–06 the increase is about \$1 million — that is, approximately 20 cents per capita.

Presently recurrent library funding is allocated on a basis of 90 per cent per capita and 10 per cent factors weighted on a council basis, reflecting remoteness, dispersion of the population, socioeconomic disadvantage et cetera. The funding formula introduced in 2003–04 for three years is largely population driven, which impacts on both country and metropolitan areas with static or declining populations. On the other hand growth areas in outer metropolitan Melbourne and the country are obviously receiving funding increases in excess of the rate of inflation.

Because the Bracks government has failed our library providers by restricting recurrent funding increases to consumer price index rises, or \$1 million per annum, our free public libraries cannot provide the staff, book stocks or resources required. In country Victoria many libraries are under threat, as are our mobile libraries. By contrast, the Liberal Party has a commitment which would see recurrent funding increase by \$1 per capita per annum instead of the present 20 cents per capita per annum under the Bracks government.

The action I seek from the minister is to ensure that the new funding and service agreement, which will replace the present agreement from 1 July, does not disadvantage those areas where population growth is static or declining. The simple answer would be for this Labor government to match the Liberal Party's policy which would see recurrent library funding increase

from the present \$29 million per annum to over \$45 million per annum — that is, an increase of \$16 million per annum.

Bendigo Health Care Group: funding

Hon. D. K. DRUM (North Western) — My adjournment matter is for the Minister for Health in the other place, Ms Bronwyn Pike. I need to bring to the minister's attention the desperate situation of inadequate funding to the Bendigo Health Care Group. The weighted inlier equivalent separations (WIES) funding model which operates in Victoria effectively funds our hospitals for any given year based on an estimate from the previous year. The Bendigo Health Care Group's target of 18 000 units has well and truly been exceeded and the \$3000 that accompanies each of the 18 000 units has now dried up.

That has been the situation for the last six months and nothing will change until the end of the financial year. For that time the Bendigo Health Care Group has effectively had to stop all of its elective surgery and has tried to postpone as many of those surgical procedures as it possibly can. It then has to find funding from thin air to keep its emergency department operating. Because of the outstanding administration and the work and loyalty of the staff, it is business as usual for the operations that are required and business as usual for the emergency department, but the group has had to put an end to the elective surgery that it would normally be conducting at this time.

Goulburn Valley Base Hospital in Shepparton has the same situation, and other regional hospitals around Victoria are also facing the same problem. Where they differ from metropolitan hospitals is that metropolitan hospitals can find another hospital nearby that has not used up its WIES allocation and so elective surgery can be moved to other hospitals. Alternatively, the hospital can be put on ambulance bypass and patients taken on to the next hospital. Neither of those opportunities exists in our major regional hospitals such as those in Barwon, Ballarat, Latrobe Valley, Bendigo and at the Goulburn Valley Base Hospital.

I call on the minister to find the necessary funding to allow hospitals to maintain their elective surgery rates as well as the surgery that continues to present by way of the emergency departments. I also call on the minister to develop a funding model which allows our major regional hospitals to function in a way that is necessary to allow them to meet the demands of their respective regions.

Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway: upgrade

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (North Eastern) — My adjournment issue is for the attention of the Minister for Transport in the other place. It regards a section of the Midland Highway between Shepparton and Mooropna, known as the Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway.

The long-awaited work to upgrade that section of road is due to begin this week and will not be completed until late next year. As the minister is well aware, the work about to be undertaken on the causeway is necessary because in its current state the road does not meet safety standards. In 2002 VicRoads compiled a planning study that made eight recommendations to the government for the upgrade of this section of the Midland Highway.

The recommendations ranged from a basic upgrade that would bring the road up to bare minimum safety standards, but not including lighting, to a six-lane divided highway with lighting. Seven of the eight recommendations included lighting for the entire length of the causeway. Unfortunately the option chosen by the government for the upgrade is only the basic option, and therefore the work about to begin will only bring the road up to bare minimum safety standards and does not include lighting for the entire section of road.

The section of road I am referring to is the road that connects the two population centres of Shepparton and Mooropna. It crosses the Goulburn River and the river flats and floodway that surround it. It is a winding section of road that includes six bridges. It has been built up quite high to allow for a connection between the two centres when the surrounding river flats are in flood. At many points there is a sheer drop of around 3 metres from the road surface to the river flat below.

It is unfortunate that due to the winding nature of the road there are several sharp turns at the approach to the bridges. This often leads to damage to the guardrails of the bridges when motorists are caught unaware and are not able to control their vehicles. Due to the surrounding bushland this section of road is very dark at night. It is a section of road that is desperately in need of lighting to improve safety conditions at night.

The causeway upgrade planning study identified the cost of providing lighting at only \$370 000. In a letter I received from the minister last year I was advised this cost would now be closer to \$600 000. With work about to begin on the safety upgrade, now is the time for lights to be installed on this section of road. It can

never get any cheaper and our community should not be inconvenienced a second time.

In the interests of the safety of the drivers and passengers of the 23 000 vehicles that access this road daily I request that the minister provide the additional funding necessary to allow lighting to be installed on the Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway during the construction works that are due to begin this week.

Timber industry: auctions

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — Tonight I wish to direct to the attention of the Minister for Agriculture in the other place a matter regarding VicForests timber auctions. VicForests had its second online auction for timber on 2 June. It was a substantial auction of some 700 000 cubic metres of timber. The first auction was held in April for 174 000 cubic metres, but this was a much more significant auction.

The outcome of the auction has been an absolute disaster for the industry. I understand that only four sawmilling companies were successful in purchasing any significant quantity of resource as an outcome of the auction. Many missed out entirely and some only obtained a very minimal quantity. Even those who were successful had to pay prices that were somewhere between 20 and 50 per cent above expectations.

It has been suggested to me that was because the auction process did not follow the path for which industry participants train and therefore the path that was expected, and that the great uncertainty of the process led to the higher prices, which in the long term are simply not sustainable.

As I understand it, the auction process led to grievances being lodged on every single lot, and just over 100 lots were put forward for auction. Indeed the grievance process has prompted letters today to VicForests from legal representatives of the Victorian Association of Forest Industries querying whether the grievance process is legal and whether the panel appointed to hear the grievances had the power to determine the outcome.

They make the point in their letter to VicForests that the grievance panel, which consisted of a representative of VicForests and a member of the online company that conducted the auction, simply meant that the grievance committee became a judge of its own cause. It seems to me there needs to be greater independence in the grievance process.

In debate in this chamber a month ago I said that the timber industry was perilously close to collapse and I am now firmer in this view. Unless the government acts

quickly and decisively, many small sawmill operations in Victoria will simply fall over. If that occurs, it means a greater reliance on imported timber products to our country, and that is a bad thing both in terms of an import position but also an environmental position if we are relying on imports from other countries of lesser environmental standards than we adopt for forest harvesting practices.

My request to the minister is that as a matter of urgency he arranges to meet with the industry, probably through the Victorian Association of Forest Industries, the industry representative body and VicForests, review the auction system and put in place a system for timber sales that is in the best interests of the community, the industry and the government, and I deliberately put them in that order — that is, the community, the industry and the government.

North Western Province: seniors reading aids

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — My adjournment matter tonight is directed to the Minister for Aged Care, Mr Jennings. The request is for the minister to put in place a loan or rental program of reading aids for our aged community members who suffer from vision impairment. This is a huge issue in the Sunraysia area, which has an ever-increasing aged population — for very good reason, I might add, because the weather is good and the amenities of the area are attractive to all ages but particularly to more senior members of the community.

Using this equipment is best described as being similar to looking a microfiche. However, it works differently. As you slide a book or a sheet of paper onto a horizontal plate it is reflected onto a screen that has a number of adjustments such as brightness, size and positioning so that the user can get the maximum effect from the unit. An elderly lady in Mildura, whom I believe is 90, is an avid collector of stamps. I suspect you could say stamps are her purpose in life, but her hobby is made difficult due to her impaired vision.

We have a great Vision Australia unit in Sunraysia, which is run by Jenny Gibbons. I have worked closely with it over a number of years. When I spoke to Jenny about this issue she advised me that the Sunraysia catchment has in excess of 700 clients, with probably just as many out there who do not have any contact with the unit for one reason or another. Jenny informed me that there are various models of this device, ranging from a simple hand-held magnifying glass that may be illuminated and a model that transfers the words of a document onto a television screen right up to the fully stand-alone system I mentioned that does the lot. The

cost of the units ranges from the very basic at perhaps \$100 up to a machine that does the lot at in excess of \$5000, so it is clear they are not affordable for many of our people.

In Mildura Vision Australia has some machines that clients can use in-house or take on trial, but it does not have the capacity to do any more than that at present. I understand the Department of Veteran Affairs has a program that provides some assistance in the area, but that is of little help to many of our aged and vision-impaired people. I suspect the best way forward may be to have the minister's department have a look at the various options that are available and ensure there is a requirement, which I strongly believe there is, that is not being met. Therefore on behalf of members of our vision-impaired community of all ages I request the minister to facilitate a loan or rental program of reading aids which would greatly improve the quality of life for many of our community members.

Wallan: truck stop redevelopment

Hon. E. G. STONEY (Central Highlands) — I have an issue for the Minister for Transport in the other place regarding the redevelopment of the Wallan truck stop. I raise the issue of the plight of a small businessman, Mr Tony Laro. Tony's plight has been drawn to my attention by Mike Dalmau, the Liberal candidate for Seymour. Mike Dalmau told me that Tony, with his late wife, who died from cancer some years ago, set up their business at the Wallan truck stop some 13 years ago. I called in there on Sunday, and Tony does provide a wonderful service, working out of a container. There are always a lot of trucks there and many campervans, and people were standing around talking. I was very impressed with the service he offers. I was told that in the early days the couple struggled in the business but persisted through all sorts of weather. They served great hamburgers and fresh, healthy cooked food. They also gave personal advice and became personal friends with many of the truckies and regular travellers who went through.

I am told that Tony is a modern day hero to these people. I am told he is like the other icon on the Hume — the Dog on the Tuckerbox. Today the people who call in there are his friends, his life and his reason for living. Mike Dalmau told me that as a person who has suffered himself, he can really understand Tony's plight. It is not about business and profits but about real people. Mike Dalmau has asked me to ask the minister to stand up for this man, who is loved by every truck driver. I believe Tony has book of petitions and comments for people to sign on the way through.

Tony Laro is a small business operator who must be supported in this redevelopment. There are many questions about the Wallan redevelopment. What process has VicRoads used? Did it publicly advertise for expressions of interest? Was it an open process to allow any company to apply? How do we know we are getting the best deal for all Victorians? What are the conditions allowing companies to establish at Wallan? The community is asking a lot of questions about it. But getting back to Tony Laro, this is a most important personal issue for this man who has provided enormous service to the community over many years. I ask the Minister for Transport to instruct VicRoads that in the redevelopment of the Wallan truck stop a suitable site be made available to Tony Laro so that he can continue to operate his small business of 13 years.

Responses

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — Mr Koch raised the matter of community neighbourhood houses and learning centres. I will refer that to the Minister for Local Government.

Ms Carbines raised the matter of trail bike usage on Crown land. I will refer that to the Minister for Environment in the other place.

Mr Vogels raised the matter of local libraries. I will refer that to the Minister for Local Government.

Mr Drum raised the matter of the Bendigo Health Care Group. I will refer that matter to the Minister for Health in the other place.

Ms Lovell raised the matter of the Midland Highway and the Peter Ross-Edwards Causeway. I will refer that to the Minister for Transport in the other place.

Mr Hall raised the matter of VicForests timber auctions. I will refer that to the Minister for Agriculture in the other place.

Mr Bishop raised in quite some detail the matter of reading aids for the aged community in his electorate. I will refer that to the Minister for Aged Care.

Mr Stoney raised the matter of the Wallan truck stop redevelopment. I will refer that matter to the Minister for Transport in the other place.

Motion agreed to.

House adjourned 5.10 p.m.

