

PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

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

Thursday, 8 June 2006

(Extract from book 7)

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By authority of the Victorian Government Printer

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The Lieutenant-Governor

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Standing Orders Committee — The President, the Honourables B. W. Bishop, Philip Davis and Bill Forwood, Mr Lenders, Ms Romanes and Mr Viney.

Joint committees

Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee — (*Council*): The Honourable S. M. Nguyen and Mr Scheffer.
(*Assembly*): Mr Cooper, Ms Marshall, Mr Maxfield, Dr Sykes and Mr Wells.

Economic Development Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables B. N. Atkinson and R. H. Bowden, and Mr Pullen. (*Assembly*): Mr Delahunty, Mr Jenkins, Ms Morand and Mr Robinson.

Education and Training Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables H. E. Buckingham and P. R. Hall.
(*Assembly*): Ms Eckstein, Mr Herbert, Mr Kotsiras, Ms Munt and Mr Perton.

Environment and Natural Resources Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables Andrea Coote, D. K. Drum, J. G. Hilton and W. A. Lovell. (*Assembly*): Ms Duncan, Ms Lindell and Mr Seitz.

Family and Community Development Committee — (*Council*): The Hon. D. McL. Davis and Mr Smith.
(*Assembly*): Ms McTaggart, Ms Neville, Mrs Powell, Mrs Shardey and Mr Wilson.

House Committee — (*Council*): The President (*ex officio*), the Honourables B. N. Atkinson and Andrew Brideson, Ms Hadden and the Honourables J. M. McQuilten and S. M. Nguyen. (*Assembly*): The Speaker (*ex officio*), Mr Cooper, Mr Leighton, Mr Lockwood, Mr Maughan, Mr Savage and Mr Smith.

Law Reform Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables Richard Dalla-Riva, Ms Hadden and the Honourables Geoff Hilton and David Koch. (*Assembly*): Ms Beard, Ms Beattie, Mr Hudson, Mr Lupton and Mr Maughan.

Library Committee — (*Council*): The President, Ms Argondizzo and the Honourables Richard Dalla-Riva, Kaye Darveniza and C. A. Strong. (*Assembly*): The Speaker, Mr Carli, Mrs Powell, Mr Seitz and Mr Thompson.

Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee — (*Council*): Ms Argondizzo and Mr Somyurek. (*Assembly*): Mr Baillieu, Ms Buchanan, Mr Dixon, Mr Nardella and Mr Smith.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables W. R. Baxter, Bill Forwood and G. K. Rich-Phillips, Ms Romanes and Mr Somyurek. (*Assembly*): Ms Campbell, Mr Clark, Ms Green and Mr Merlino.

Road Safety Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables B. W. Bishop, J. H. Eren and E. G. Stoney.
(*Assembly*): Mr Harkness, Mr Langdon, Mr Mulder and Mr Trezise.

Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee — (*Council*): The Honourables J. M. McQuilten and R. G. Mitchell. (*Assembly*): Mr Crutchfield, Mr Hardman, Mr Ingram, Dr Napthine and Mr Walsh.

Scrutiny of Acts and Regulations Committee — (*Council*): Ms Argondizzo and the Honourable Andrew Brideson.
(*Assembly*): Ms D'Ambrosio, Mr Jasper, Mr Leighton, Mr Lockwood, Mr McIntosh, Mr Perera and Mr Thompson.

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Assembly — Clerk of the Parliaments and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly: Mr R. W. Purdey

Council — Clerk of the Legislative Council: Mr W. R. Tunnecliffe

Parliamentary Services — Secretary: Dr S. O'Kane

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FIFTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT — FIRST SESSION

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Eren, Hon. John Hamdi	Geelong	ALP	Somyurek, Mr Adem	Eumemmerring	ALP
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Hilton, Hon. John Geoffrey	Western Port	ALP	Viney, Mr Matthew Shaw	Chelsea	ALP
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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Thursday, 8 June 2006

The PRESIDENT (Hon. M. M. Gould) took the chair at 9.33 a.m. and read the prayer.

Hon. B. N. Atkinson — I would like to advise everybody that they can get Karak for \$3 at Coles.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I ask the Usher of the Black Rod to remove that item from the house. Put it in my office.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order!

PETITION

**Baxter-Tooradin–Fultons–Hawkins roads,
Baxter: safety**

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern) presented petition from certain citizens of Victoria requesting that the Victorian government urgently upgrade the Baxter-Tooradin, Hawkins and Fultons road intersection in the suburb of Baxter so that Hawkins and Fultons roads are aligned and that the railway crossing along Baxter-Tooradin Road is widened to safely accommodate pedestrian traffic (1648 signatures).

Laid on table.

**INSPECTOR OF MUNICIPAL
ADMINISTRATION**

Greater Geelong City Council

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government), by leave, presented report, May 2006.

Laid on table

PAPERS

Laid on table by Clerk:

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

Bass Coast Planning Scheme — Amendment C47.

Benalla Planning Scheme — Amendment C14.

Golden Plains Planning Scheme — Amendment C28.

Greater Dandenong Planning Scheme — Amendment C59.

Hume Planning Scheme — Amendment C64.

Moyné Planning Scheme — Amendment C18.

South Gippsland Planning Scheme — Amendment C37.

Whittlesea Planning Scheme — Amendment C79.

Surveillance Devices Act 1999 — Report, 2005, from the Secretary of the Department of Sustainability and Environment pursuant to section 37 of the Act.

MEMBERS STATEMENTS

Snowy Hydro Ltd: sale

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — I wish to draw to the attention of the house the cant, hypocrisy, deception, vile opportunism and lies which have been retailed by the government and ministers about the budget, about the \$600 million black hole, about the deception of rural communities, the deception of the education community and the deception of parents.

Ms Broad interjected.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — No amount of interjecting from the Minister for Local Government will change the fact that she, amongst other ministers, has misled the public. Ministers have been telling lies; they have told lies about the budget being structured on the basis of the sale of Snowy Hydro. The Snowy Hydro sale is off, and the result therefore is that there is a \$600 million black hole which the government is refusing to acknowledge, and it is lying.

The Premier, the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance should be ashamed. They have no credibility. This government lacks the credibility that even Rob Jolly had — at least everybody knew Rob Jolly made a mess of it. What the Minister for Finance is trying to do is to hide from the accountability on which this government will be judged. You cannot bring down a budget that is exposed within three days as being a fraud. What the public of Victoria is entitled to know is which ministers are prepared to continue to lie.

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

National Volunteer Week

Hon. J. G. HILTON (Western Port) — My statement today will be on National Volunteer Week, which was from 15 to 21 May. It has been estimated that 6.3 million Australians give approximately

836 million hours as volunteers. In my local area the City of Casey always recognises its volunteers, and it does so in two ways: with an award presentation evening and a civic dinner.

This year I shall quote the mayor of the City of Casey, Kevin Bradford, who said:

Being nominated not only raises awareness of individual volunteering achievements, it also raises awareness of many important organisations and worthy causes in our city. Hopefully, the achievements of our local volunteers will inspire more people in the community who have been thinking of volunteering to give it a go.

This year awards were given to Ms Susan Bergman, who received the arts and cultural award; Mr Phil Hughes, the environment and conservation award; Mrs Margaret Hill, the family and community support award; Mr Leslie Herring, the sport and recreation award; Ms Angelina Eli, the young volunteer award; and the Narre Warren State Emergency Service unit, which received the innovation award.

I would like to thank not only the award winners but also the other nominees for the wonderful work they do in Casey and the community.

Land tax: increases

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — My statement today concerns the government's collection of massive amounts of land tax. It is important to put on the record in this chamber the enormous increases in land tax under this government. In 1998–99 the state government collected \$378 million. In 2005–06 — that is, this financial year — the budget papers show an estimated collection of \$772 million, an increase of \$394 million or 104 per cent.

This is striking retirees and small businesses across our state, including in my electorate and the electorate I seek to represent, the Southern Metropolitan Region. I see Mr Pullen sitting over there like a cockatoo — or a Karak, for that matter — unconcerned about what this is doing to his area. I know he supports government policy slavishly; he has never once spoken out against the land tax this government has put forward. Yesterday in the chamber I was disgusted to hear him describing these tax changes as positive and as something that would benefit the community.

The 104 per cent increase in land tax collections in the seven years of the Bracks government is striking at small businesses and retirees. I make the point that it is not just Mr Pullen; people like the member for Burwood in the other place, the Parliamentary

Secretary for Treasury and Finance, crafted this budget. He is responsible for these taxes.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The member's time has expired. Could we have less interjection and noise in the chamber. I am sure it would be appreciated by all, including Hansard.

Nuclear energy: sites

Ms CARBINES (Geelong) — I rise to express strong concern on behalf of the people of Geelong Province regarding the move by the Prime Minister to establish a nuclear power industry in Australia. The Howard government has refused to act to address climate change. It has ignored our international obligations by not signing the Kyoto protocol and, at home, has thwarted efforts to increase the mandatory renewable energy targets.

Honourable members interjecting.

The PRESIDENT — Order! I ask Ms Hadden and Mr Pullen to be quiet.

Ms CARBINES — The Howard government has done everything it can to stymie attempts by the Bracks government to promote renewable energy by blocking the development of wind farms. Now John Howard is taking Australia down the path of nuclear energy despite it being a high-risk energy option.

We have legislation in Victoria banning a range of nuclear activities, including power plants, but John Howard could use commonwealth land to get around our protection. My community of Geelong is very concerned about this, because we have vast tracts of commonwealth land in the Geelong region, including Point Wilson, Avalon and Queenscliff.

Our local Howard government member, Stewart McArthur, has typically been silent on the nuclear power issue. I call on Stewart McArthur to join me in standing up for the Geelong environment and our community to stop a nuclear power plant in our region.

Lions Club: Children of Courage awards

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (North Eastern) — Last Sunday I had the pleasure of attending the Lions Children of Courage awards. These awards were established to recognise a very special group of young children and their families. There are many awards that recognise the achievements of young people, but children with special needs are not often catered for.

The Lions Children of Courage award is not a competition. Every recipient of this award is a winner in his or her own right. The awards are a recognition of these young people's achievements that will act as an encouragement for their future, to help them believe in themselves and to help to increase their self-worth. All children just want to be accepted by others regardless of any special needs they may have. This award portrays them as children who have successfully overcome barriers which face them in this world today.

Congratulations should go Glenda McLeod and Margaret Stewart and to Lions district 201, zone 2, for conducting these awards.

Federal Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs: secretary

Hon. H. E. BUCKINGHAM (Koonung) — I was interested to note an article in the press recently that the new boss of the immigration department, that most aptly named department, DIMIA, the federal Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, who receives over \$400 000 a year in salary, has employed a \$1000-an-hour motivator to help him in his new role. He too must be working towards becoming an ambassador, as the previous incumbent did.

Andrew Metcalfe is quoted as saying to a Senate estimates committee hearing, when justifying the need for the motivator:

You need to keep the edge.

Mr Metcalfe denied the consultant was expensive and is reported as saying:

This man is earning his money, I can tell you ...

The article in the *Herald Sun* of 23 May went on to point out that under his leadership the department:

had adopted the motto: 'People are our business'.

I hope Mr Metcalfe did not pay someone a lot of taxpayers money to come up with that, given the wrongful detention of Cornelia Rau and the wrongful deportation of Vivian Alvarez Solon. Last year the commonwealth ombudsman revealed that someone may have wrongfully been detained for 7 years, another for 6 years and another for 4 years. Having investigated 220 cases, he said 12 people had been wrongfully detained for three years. These cases add up to a staggering 75 years. Clearly people are not his business. His motto is absolutely offensive.

Public Accounts and Estimates Committee: funding

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Eumemmerring) — I draw the attention of the house to the latest issue of the *Parliamentarian*, which contains an article headed 'Where were the Parliamentarians? — Recommendations for Restoring Accountability', which reports on a commission of inquiry in Ottawa and a report by Mr Justice John Gomery into the failure of a sponsorship program run by the Canadian government which started in 1996 and collapsed over the following five years. The commission of inquiry made a number of recommendations relating to the collapse of that specific program, but also reported extensively on issues of the accountability of the Canadian executive to the Canadian Parliament and the systemic failures that occurred over that five-year period.

The report presents a number of facts that are in parallel to the situation we have here in Victoria. Mr Justice Gomery made a number of recommendations which should be considered within the Victorian jurisdiction, including that to redress the imbalance of resources available to the government and to parliamentary committees the government should substantially increase funding to the public accounts committee. He also recommended that the public accounts committee should be able to perform investigations and conduct hearings with secretaries of departments rather than simply with ministers, noting that by requiring heads of departments to be responsible to Parliament as well as ministers, a far stronger accountability mechanism is put in place.

This government talks about being open, transparent and accountable. Given that commitment I call on this government to adopt the — —

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

Aboriginals: justice awards

Ms MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — On 2 June, as part of Reconciliation Week, I was pleased to host in Queen's Hall the launch of the Victorian Aboriginal justice agreement II, as well as the fifth annual indigenous justice awards. The launch was attended by Mr Jennings, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Hulls, the Attorney-General in the other place, and Ms Garbutt, the Minister for Community Services in the other place.

The Aboriginal justice agreement has developed groundbreaking initiatives, such as the Koori courts, night patrols and Koori-specific programs in corrections. It has also resulted in a new way of consulting with the Koori community involving the Aboriginal Justice Forum and regional Aboriginal justice agreement committees. The Aboriginal justice agreement II continues the partnership between the Victorian government and Victorian Kooris in tackling the overrepresentation of Kooris in the justice system. Over \$26 million has been committed in this year's budget to ensure its success.

The indigenous justice awards acknowledge the outstanding work performed across the state by individuals who are committed to improving social justice for the Koori community. The recipients of the statewide public sector awards were Matthew Holmes, for his work as the Aboriginal wellbeing officer for the Beechworth, Loddon and Dhurringile prisons, and Judge Paul Grant, president of the Children's Court, for his work in the Melbourne regional Aboriginal justice advisory committee and the development of the Koori court program in his previous role as coordinating magistrate for the Koori courts.

The Koori youth, adult and elder award recipients were Jon Kanoa for his voluntary work with the Grampians justice youth programs for the last three years, Senior Constable Melissa Peters, for improving relationships between the western region community and police, and Auntie Elva Johnson for a lifetime of giving to the community. All the award recipients deserve congratulations and are doing fine work in promoting true reconciliation.

Blackburn Primary School: pedestrian crossing

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — I have some concern about pedestrian sanctuaries on major roads. Whitehorse and Springvale roads are near my office, and I am concerned and fearful that one day we will see a car accident that results in a vehicle cannoning into pedestrians standing on one of the sanctuaries in the middle of the crossing on the highway.

A similar situation exists on Blackburn Road at a location near the Blackburn Primary School. The school is actually using a church across the road from it. There has been terrific cooperation between the school and the church, with students moving between the two areas and parents using the church car park when they are dropping off their children in the morning. That results in a large number of people — mothers and children who are students of the school — crossing Blackburn Road. The pedestrian sanctuary in the

middle of Blackburn Road outside the Blackburn Primary School is totally inadequate and I believe dangerous.

I join with the school community in calling for the minister to look at the Blackburn Road area adjoining the school and to consider installing traffic lights where the school and church are located. That would result in a safer situation of crossing. As I understand, the location certainly meets all the warrants for both vehicles and pedestrians.

Caulfield General Medical Centre: redevelopment

Mr SCHEFFER (Monash) — The big news for Monash Province out of the state budget is that the plan for the major upgrade of the Caulfield General Medical Centre is now under way. The \$23.5 million that has been allocated has been widely welcomed. Local residents know that since its election in 1999 the Bracks government has been strongly committed to the redevelopment of this much-valued institution. The Premier, the Minister for Aged Care and the Minister for Health have all visited the Kooyong Road site and all have been impressed, as I am, with the ambitious master plan that Bayside Health has developed.

Sections of the Caulfield General Medical Centre have seen better times and the redevelopment is much needed. But everyone in Caulfield remembers the dark years of the 1990s when the Kennett government moved to close down the place and how the community and the Friends of Caulfield General Medical Centre mobilised to protect it. For generations to come, people will thank the Bracks government for both preserving and developing this important hospital.

The first stage of the full redevelopment will establish a logistics building and provide new facilities for a receiving kitchen, engineering services, materials management and plant. The works will replace critical elements of the electrical engineering infrastructure and support the further planning and preliminary design for the full redevelopment of the site. I congratulate Bayside Health CEO, Alan Lilly, and the staff, volunteers and patients on the fantastic work they all do to improve the health of the community.

Water: government strategy

Ms HADDEN (Ballarat) — Over the past couple of years the Bracks Labor government has released the green water paper and then the white water paper, which was to secure our water supply for the next 50 years and to restore our rivers to environmentally

sustainable levels. The Melbourne 2030 planning policy was to secure Melbourne to cope with a 1 million population increase by 2030. Now we have Bracks's version no. 4 in the form of the recently released sustainable water strategy for the Central Highlands region. This draft, under the banner *Our Water Our Future*, is out for community comment.

But whose future? Premier Bracks and the water minister, Mr Thwaites, propose to pump water away from country Victoria and over the Great Dividing Range south into the cities of Ballarat and Geelong, to the detriment of the Loddon-Murray river system. They propose to take away country Victoria's valuable water resource during the 10th year of a drought. This will have massive negative impacts on irrigators, farming businesses and country communities. The Bracks government's hidden agenda with its so-called water strategy is to return our valuable agricultural irrigation land to dryland farming — that is, to remove all the water from those regions and pump it to the cities.

The proposal to build an industrial toxic waste dump in Victoria's food bowl in the Mildura-Sunraysia district will destroy our clean and green reputation and devastate that rich agricultural irrigation district. But that is what Premier Bracks and his city-centric ministers really want — to remove all the water from our high-value food-producing irrigation areas and sell it to intensive users such as the mineral sands mining industry in the Wimmera-Mallee district and people in the horticultural districts on the outskirts of Melbourne. It is time that Bracks and Thwaites and their Labor hack advisers consulted with people with real local knowledge and had regard for commonsense opinion.

Sandringham: Tulip Street pavilion

Mr PULLEN (Higinbotham) — Last Saturday, together with the mayor of Bayside, Cr Derek Wilson, Renato Ponti, the president of the Sandringham Soccer Club, and Barry Fisher, the president of the Sandringham Royals baseball club, I had the pleasure of officially opening the Tulip Street, Sandringham, pavilion. This project involved the building of a brand-new, state-of-the-art pavilion and the refurbishment of two other pavilions at Tulip Street. Bayside City Council contributed \$560 000 and each club raised \$125 000, which is absolutely amazing. Soccer and baseball were identified as emerging sports in bayside — and is that not so with the wonderful performance of the Socceroos to get to the World Cup?

I must thank the Minister for Sport and Recreation, the Honourable Justin Madden, who visited the site last year and met with the council and the clubs to see how

important this project was. It was with a great deal of pleasure that I was able to advise the council that the Bracks Labor government would contribute \$270 000 to the project. As usual the Sandringham Lions Club volunteered to provide delicious sausages in bread to the 200-strong crowd.

It was also opportune for me to announce a further \$12 000 to be provided to the Sandringham Soccer Club for lighting at the Peterson Street Reserve in Hightett. This continues the outstanding support provided by the Bracks Labor government. Every project put forward to the government by the Bayside council since my election as a member for Higinbotham in 2002 has been approved.

Government: advertising

Hon. D. K. DRUM (North Western) — One of the most frustrating aspects of opposition is on the one hand having to continually fight for many worthwhile projects — generally without the results our community is calling for — and on the other hand seeing the government waste so many millions of dollars on advertising campaigns, which are estimated to have cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

I support the Auditor-General's inquiry into the Bracks government's advertising campaign, and I also support the call by the Leader of The Nationals in another place, Peter Ryan, for strict guidelines to be introduced for all governments in relation to advertising. Putting in place a code of conduct now gives credibility to The Nationals in opposition; we are not just crying in opposition and then going to do exactly the same thing as the Labor government if we ever happen to get into government. It is something all governments have been guilty of in the past.

Advertising campaigns on television give no public notice and carry no public interest, just self-congratulation. Full-page ads in the papers costing millions of dollars have no public interest. A lot of the full-page ads in the papers are not factual and are a series of lies and propaganda on behalf of the government.

In the midst of this excessive waste and self-congratulation there is one campaign I would like to commend: the Transport Accident Commission's It's 46 Too Many campaign. It hits the mark. It gives a message, especially with the Queen's Birthday weekend coming up. The cost of human carnage on the roads needs to be stopped. It needs to be counted. Against the backdrop of waste and —

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

Health: Nurse on Call initiative

Mr SOMYUREK (Eumemmerring) — I rise to commend the Minister for Health in another place, Bronwyn Pike, on the Nurse on Call initiative which she and the Premier launched last Sunday. The Nurse on Call 24-hour hotline gives Victorian families immediate health advice 24 hours a day. By simply calling 1300 60 60 24 Victorians will be able to speak to an experienced nurse, discuss their illness or condition, receive advice and be directed to the care or treatment they need.

In speaking on this initiative I should declare a personal interest. That is that I am the father of two children under the age of 10, and like most parents of children of a similar age I have spent many, many unnecessary hours at hospital emergency wards in the middle of the night.

My electorate includes the south-eastern growth corridor, which is overly represented by young families with small children. Consequently this initiative will be of great benefit to those families. Our family and other families in my electorate with young children now have the added security of knowing that we have access to 24-hour advice and information which will help determine whether we need to attend hospital or a doctor straight away, whether the illness or condition could be treated by a GP the next day or if we can manage at home. This initiative is just another way that the state government is making Victoria the place to be, live, work and raise a family.

Baxter-Tooradin-Fultons-Hawkins roads, Baxter: safety

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern) — This morning I presented a petition on behalf of 1648 constituents calling for action by VicRoads to fix the Baxter-Tooradin-Hawkins-Fultons roads intersection at Baxter. I have been mentioning this now for a period of years, and I think it is illustrative of the non-responsiveness of the Minister for Transport and the board and management of VicRoads. If I look back on the items I have presented in the house in the last few years, I find that not one single item has been actioned by the government. That is an indictment of VicRoads, of the board of VicRoads, of the state government and of the minister's lack of action.

When we look at the installation of lights at places like the Moreton Bay Drive intersection at Lyndhurst,

which is clearly dangerous and where the police in both Dandenong and Frankston and the traffic operations group have said it is a tragedy waiting to happen, again we see that the inaction of VicRoads is a cause for great concern. I call on the Minister for Transport in the other place, the chairman of the board, the board and the senior management of VicRoads to take a good hard look at their non-responsiveness. If necessary I call on the minister to dismiss the board.

STATEMENTS ON REPORTS AND PAPERS

Ombudsman: review of Freedom of Information Act

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA (East Yarra) — This report was tabled in Parliament last week. As the opposition spokesperson on the scrutiny of government, I must say that this is a quite damning report on the behaviour of the government — ministers and the bureaucracy — with regard to the processing of freedom of information (FOI) requests. It is a damning report on the way the government has dealt with freedom of information.

The government purports to be open, honest and transparent, yet this report paints a picture of its being anything but open, honest and transparent. It paints a picture of its being deceptive, secretive and ruled by masters of spin. Without question there are huge amounts of information contained in this detailed report. The Ombudsman conducted his investigation over a number of years. I recall initially raising a concern with the Ombudsman early in 2004. He decided to conduct his own investigation because of the number of complaints he had received, not only from the opposition but also from journalists trying to extract information and the general public.

Some of the facts in the report regard delays in the FOI process. Those delays have been part of an ongoing saga under this government. There is a statutory requirement for FOI requests to be replied to and dealt with in a 45-day period — a period far in excess of the limits in other states and territories. Despite that, only 56 per cent of FOI decisions made by the government in 2003–04 were made within the statutory time frame of 45 days. In fact nearly 21 per cent of decisions took more than 90 days. You have to ask why that is the case.

Perhaps the most compelling part of the document is at pages 24 and 25, where the Ombudsman outlines some case studies. The best case study is no. 1, which

concerns a request for access to a report commissioned by a department. The report states:

The FOI officer decided to release the report. The proposed decision was then sent to the minister's office for noting.

This is an example of the way the Attorney-General controls the FOI process badly. Every FOI request that is politically sensitive has to be sent to the relevant minister for noting. These guidelines were brought in by the Attorney-General in the other place, Rob Hulls; they were not brought in by the Kennett government. The report further states:

The FOI officer then waited 26 days for advice that the minister had been fully briefed on the sensitivities of the report. Release of the decision and the report was then further delayed —

and this is the compelling part —

until the return from leave of an officer who was thought best able to handle any press reaction to the document.

The reality is that we now have the spin doctors overseeing the FOI process. I have referred to how spin doctors are involved. I know of occasions on which FOI documents have landed at the back door of Parliament House at 4 o'clock on a Friday afternoon with the sole purpose of avoiding the media. Lo and behold, an outlet seems to get hold of the details so that the government is able to manufacture something out of it. On 6 June this year Carol Nader, the *Age* health reporter, wrote:

The *Age* tried to obtain documents about a proposed lung transplant service for children. The documents arrived eight months after the FOI request was lodged — just in time for the government's announcement on the service.

The spin, the deception and the secrecy of this government continues.

This is quite a damning report by the Ombudsman. I just wish I had more time to go through it in detail because there are quite amazing amounts of detail in it. It talks about deception, it talks about cover-ups, and it talks about anything but open, honest and transparent government. It should send shockwaves through Victoria to find that this is a government that seems more intent on having control of the most precious of the freedoms we cherish. The reality is —

Ms Hadden — It is freedom from information!

Hon. RICHARD DALLA-RIVA — Exactly; it is freedom from information.

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

Swinburne University of Technology: report 2005

Hon. H. E. BUCKINGHAM (Koonung) — Swinburne is an excellent example of a tertiary institute that is offering innovative learning experiences to the Victorian community. It is both a higher education and a TAFE provider, with university courses being offered at the Prahran, Hawthorn, Lilydale and Sarawak campuses. TAFE courses are offered at all six Victorian campuses in Hawthorn, Croydon, Lilydale, Healesville, Prahran and Wantirna.

In the university sector Swinburne has five faculties, consisting of the faculties of business and enterprise, design, engineering and industrial sciences, information and communication technologies, and life and social sciences. In the TAFE sector Swinburne offers courses in arts, hospitality sciences, business and commerce, engineering and social sciences.

During 2005 Swinburne developed its *Statement of Direction 2015*, outlining its medium-term vision for the university and its stakeholders. This vision sees Swinburne staff and students as entrepreneurial in their endeavours, international in outlook and intersectoral in approach.

Swinburne was also an outstanding performer in the learning and teaching performance fund rankings. The university was ranked in the top tier, coming fourth in the nation for learning and teaching quality, and second amongst the eight Victorian universities.

Swinburne is also a university that is seeking to improve its endeavours and outcomes in the area of research. In line with this, Swinburne received in excess of \$15 million for selected industry-relevant research through the Victorian government's science, technology and innovation grant scheme. Its research centres cover areas as diverse as the Australia-Pacific Centre for Philanthropy and Social Investment, the Brain Sciences Institute and the National Centre for Gender and Cultural Diversity.

Within the TAFE division a diverse range of flexible delivery options are available for students. These options blend different delivery modes to meet the needs of specific learner groups. Program delivery often involves a mix of modes, including off-campus, summer school, online, short courses, web-based communication, workplace assessment and recognition of prior learning.

The popularity of the flexible delivery of programs continues to grow, ranging from pre-apprenticeships to graduate certificates and graduate diplomas — for example, during 2005 training in disaster management was delivered using distance education to students in Thailand, Taiwan, the United States, Canada, Columbia and various Pacific Islands, as well as to students in many parts of Australia. Through a partnership between Swinburne TAFE's department of financial services and the Victorian WorkCover Authority, 2005 saw a certificate IV program delivered flexibly to trainees across the workers compensation sector. This customised program was designed for workers who were becoming case managers in the sector, and it is envisaged that other programs will be developed in collaboration with the WorkCover authority this year.

On 10 October 2005 Swinburne entered into a sustainability covenant with the Victorian Environment Protection Authority. The covenant commits Swinburne to working in a more environmentally sustainable way through encouraging the dissemination of sustainable practices to students and staff. I was pleased to attend, with the Premier of Victoria and the member for Bayswater from the other place, an announcement that a national centre for sustainability, environmental design and land management will be built at Swinburne TAFE's Wantirna campus in my electorate, which is an excellent campus. This \$10 million development, money for which was allocated in the 2006 state budget, will create new and refurbished energy-efficient buildings catering for up to 850 full-time students. The project will also employ up to 250 people during the construction phase.

Businesses are looking for expertise and ideas to reduce environmental impact. It makes both environmental and economic sense to ensure Victoria has a strong skills base in this area. This building is also to be used as a learning tool for students undergoing the newly accredited diploma of sustainability.

I would like to quote from the Swinburne TAFE web site. It states:

At Swinburne we don't teach students what to think, rather how to think and how to get out and make things happen. Our students are work ready and can think on their feet, and this is reflected by the 98 per cent of Swinburne TAFE graduates who are employed or in further study after their training.

Swinburne is both an excellent university and TAFE. I would like to thank the Swinburne University of Technology council, the chancellor, Bill Skates, AO, the vice-chancellor, Professor Ian Young, and the staff at all campuses for their ongoing commitment to

delivering a high standard of education in Victoria and Australia.

Ombudsman: review of Freedom of Information Act

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern) — I would like to make some comments on the report presented to the Parliament by the Victorian Ombudsman on a review of the Freedom of Information Act, which is dated June 2006. This act should be renamed the freedom from information act, and that is one of the tragedies of the Parliament under this present government. As a typical member serving a large number of constituents, I have given considerable thought to the track record of the Freedom of Information Act over the last few years, and I have to say that it is an almost total failure.

I have made several, what I think are reasonable, freedom of information (FOI) applications through my office in a formal sense, and those requests have been universally met with almost no information, no cooperation and long delays. The report presented by the Ombudsman is a first step in presenting to the Parliament a reasonable approach to a review of this particular matter. I think the Freedom of Information Act is long overdue for serious review by the government. It is not working. It is failing in its goals and is, quite frankly, slow and cumbersome. That is why, without being cynical, I regard it as a freedom from information act.

Some time back I asked the City of Casey to provide documents under FOI. I simply wanted some correspondence to do with the change of status of the Western Port Freeway back to the Western Port Highway. I got a reply which said they would not do that because it would take too much staff time. When a member of Parliament who asks a council for a document, which is a crucial document on a serious matter to do with a major arterial road, is told it would take too much council time, it shows the act is not working.

Another information request was made of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. It was asked to provide information about the test rigs, the methods and the technical standards it applies to the testing of speed detection devices used by Victoria Police. The reply I received from RMIT was absolutely insulting to a member of Parliament. In terms of freedom of information it was a complete disgrace. It said it would not give the information to me because it was commercial in confidence — in other words, go away. The only recourse then is via the Victorian Civil and

Administrative Tribunal. It shows the whole thing is not working.

I believe the report provided by the Ombudsman is a welcome first step. It is a quality report which raises a very serious matter. Generally speaking the Freedom of Information Act is not working. The state government is not cooperating with the spirit of the act. I recall when the present government was in opposition it made great play about open and transparent government and all the very fine intentions it had. But if you look at the track record of the Bracks government since it came to government in 1999 and apply its own intentions, statements and standards to the performance of the Freedom of Information Act, the only conclusion is that the government is failing. It is failing to implement the spirit and indeed the intent of the act.

Case after case has been taken to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, cases which should never be there but are taken simply because of departmental and ministerial directions and the approach taken by this government to deny information. No responsible member of Parliament — I repeat, no responsible member of Parliament — will abuse the processes of the Freedom of Information Act. It is there as part of the checks and balances on our democratic system. I commend the Ombudsman and ask that the state government urgently review the Freedom of Information Act.

Australian Catholic University: report 2005

Hon. J. G. HILTON (Western Port) — This morning I would like to speak on the annual report of the Australian Catholic University (ACU) for the year ending 2005. The university is obviously similar to many other higher education institutions, in the sense of having a commitment to the highest standards in teaching and research. However, the university believes, based on its significant Catholic tradition, that it has an ability to apply a spiritual perspective to its operations and that its role is in part to engage religious, ethical and social dimensions of the issues that it faces in its teaching and research activities. It is guided by fundamental regard for justice and equity and indeed the dignity of all human beings. I think that view is very laudable.

I shall just quote from the university's mission statement where it describes its ideal graduates. These people:

will be highly competent in their chosen fields, ethical in their behaviour, with a well-developed critical habit of mind, an appreciation of the sacred in life and a commitment to serving the common good.

Again I do not think we could possibly argue with that.

There are approximately 13 000 students enrolled at ACU, and of these some 2000 are overseas students. This again is reflected in the fees which are derived from the overseas students. I mentioned this last week when I was discussing the Melbourne University annual report. With the ACU, \$15.1 million was derived from overseas students in 2005. This compares to the \$8.7 million which was derived from overseas students in 2004. I repeat the point I made last week: if universities become more and more dependent on fee income from overseas students and the federal government continues to reduce its contribution to higher education, this in my view is doubly concerning. It is concerning firstly because our universities are beginning to rely more and more on a very fickle overseas market, and secondly because it has to have some impact on the ability of our own young people to obtain a quality education at the university of their choice when the universities' focus is increasingly on servicing an overseas student cohort.

I would like to highlight in this very brief contribution an aspect of the report I found particularly interesting, although in honesty I do not feel it would interest many members. For the first time the university produced its report in accordance with the Australian equivalent of the international financial reporting standards and modified its 2004 results to reflect these standards. That is not a particularly interesting issue. However, it is interesting in the impact that using these standards can have on the strength of the organisation's balance sheet. I will not go into the details of the adjustment which the university made; suffice it to say that the valuation of property, plant and equipment was reduced by over \$100 million and the increase in intangible assets was \$51 million. That had a total effect on the equity of the university of \$60 million, which was reflected in the university's reserves. As I said, this has a major impact on the balance sheet. However, I believe it is only appropriate that we have common international accounting standards so that we can, at least as far as possible, compare like with like. For any member who is interested in this issue, the adjustment which was made is reflected in the ACU's annual report, and I think it very clearly sets out those issues.

As I have said previously in comments on statements on reports, it is not possible in 5 minutes to go anywhere near the quality of the information which is presented. But I would just like to say in conclusion that the Australian Catholic University had an excellent year in 2005, with a profit in excess of \$8.4 million. Whilst I do not believe profit on its own should be considered in any way as a yardstick of how a tertiary

institution is viewed, it is certainly an indication of the quality of the management involved in the institution. I would like to wish all involved with the university — staff, board members and students — every success.

Victorian Arts Centre Trust: report 2004–05

Hon. ANDREA COOTE (Monash) — I would like to speak today on the Victorian Arts Centre Trust's annual report for 2004–05, and I will quote from the remarks of the president of the Arts Centre Trust, Carrillo Gantner:

In promoting participation in and access to the performing arts for all Victorians, the core business of the Arts Centre Trust is the delivery of diverse, distinctive and dynamic programming. This includes working with all the presenters who use the arts centre to generate the best programming experiences for all Victorian audiences.

He then goes on to say something of which I think we should all be cognisant:

Victorians all recognise the arts centre's spire, but we also want as many people as possible to understand what happens underneath this icon. We must understand our audience, and potential audience, which is why we continue to make the most of customer research ...

I had the pleasure of visiting the Victorian Arts Centre Trust last year and having a very good look behind the scenes. It was extremely interesting. The arts centre is indeed something we take for granted when we look at the spire. We must understand what does go on underneath it, from the performances we see right through to the costuming and the programming. The arts centre is truly quite an amazing organisation, and as such I was pleased to see that the government gave it \$19.8 million for state-of-the-art capital works upgrades.

Some of the things we do not see are the behind-the-scenes conditions. We certainly see the seats, the foyer and a whole range of areas, but there are a number of things that keep an organisation such as this running that need to have significant funding. They are things such as car parking space. That does not sound like a huge thing, but when you have people coming in from the outer metropolitan areas of Melbourne it is important that they are able to have easy access to car parking that is close. This has been an issue for the arts centre for some time.

In addition the centre needs to make sure the food and beverages are first rate. It is certainly in need of some help and assistance in this regard. These things do not sound huge when talking about performances and what actually happens, but unless the audiences engage with what is going on in a positive way they will not come

back, and that is absolutely important. In his introduction to the report Carrillo Gantner said:

Unfortunately current levels of funding mean the arts centre's asset condition is —

falling —

below the '70 per cent as-new' level.

That is the benchmark the centre set for itself. When I visited the trust it spoke about the round. The round is a mechanised round — literally — section of the floor of the stage which is used for moving all the stage sets that have to be moved around in a change of scenery, for example. It is quite old. It is expensive to do up. It is certainly not glamorous. It does not impact upon people like car parking and food and beverages do, but in fact it is absolutely vital.

One of the other things the trust says in this report is that it is important to have online opportunities. I certainly hope that, in addition to helping to upgrade the physical assets, online opportunities will be looked at. The arts centre is another wonderful resource we have in Victoria. I have spoken at length about what I feel should be enhanced with the state library's opportunity for online development, and in just the same way I think we need to have greater online development to show not only what happens at the arts centre but what could happen at the arts centre.

As Carrillo Gantner said in the foreword that I quoted earlier, programming is a big issue. This could be enhanced with better online work, with an improved web page and with greater opportunities for the rest of Victoria to see what is on at any given time and to understand the necessity of the money being spent and where it is being spent. I believe that with greater online opportunities and a better web site the people of Victoria will come to understand that the essence of the arts centre is not just the spire but is the work of its excellent staff, including the work that goes on behind the scenes.

I will be watching with interest to see how this \$19.8 million is spent. I will be keen to see how it is accounted for. I will be looking forward to speaking to whomever might be the Minister for the Arts — hopefully it will be me next time.

Mr Gavin Jennings — Talk to yourself.

Hon. ANDREA COOTE — I will talk to myself, which will be interesting. However, the government minister will not be Minister Delahunty.

Ombudsman: review of Freedom of Information Act

Ms MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — I am pleased to speak on the report of the Ombudsman's review of the Freedom of Information Act dated June 2006. I have been itching to get up for the last 15 minutes as I have listened to other members speak on this report. This government is committed to open and accountable government and welcomes the Ombudsman's review. I point out that it was this government that enshrined protections for both the Ombudsman and the Auditor-General in Victoria's constitution to ensure that we can have reviews such as this and can have truly open and accountable government.

It has been interesting while listening to the debate so far to realise that the report was tabled last week and the opposition has taken a whole week to speak on it. I point out that when the report was tabled in the Parliament on 1 June, the Attorney-General said in his media release:

We will act immediately to implement the Ombudsman's recommendations to improve administrative processes and we broadly support the proposed legislative changes.

It is interesting that as recently as last week we were debating a bill that makes amendments to justice legislation and implements one of the Ombudsman's recommendations. At pages 6 and 7 the report states:

Section 25 of the act be amended in terms similar to section 22 of the commonwealth FOI —

freedom of information —

act to enable agencies to delete material that is not within the scope of the request where deletion is both practicable and not contrary to the applicant's known wishes.

We have already acted to implement the Ombudsman's recommendation. It is important that the opposition take account of the Attorney-General's commitment to the other proposed legislative changes.

It is important to remember and understand that the Ombudsman's report makes it clear that FOI requests are being handled promptly and diligently, so we are respecting the spirit of the act. It is important that we put this into context when there are now more than 20 000 FOI applications being made every year. FOI requests have increased by more than 57 per cent since this government came to office. In almost all cases — 97 per cent according to the 2004–05 FOI annual report — access to documents is granted. In his media release the Attorney-General also indicated that he has written to all departments, attaching a copy of the

Ombudsman's report to the letter, and asking them to report back to him within 28 days on their progress in implementing the Ombudsman's administrative recommendations. He has also requested departments to employ additional staff to get rid of any backlog that might exist.

Improvements have already been made in anticipation of this review, with the vast majority of all applications — more than 70 per cent — now being processed within the required time lines, which is well up on the 56 per cent rate of just two years ago. It is important to note that the Ombudsman said in his review that undue delay in processing FOI applications occurs in a minority of cases. He also focused on 100 files that were selected on the basis that they had taken more than 45 days to determine or involved sensitive policy issues, so by the nature of the selection they were the worst cases.

In conclusion, it is important that we remember that the Freedom of Information Act was introduced by the Cain government and that the former Kennett government restricted FOI access by broadening the definition of cabinet documents. We remember that it wheeled truckloads of documents into the cabinet room so that it could claim the FOI exemption for them. At one point it also threatened to scrap the Freedom of Information Act. The Kennett government increased fees and as a result FOI requests fell. We welcome this report. We are committed to continual improvement and we are committed to implementing the report's recommendations. We are a government that cops constructive criticisms and makes changes where necessary, because we are a government that listens and acts.

Sustainability and Environment: report 2004–05

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — I wish to speak about the Department of Sustainability and Environment annual report 2004–05. I want to talk about water and water savings that are made at a domestic level and in relation to new and large buildings.

I note that today the Minister for Environment is to open at the Queen Victoria Market a project for the collection, storage underground and reuse for cleaning of stormwater. The system uses water that is available and puts it to a constructive use on the site. The government is coming to grips with these matters very late in its period in office, but I welcome these positive steps.

I put on the record that the government failed on certain key sites to incorporate a water saving strategy of exactly this nature — most prominently at Federation Square. The community will be aware that the iconic Federation Square development on the old Gas and Fuel Corporation building site, a Kennett government initiative, initially included rainwater storage tanks, which were deleted by the Bracks government as a cost-saving measure as the project neared its completion — over time and over budget.

I can understand why governments have to bring in projects on budget, but the government's mismanagement of that project meant that the water savings that could have been achieved on the site were not achieved and the example that could have been set on that site was not set. It is cheaper in the long run to save water in that way. If you make those water savings, it means that water consumption from externally piped water is reduced and over the longer term buildings make significant water savings.

The whole concept of green buildings is an important one. I have visited a number of green buildings recently, including one in Leicester Street, Carlton. That building is a good example of how design and construction on green principles can lead to much better outcomes on energy consumption and water reuse and in fitting a building to its human occupants.

I also visited 40 Albert Rd, South Melbourne, which at the moment is perhaps the exemplar in Australia of the very effective use of design, power, lighting and insulation in a building. I should describe for the house how this is done. There is not only the ability to generate energy from gas by a fuel cell on site but hopefully at a later point there will be the ability to put energy back into the grid from a fuel cell so that you have a reasonably clean source of energy. The use of lighting technology, insulation techniques and a whole range of steps involving construction materials set an example for all builders.

Of course a building of this nature is in the end cost effective. I make the point that the building at 40 Albert Road is a retrofitted building and has not been built on a greenfield site. The changes have been made in a thoughtful manner to make energy, water and other savings that will advantage the building's owners and the community.

I compliment those people who are prepared to step forward in that way. I made some of these points at the United Nations Association World Environment Day awards on Friday night, and was very pleased to draw

that link between sensible planning and good environmental outcomes.

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

Primary Industries: report 2004–05

Hon. B. W. BISHOP (North Western) — I rise to make a few comments on the annual report of the Department of Primary Industries. As I look at the front cover of the report, I see the words 'The thinking behind our everyday essentials'. That is true because they are everyday essentials. The DPI deals with energy and resources, which are very important to Victoria and Australia, and agricultural products, of course, which are an essential part of everyday life.

I want to concentrate my remarks today on the agricultural side of this document. I must admit I was not going to utilise the time I have available today speaking on this, but when I read through the report I thought I should link it up with a couple of things. One was the budget and one was the practical application and utilisation of the resources of the agriculture department.

When you have a look at this document, you see it is a pretty smart document. It has been well done and is certainly well dressed up. I suppose you could say the spin doctors have been well at work when you read through the document, but I do not believe it reflects the disinterest of this government, and in fact that of the Minister for Agriculture in the other place, because the funding processes are not reflected through this document.

It seems that agriculture does not get a fair shake when we see the allocation in this year's budget of \$45 million to agriculture out of quite a big state budget of about \$32 billion. But let us have a look at what the report says. When I had a look at the highlights on page 3, a couple of them jumped out at me. One talked about protecting Victoria from pests, such as fire ants, fruit fly and locusts. The other one talked about a review of drought policy and industry workshops for farmers.

Let us have look at the locusts, for a start. I would like to have seen more practical suggestions in the report. I am going to try today to put forward some practical and positive suggestions that I think are missing from the report, and that have come about from my experiences over the years in the management of locusts. I thought the department fiddled around a bit during our last plague, which certainly caused a fair amount of damage

throughout our agricultural areas. I understand it is a policy issue and not necessarily an operational one, and I suspect the people on the ground might have had a real red-hot go at it. The issue is that when you need to deal with locusts, there is a very narrow time band, and in fact the department — the government — had a go at the public land but they did not coordinate that as well as I think they could have done with the private land-holders. It would have been far better, I believe, to have done it all in one go, to have come to an arrangement with the farmers. That would have been a very practical and efficient way to go.

The second highlight I spoke about concerning drought relief, which is on page 34 of this document — and it is quite a substantial document — is covered by 10 lines in a half-page column on that page. I am amazed at that because we have had a decade of pretty difficult years, particularly in the grain area, and I thought there may have been more practical solutions in relation to drought. I went back and had a look at page 10 of the document, which is headed 'The future', but there was nothing about it there. There was no recognition of the past 10 years and how we managed during those years, and I think we can manage it. I do not think there is any need to be negative about that at all. There are things to be done, but it needs a bit of innovation and it certainly needs an outreach from the department to the farmers and the agricultural areas. That can be done.

The catchment land management officers did a great job on that. It is a great pity that they were chopped. In the few seconds I have remaining to me today, I mention that one of the positive things we could do is to bring people like that back to provide support to farmers on the ground with their Landcare projects and other worthwhile projects where they can care for the land. That will give them more confidence in times of drought so that they look forward with confidence to changing times and better years.

Snowy Hydro Ltd: report 2004–05

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Eumemmerring) — I wish to make a statement on the annual report of Snowy Hydro Ltd for the 2004–05 year. The Snowy Mountains hydro-electric scheme, encompassing 7 power stations and 16 major dams, most of which are in the Kosciuszko National Park, is the single largest civil engineering project ever undertaken in Australia.

Snowy Hydro Ltd is the company charged with owning, managing and maintaining that system. Snowy Hydro is jointly owned by the New South Wales government, with 58 per cent; Victoria, with 29 per cent; and the commonwealth, with 13 per cent. As

honourable members know, until recently there was a proposal for that company to be floated, for two reasons, one of which was to provide the three respective governments with access to the equity in that company, but also to provide the company with the opportunity to raise additional capital.

The annual report notes that the physical asset base of Snowy Hydro is now quite old. The oldest of the primary infrastructure in Snowy Hydro is now in the order of 50 years old, and the newest is around 30 years — that is the primary trunk infrastructure. There is a need for Snowy Hydro to have access to additional new capital. It was one of the intentions of the float that the company would have access to commercial capital with which to rebuild its asset base, as required, in the next 10 to 15 years.

The annual report notes that the company has an asset base of around \$1.8 billion in non-current assets, which encompasses the network of turbines and dams and the connecting infrastructure. However, its cash holdings at the end of 2005 were only \$1.8 million, so the company does not have enormous reserves of its own on which to draw for that capital replacement requirement.

The company has been profitable for the last two years, as shown in this annual report. For the year 2005 the net profit was \$147 million, and for the previous year it was \$158 million. However, most of that profit has been paid out to the shareholders as dividends. For the 2005 year, dividends paid to the three governments were \$110 million, and for 2004 the total dividends paid were \$140 million, so the vast majority — upwards of 90 per cent — of the net profit of the last two years has been paid out in dividends to the three governments that are shareholders.

For the three years prior to that — 2003, 2002 and 2001 — which were the first three years after Snowy Hydro was corporatised, no dividends were paid, so there is only a very short history of dividends being paid by Snowy Hydro since its corporatisation in 2001. There is not a strong or consistent history of dividends being paid, and for the two years that dividends have been paid, they have been paid from in the order of 90 per cent of net profits, so there is very little margin between profits accrued and dividends paid, and the history of dividends is very short.

It was therefore interesting on Monday at the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing when the Premier noted that the government's plan to use the proceeds from the sale of Snowy Hydro could not go ahead as those proceeds would not exist and that there would be a \$450 million shortfall. The Premier said at

the hearing that that shortfall would be made up through unallocated capital and future dividends from Snowy Hydro Ltd and that they would be in the order of \$45 million per annum.

I have looked back at the history of dividends paid by Snowy Hydro Ltd to Victoria. Dividends have been paid in only two years; in 2004 Victoria received \$40.6 million in dividends, and in 2005, the only other year in which dividends were paid, dividends to Victoria totalled \$31.9 million. So over the last two years only some \$70 million has been paid in dividends to Victoria. That is far short of the \$45 million per annum the Premier claims will be available to meet the education commitments of the government.

I also note that with the requirement for capital for Snowy Hydro moving forward, given that dividends have taken 90 per cent of the profits of the company, it is unlikely that the existing stream of dividends will continue in the future. Therefore, based on this annual report, it is highly unlikely that the government will have \$40-odd million of Snowy dividends to draw on for the education — —

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

STATE TAXATION (REDUCTIONS AND CONCESSIONS) BILL

Second reading

Ordered that second-reading speech be incorporated for Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) on motion of Hon. J. M. Madden.

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

That the bill be now read a second time.

Incorporated speech as follows:

On 30 May 2006 the government handed down its 2006–07 budget. This contained a package of state tax reductions and concessions which builds on the reforms of previous years and significantly improves Victoria's business competitiveness.

This bill implements reforms I announced in the budget, including further reductions in payroll tax from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent over the next three years, further land tax relief worth \$167 million over four years, and increases in the stamp duty thresholds for concession card holders to ensure this exemption is not eroded by increases in property prices.

There were other announcements around state taxation reform in the budget that are not reflected in this bill. These matters

will be legislated separately later this year. This bill is, as its title suggests, limited to enacting the reductions in taxation rates and increases in duty concessions.

The bill amends the Pay-roll Tax Act 1971 to enact the budget-announced progressive rate reductions for the next three years. Victoria already enjoys one of the lowest rates in the country and these further changes represent direct savings for Victorian businesses. The rate will reduce from 5.25 per cent to 5 per cent in staged reductions over three years. The first reduction of 0.1 per cent, representing a \$61 million saving for business, will apply for wages paid from July 2006. Overall, Victorian business will save \$533 million over four years due to these cuts.

Upon full implementation, the Victorian payroll tax rate will be 13 per cent lower than it was when the Bracks government came to power in 1999. This reinforces Victoria as having the second lowest payroll tax rate in Australia and brings our rate to within 0.25 percentage points of Queensland. Further, despite Victoria's higher rate, the way payroll tax is calculated in Queensland means that, following the reduction to 5 per cent, Victorian businesses with payrolls between \$1.95 million and \$11 million will pay less payroll tax than their Queensland counterparts.

The Land Tax Act 2005 is amended to give effect to the extensive tax cuts announced in the budget. This includes:

to reduce the tax rates that apply from 2006–07 by:

cutting the 1 per cent rate (starting at \$900 000) to 0.8 per cent;

cutting the 1.5 per cent rate (starting at \$1.19 million) to 1.2 per cent;

cutting the 2.25 per cent rate (starting at \$1.62 million) to 1.8 per cent; and

cutting the 3.5 per cent rate (starting at \$2.7 million) to 3 per cent (previously this rate was to be cut in two 0.25 per cent stages to become 3 per cent in 2007–08).

It should be noted that these amendments are being made to both the regular and trusts schedules, and that the middle-bracket reductions are also being made to the transmission easement schedule.

The bill also provides for the capping of increases in land tax liabilities across the land tax base (except for first-time taxpayers) so that increases assessed on the same properties cannot be greater than 50 per cent in 2006–07 compared to 2005–06 liabilities. Increases in the liabilities of trusts are also to be capped. The government estimates that around 10 000 taxpayers will benefit from capping in 2007.

This government has made massive reductions to the land tax rates. Over the last three years, I have announced land tax cuts worth \$2 billion. The reductions in this bill especially target those middle rates where the effect of increased valuations, due to Victoria's buoyant economy, has undoubtedly had effect. The government estimates that around 27 000 taxpayers will be better off under these reforms.

The government has recognised the dilution in the value of stamp duty concessions for the purchase of a property by pensioners due to rising property values. This is the third time

this government has increased the concession thresholds to maintain the value of the concession.

The government has increased the value of transactions for which both a full exemption and a partial concession are available from stamp duty for eligible pensioners. A full concession will now be available on transactions up to \$300 000 (previously \$250 000), saving pensioners \$13 660 in stamp duty, whilst a partial concession is now available for transactions of up to \$400 000 (previously \$350 000). The increased concessions will apply to all contracts of sale signed after 30 May 2006. This concession will benefit an estimated 2000 pensioners and concession card holders every year, including 400 extra pensioners and concession card holders who would not have qualified under the old thresholds.

A significant concession is now available on the average home transaction in Victoria, which is currently about \$360 000. This demonstrates the government's ongoing commitment to ensuring home ownership affordability.

When this government introduced the first home bonus into the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 in 2004 it suspended the first-home-owner-with-families exemption or concession available under the Duties Act 2000. In last year's budget the government announced that it would extend the period for which the bonus would be available but that the amount itself would be reduced. Consequently the suspension of the duty exemption or concession was extended. However it has become apparent that as the bonus is now reduced, a very small group of people would actually be better off with the duty exemption or concession rather than the bonus.

The government is therefore retrospectively ceasing the suspension of the duty exemption or concession back to the date for which the bonus was reduced, that is, transactions entered into on or after 1 January 2006. Eligible applicants will now have the ability to elect to receive either the first home bonus or the duty exemption or concession. There is already a similar practice for applicants eligible for both the pensioner exemption or concession and the bonus that has been administered well by the State Revenue Office since 2004. This ensures no-one is worse off as a result of the introduction of the bonus.

This government has a proud record of taxation reform that benefits large and small business and ordinary Victorians. The budget measures contained in this act, and the further measures announced in the 2006–07 budget on 30 May 2006 that will be brought before this Parliament later this year bring greater balance and equity to our taxation system.

I commend the bill to the house.

**Debate adjourned on motion of
Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Eumemmerring).**

Debate adjourned until next day.

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT 2006/2007) BILL

Second reading

**Ordered that second-reading speech be
incorporated for Mr LENDERS (Minister for
Finance) on motion of Hon. J. M. Madden.**

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

That the bill be now read a second time.

Incorporated speech as follows:

The bill provides appropriation authority for payments from the consolidated fund to the Parliament in respect of the 2006–07 financial year, including ongoing liabilities incurred by the Parliament such as employee entitlements that may be realised in the future.

Honourable members will be aware that other funds are appropriated for parliamentary purposes by way of special appropriations contained in other legislation. In addition, unapplied appropriations under the Appropriation (Parliament 2005/2006) Act 2005 have been estimated and included in the budget papers. Prior to 30 June actual unapplied appropriation will be finalised and the 2006–07 appropriations adjusted by the approved carryover amounts pursuant to the provisions of section 32 of the Financial Management Act 1994.

In line with the wishes of the presiding officers, appropriations in the bill are made to the departments of the Parliament.

The total appropriation authority sought in this bill is \$87.989 million (clause 3 of the bill) for Parliament in respect of the 2006–07 financial year.

I commend the bill to the house.

**Debate adjourned on motion of
Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Eumemmerring).**

Debate adjourned until later this day.

ENERGY LEGISLATION (MISCELLANEOUS AMENDMENTS) BILL

Second reading

**Debate resumed from 7 June; motion of
Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance).**

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — I am pleased to speak on the Energy Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill. I note that it is essentially a housekeeping bill that makes a large number of fairly minor technical amendments to a range of acts, including the Electricity Industry Act 2000, the Gas Industry Act 2001, the Gas Safety Act 1997 and the

Local Government Act 1989. By and large these are housekeeping matters, and I have consulted extensively with energy industry stakeholders and can say that no serious or significant issues were raised in relation to any of the many amending provisions.

At the outset I will note that energy has been a major topic of discussion within the Parliament and outside. On a number of occasions in recent times, particularly over the last week or 10 days, there have been references in this place to the sale of Snowy Hydro Ltd. I would be delighted to reprise my earlier comments today — I think they will stand the test of time — about the cant and hypocrisy of the government in respect to the matter.

I also note that the national energy debate has taken a new lift as a result of the Prime Minister's appointment of an expert committee of inquiry to review Australia's position in the nuclear fuel cycle, and I look forward to the public debate on that issue over coming weeks. While one would be very tempted to use as an excuse the thin veil of this bill, which is titled an energy bill, to speak about those matters at length — —

Hon. P. R. Hall — Go for it!

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — It is evident to me that if we pay heed to the conventions of this place, a fulsome debate on nuclear power and Snowy Hydro Ltd are not informed by the template of the legislation before us. So I will restrict my comments rather than fear breaching convention and will talk specifically about the bill.

The bill deals with a number of reforms, which I should at the outset indicate that the opposition supports. It amends the Electricity Industry Act 2000 to repeal provisions relating to the powers of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission that cover the regulation of charges for connection to and use of the electricity transmission system, which will in future be covered by the newly created Australian Energy Regulator. The ACCC's role is to be taken over by the regulator at 1 July, and the bill repeals the provisions relating to the previous arrangements, which will become redundant.

The bill also amends section 27 of the Electricity Industry Act relating to the supplier-of-last-resort provisions that require energy retailers in certain circumstances to act as suppliers of last resort. The process of approval of tariffs, terms and conditions of a contract between a supplier of last resort and a customer by the Essential Services Commission is to be streamlined. The commission will be given discretion

as to whether a retailer is required to submit a particular class of contract for its approval. The amendment will streamline the approval process by allowing the commission to approve classes of contracts where contracts are similar in nature and to exempt suppliers of last resort from submitting contracts for the commission's approval where they involve large users.

The bill also amends the Gas Industry Act 1997, in particular section 34 relating to supplier-of-last-resort schemes, to require energy retailers in certain circumstances to act as suppliers of last resort. The process of approval of tariffs, terms and conditions of a contract between a supplier of last resort and a customer by the Essential Services Commission is to be streamlined. The commission will be given discretion as to whether a retailer is required to submit a particular class of contract for its approval.

The bill also amends section 71B of the Gas Safety Act 1997 by making it an offence to cause a label or compliance plate to be affixed that would falsely indicate its approval or authorisation by Energy Safe Victoria. I understand that the need for this amendment arose when Energy Safe Victoria sought to take action against an Australian agent who imported appliances made in Italy that had misleading labels placed on them but failed in its attempts to prosecute the importer.

The bill amends section 99 of the Gas Safety Act 1997 to enable an inspector, after obtaining the written consent of Energy Safe Victoria, to require a person to give assistance in determining compliance with the act or its regulations. It will become an offence to refuse or fail to comply with an inspector's reasonable necessary requirements without adequate cause. It is intended that this amendment will provide consistency with the power of inspectors under the Electricity Safety Act and will assist Energy Safe Victoria to monitor compliance with the act.

The bill amends section 117AB of the Gas Safety Act by inserting a definition of 'inspector' that will enable the plumbing industry commissioner or a plumbing inspector to issue infringement notices under section 72 of the act in relation to gasfitting work on standard gas installations undertaken by plumbers.

The bill amends section 118(1)(w) of the Gas Safety Act to allow Energy Safe Victoria to exempt a class or classes of persons from the requirement to undertake the testing of gas. Currently the Gas Safety Act allows Energy Safe Victoria to exempt gas companies from complying with gas quality standards. The amendment will allow a person or persons — and the definition includes a company — to be exempted from the

requirement to test the quality of gas. It is important when an exemption is granted that it be tightly constrained to protect consumers who may bear financial or safety costs due to a deterioration in the quality of gas supplied.

I understand that the purpose of the amendment is to reflect the reality that the requirements for testing for certain properties of gas is not appropriately consistent across all gas fields. Of course the quality of gas and its properties are different — for example, gas from the Gippsland Basin has a high sulphur content and that is therefore routinely tested for, whereas gas from the Otway Basin has a low sulphur content and it may not be required to be tested.

The bill includes under ‘public authority’ in the Local Government Act licensees under the Electricity Industry Act 2000 and the Gas Industry Act 2001 and a person permitted to own or use a pipeline under the Pipelines Act 1967 to ensure that on a road closure existing rights in land will be preserved for private energy utilities. The amendment will ensure that, if a road is closed, discontinued or diverted, energy companies will now be regarded as a public authority and their easements will be preserved. This amendment is needed because of the privatisation of the Victorian energy industry and is regarded as recognising the need to give private energy companies the same protection as has been previously accorded to public authorities.

The bill amends the Local Government Act 1989 to include under ‘public authority’ those licensed to construct and operate a pipeline under the Pipelines Act 2005. As with the previous amendment, this recognises the privatisation of the energy industry and will afford the builders and operators of pipelines the rights previously accorded to public authorities.

I should say that the bill is regarded generally by the stakeholders, who have made comment to the opposition, as being administrative in nature and a case of necessary housekeeping. Indeed, some comment to the effect of its being reasonably helpful in the operation of the energy sector was received by the opposition. The only issue of concern raised at all was raised not on behalf of an organisation but by an individual who works in the energy sector. They raised concerns about the exemptions having an impact both financially and on safety in gas testing. I think that the bill deals with that satisfactorily, but obviously it is an issue to note with regard to the exemptions that will be provided.

Finally, although, as I said, the bill is wide in scope in the range of amendments, it does not really provide the

appropriate platform to debate the larger energy needs of our community, I make the point that this is a consequence of the privatisation of the energy industry in Victoria. Notwithstanding the intransigent opposition of the then opposition Labor Party when that occurred, now the government has reaped the financial reward — having had the hard work done by the previous coalition government to ensure that Victoria’s financial position was put onto a proper basis by reducing and retiring debt. Therefore, given that energy consumers in this state are ultimately those for whom the regulation of the sector is primarily directed, and given the provision of a competitive framework for business to contest the energy market, Victorians have been well served. The government clearly recognises this by progressively adding to the sensible regulatory framework by introducing modest provisions through amendments to make those arrangements more effective. I support the bill.

Hon. P. R. HALL (Gippsland) — I am pleased to report to the house today that The Nationals are also supporting this legislation. As it makes amendments to four acts of Parliament, the Electricity Industry Act, the Gas Industry Act, the Gas Safety Act and the Local Government Act, it could be described as being broad in its application across the total energy sector, but — I agree with the Leader of the Opposition — it is narrow in its application in each part of that sector. It makes essentially minor amendments to aspects of each of those acts. So it is broad in applying to the total energy sector and narrow in its application to each part of that sector. I want to keep my remarks in balance with those: I will be specific about the amendments to each act, and I want to make a couple of broad comments about the energy sector.

I will start with those broad comments. I mention first the government’s current policy advertising program encouraging people to conserve energy. That is a worthwhile program to embark upon. If the community can be educated to conserve energy, that is all the better. As provisions of the bill relate to appliance efficiency, there is relevance in my brief comments about the government’s program to educate people about energy conservation. There is no doubt in my mind that demand reduction is the best way to conserve energy and that people should be educated to that extent. Therefore I congratulate the government on the theme chosen for that particular program. I also thought that the program urging people to conserve water was a very worthwhile program. The only concern I have about the water conservation program is that it seemed to be too political in nature. I do not think having footage of the Premier in a helicopter flying over dams was absolutely necessary to convey the message about

how important water conservation is. I hope the campaign to promote energy conservation is not political in nature, because it is a worthwhile topic.

I also comment briefly on electricity supply in this country. Members are aware that in Victoria 80 to 85 per cent of our electricity needs come from brown coal, a significant part of the remainder comes from gas-fired power stations and only a small amount comes from renewable power. Yesterday in my contribution in this chamber to the budget debate I made the comment that we first need to improve the way we use brown coal, that it is the predominant supplier of power in this state and will continue to be the predominant source for power generation in the state for many years to come and that we need to improve the efficiency with which we use brown coal. I made the comment also that we need to explore the greater use of renewable energy, particularly solar energy, in this country.

In respect of that first comment about improving brown coal technology, I was disappointed to read in the *Age* 'Business' section this morning at page 3 that the \$16 million allocated in last year's state budget has yet to be spent. That was \$16 million allocated over four years for the purposes of determining and researching ways in which our brown coal could be used better. I note, for example, that the Co-operative Research Centre for Clean Power from Lignite has only one or two months of its current contract funding to run. It was expected to receive at least part of the \$16 million to continue its research efforts, but its future is in doubt. It seems there are no plans at this point to spend the \$16 million allocated in last year's budget for the next four years. That brown coal research is desperately needed. I urge the government to make some decisions about how that research money is going to be spent.

The other quick comment I want to make is how in this country we seem to be ignoring the potential use of solar energy in any significant way. I commented yesterday about the establishment of the National Solar Energy Centre by the federal government and how much it offered in terms of a potential major future power supply to this country. I hope one day to have more opportunity to talk at length about that in this chamber, because in my view solar power has been largely ignored up until this point in time, and it potentially offers very significant opportunities for us living in this sunny part of the Southern Hemisphere.

I want to now turn to the provisions of the bill. The amendments have been described as rather technical, and we certainly agree with that assessment. As I said, we are supporting each of the amendments in this

amending bill. The first one relates to the regulation of charges for connection to and use of electricity transmission systems. That is going to be undertaken by the Australian Energy Regulator; it was formerly undertaken by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission. Because of changes agreed to at a national level, the role of the ACC is being taken over by the energy regulator. Therefore this is a consequential amendment to previous administrative decisions.

There are amendments that streamline the supplier-of-last-resort provisions. They are complex provisions, but my understanding is that the energy regulator will be able to describe a class of people for a supplier of last resort and therefore it will not be necessary to engage in an individual contract with each of those customers. There will be a contract that will apply to the class of customers.

Amendments to the Gas Industry Act will give greater powers to take action against the false labelling of gas appliances. That is welcomed. There is further definition of an inspector under the Gas Safety Act to enforce gas installation works undertaken by plumbers. Again these seem to be sensible provisions.

Finally, the amendments to the Local Government Act mean that when a local government chooses to close a road the existing electricity, gas and pipeline rights are preserved. That means that if a utility has an easement running through a particular road, while the road might be closed by local government, the easement rights will be preserved. As I said, these are technical amendments which go to four different acts of Parliament. They seem sensible to The Nationals, and we are happy to indicate our support for them.

Mr VINEY (Chelsea) — I am very pleased to support this legislation, which as previous speakers have pointed out is almost an omnibus bill. It amends the Electricity Industry Act 2000 to repeal provisions relating to the considerable powers of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission in relation to transmission pricing and the supplier-of-last-resort provisions. It also amends the Gas Industry Act 2001 in relation to the supplier-of-last-resort provisions. Importantly it amends the Gas Industry Act to improve the operation of that act in regard to consumer protections around labelling, and it amends the Local Government Act to define a public authority as including certain private entities.

As previous speakers have said, the bill is wide-ranging in terms of the acts it amends, but the issues it deals with are quite specific and narrow. Sometimes we have

before the house legislation that tidies up previous acts to make sure there is consistency. In this case the bill is making fairly important provisions for the protection of consumers in relation to the labelling of appliances under the Gas Safety Act.

I want to pick up on some of Mr Hall's opening remarks, because given the current climate in this country and the debate on energy legislation, it is important for the broader context to be understood — the use of energy, the demand for energy and the real concerns in our community about greenhouse gas emissions and the potential climate change effect. Mr Hall quite rightly mentioned a number of areas which I agree with him need considerable further work from us as a community, from us as local, state and national governments, and from all of us as individuals. He quite rightly talked about energy efficiency. All these things are necessary to ameliorate the impact of greenhouse gases. Energy efficiency and demand reduction are important initiatives for us to deal with as a community.

At a government level we need to look seriously at areas on the supply side. In terms of energy availability, it is true that Victoria has an enormous resource of brown coal in the Latrobe Valley. Putting aside greenhouse gases for one moment, this resource provides a long-term and available energy supply, but unfortunately brown coal is a significant greenhouse gas polluter. We need to improve the way we use brown coal and look at new technologies such as brown coal drying, gas conversion and so on. There has also been discussion about geosequestration, which involves putting carbons under the ground — —

Hon. D. McL. Davis — Say it quickly!

Mr VINEY — Yes, it is easier if you say it quickly. This process involves putting carbon back into the ground. At government level we need to look at a range of issues like that. I am pleased that about 18 months ago this government announced \$103 million in additional funding for emerging and greenhouse gas technologies, and there is an additional \$15 million for that in this budget. The government is serious about this investment. We need to improve the ways we use brown coal. Investing in these areas is one of the ways we can start this process.

I welcome Mr Hall's comments. We also need to look at renewables. As Mr Hall said, this is particularly the case with solar energy, and I would add wind energy. We may differ on that, but there are other potential technologies, like tidal energy, which we can and will have to look at as a community. In Mr Hall's

contribution to this current debate there was a significant omission in relation to alternative energy sources. It was significant because that omission has been dominating news for a week. The Prime Minister, Mr Howard, has apparently suggested that as a community we need to go down the path of nuclear power. I beg to differ with the Prime Minister. I note that Mr Hall indicated to me across the chamber the other day — I am not sure whether it was on or off the record, but I will now put it on the record — that he did not support a nuclear power plant in Victoria.

Hon. P. R. Hall — I spoke about it yesterday during my contribution to the debate on the budget papers.

Mr VINEY — That is great, and I acknowledge it. I am sorry I did not hear that contribution. I think the nuclear power industry is the wrong path for this community to go down and to invest presumably many billions of dollars in when there could be significant investment in alternative energies such as solar energy, various technologies associated with brown coal treatments which would provide great benefit to this community and the use of available renewable resources without the risk and the dangers associated with nuclear power plants. I accept that safety in the construction of nuclear power plants is improving, but we cannot forget that the by-product of the nuclear industry is radioactive waste, which has a half-life of some 36 000 years.

Somebody said on a talkback radio program the other day — I do not know whether it is true or not — that the Sphinx, the oldest human structure on the planet, has existed for one-sixth of the half-life of nuclear waste. That is what we will have to potentially deal with in regard to this industry. I do not think there is an answer to that problem. I welcome Mr Hall's general comments on this matter. I concur with him that in the context of this bill before the house today these are important issues for the community to deal with.

The Energy Legislation (Miscellaneous Amendments) Bill is quite specific in nature and tidies up existing legislation. I appreciate the support of the opposition and The Nationals. I commend the bill to the house.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

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

That the bill be now read a third time.

In doing so, I wish to thank respective members for their contributions.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

BUDGET PAPERS 2006-07

Debate resumed from 7 June; motion of Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance):

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

Hon. W. A. LOVELL (North Eastern) — I rise to speak on the motion to take note of the budget papers. It disappoints me to be speaking on a flawed document. It is a document that has a \$600 million black hole in it. It is a document that the government should take back to the drafting stages and then re-present to the Parliament. However, the government refuses to accept it is a flawed document and we must therefore debate it in its current form.

As a country member of Parliament I was particularly disappointed to read the government press release which trumpeted that services and support are to continue for provincial Victoria. In the first paragraph of the press release the government acknowledged that less than 3 per cent of the budget would be spent on services in and support for country Victoria. It is extremely disappointing that once again country Victorians will suffer under a Bracks government budget. This government has only funded token programs in country Victoria and has failed to deliver any real initiatives. Indeed, much of the money has been announced previously in the lead-up to the budget, and the budget was just an opportunity for them to reannounce those projects.

Country Victorians were also shocked to see that Labor was now repeating the mistakes of the Cain-Kirner years and that the state was going back into debt. This budget outlines that there will be an additional \$5.6 million in spending, and we will have a debt by 2010 of \$7.1 billion. Country Victorians were also shocked to learn that the Department of Primary Industries budget had been cut by \$28 million. That was certainly a move that insulted country Victorians and, in particular, the farming community in country Victoria.

This budget contained no new initiatives to address any of the rural doctor shortages. Hospitals throughout country Victoria missed out with only one country hospital being funded in this budget. The fire services levy was another issue of contention in country Victoria, with country Victorians paying more, even though the Bracks government cannot manage its public land. The farmers in the north-east of Victoria who suffered from those horrific bushfires in 2003 were disappointed to see that their fire services levies are going up, but they have not seen any improvement in the management of public land in the north-east.

Free public transport for seniors on Sundays, announced in the government's transport policy just a few weeks ago, was also re-announced in the budget. This is an insult to country Victorians. Seniors in metropolitan Melbourne can travel anywhere within the metropolitan system for free on a Sunday, but that same opportunity has not been extended to country Victorians. There is a small opportunity for people in Bendigo, Ballarat and Geelong to travel within their townships, but for country Victorians outside those provincial centres there is no access to free travel on a Sunday. While metropolitan seniors can get on a train, bus or tram and go to the football or the zoo with their families, or even go for a daytrip out to Healesville, that same opportunity will not be afforded to seniors in country Victoria.

Of course, there was not one cent for the extension of reticulated natural gas throughout country Victoria.

Some of the other things that were hidden in the budget that I was particularly disappointed about were that Victorians will pay \$900 more a head in taxes in the next 12 months. As I said, the state debt will increase from \$1.5 billion in 2005 to \$7.1 billion by June 2010. Victorian home buyers will continue to pay the highest stamp duty in the nation. The trumpeted land tax is not what it appears. Most property owners will continue to pay more in land tax next year.

I was pleased to see a few announcements in the budget that affect my area, and I would like to talk about a couple of those because I have lobbied particularly hard for some of them. I was pleased to see that for the first time in 10 years there will be an increase in the accommodation allowances for apprentices. That is something that I have lobbied particularly hard for over the last couple of years because country apprentices are more likely to have to travel to do their TAFE courses and be up for the cost of their accommodation. Victoria was well behind every other state in Australia in what it paid in accommodation allowances to apprentices. I am

pleased to see that has been brought more in line with other states.

I was particularly pleased to see the funding for the Rochester and Elmore district hospital. Early last year this hospital learnt that the government was going to close its operating theatre. It was a shameful announcement that was made in mid-January during the holiday period. The very next morning after the announcement was leaked at a board meeting the night before, the Honourable David Davis and I stood on the hospital lawns with the people of Rochester and opposed the closure of that operating theatre. We opposed the fact that the Bracks government had failed to maintain that theatre to a standard that allowed the performance of operations to continue in Rochester. We immediately called on the Minister for Health in the other place to fund an upgrade to that health service. The minister was not listening.

It was extremely disappointing that other politicians in our local region actually backed that closure. The Honourable David Davis and I fought on along with the community. We held a public meeting in Rochester that was attended by almost 1400 very angry residents who were prepared to stand up and fight for their health service. It was that public pressure from the people of Rochester being prepared to stand up and fight for their health services that forced this government to reconsider its decision on the closure of the operating theatre. It has been an extremely good outcome; not only will we have a brand new operating theatre but we will also have a redevelopment of the hospital.

There is a group of people that should really be thanked in this speech — namely, Graham Clark, who chaired the Rochester Hospital Community Action Group, and the rest of the people who made up that committee and were prepared to stand up and fight for their health services. We have had a great outcome for the people of the Rochester and Elmore district.

I also welcome the funding that has been delivered for the Academy of Sport Health and Education in Shepparton, a program that is designed to re-engage young Aboriginal people in education through sport. That is an initiative of the University of Melbourne and the Rumbalara football club, and it has been a very successful program. I hope that model will be used to re-engage more Aboriginal students across the state in education through their involvement in sport. I also welcome the money that was allocated for the redevelopment of the Ambermere site in Shepparton for mental health services. Again, that was funding that was well and truly overdue and should probably have come 8 to 10 years ago.

I turn to some of the key areas that were not funded in my local area. Prior to the budget coming down last week I put out a wish list. A number of things did not gain funding, including the further stages at Goulburn Valley Health. Kyabram and District Health Services has a need for funding to relocate its community health service to more adequate premises, but that was not funded. There was no further money for the redevelopment of the Echuca hospital or the Nathalia hospital, and that was very disappointing. It was also disappointing that there was no further funding for dental health in country Victoria, particularly in areas like Wangaratta and Echuca. We have a severe shortage of dental practitioners, and there is a real need for funding to attract and retain public dentists in country Victoria.

Nothing was announced for my region in public housing, yet we have waiting lists containing in excess of 1300 families in the Hume region. The figure is higher again in the Loddon-Mallee region, where over 1500 families are on the public housing waiting list. It is something the Minister for Housing must address. She desires to represent the Northern Victorian Region in the next Parliament, but so far her track record in that region has been very poor on public housing, with in excess of 2800 families on a waiting list for public housing. I am sure she will not receive one of their votes. There was also no money for shared supported accommodation, and this is an area of desperate need in country Victoria. There are many elderly parents who have adult disabled offspring living with them in their own homes who are really concerned about what will happen to their offspring when they are no longer able to provide the level of care that is needed.

There were a couple of announcements about funding for schools, but I guess that is all up in the air now because we do not know what will happen about funding for schools with the \$600 million black hole in the budget. I hope the government finds that money from somewhere else, because it is a real shame that maintenance and the building of new schools in this state had to wait for a one-off sale of state-owned infrastructure in order to be provided for. Maintenance should be budgeted for in every budget and not left to rely on a one-off sale of a state asset.

I have already mentioned that we did not get any further extension of natural gas in the north-east, and certainly we are looking forward to the government delivering on its promise before November, because it promised natural gas to several towns in the north-east.

I now turn to some of my portfolio areas. The tourism portfolio is interesting, with the government

announcing additional spending for tourism next year. It had a budget blow-out of 22.5 per cent in the Marketing Victoria budget for 2005–06. Despite this being the year of the Commonwealth Games and despite there being a budget blow-out, it still failed to meet its targets for tourism numbers and tourism expenditure in 2005–06. It is forecasting a decline in tourism expenditure in 2006–07. Despite the fact that the government will spend an additional \$10.5 million to market tourism, it still expects to see a decline.

What is even more disappointing is that the government is prepared to accept mediocre standards; it is not prepared to raise the standards for Victorians. An example is its target market awareness for tourism, which was as high as 65 per cent interstate for the Commonwealth Games. In previous years the Queensland market awareness of Victoria was 24.3 per cent, in South Australia it was 22 per cent and in New South Wales it was 21 per cent. Next year the target for interstate awareness of tourism in Victoria, despite the government's allocating additional money for marketing, has been set as low as 16 per cent. We are going from a market that had a 65 per cent awareness of tourism in Victoria due to the Commonwealth Games to targeting only 16 per cent awareness. That is pretty low, and it is a shame these standards are being set by this government, which should be aspiring to much higher standards.

In the consumer affairs portfolio we also had a budget blow-out. The Minister for Consumer Affairs, the Honourable Marsha Thomson, has shown she is prepared to accept the department aspiring to lower standards. In this budget the department only aspires to a quality of service at 87.5 per cent and timeliness of service delivery at 90 per cent. These targets would not be accepted in private enterprise. Victorians have a right to demand better, and the minister should aspire to higher standards.

The financial services budget is expected to blow out by 29.78 per cent. Although the women's affairs portfolio is expected to come in on budget, it is expected to consult with around 25 per cent less women this year. In an election year we have less consultation and more Labor social engineering, and the Minister for Women's Affairs in the other place will just decide what is best for Victorian women. We also see that she is prepared to accept that near enough is good enough, with quality measures aiming for only 85 per cent satisfaction with forums run by the Office of Women's Policy. The government is prepared to accept that the Queen Victoria building will have an occupancy rate of less than 85 per cent. In timeliness measures it is

prepared to accept that only 80 per cent of women's strategy will be delivered against performance targets.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon. Andrew Brideson) — Order! The honourable member's time has expired!

Ms ROMANES (Melbourne) — I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak this morning on the budget papers, which have been well received across the board in the community following the bringing down of the budget last week by the Treasurer, John Brumby. I believe that is because the fundamentals of the budget are sound, and the investment in education and training to build a skilled work force and to grow the economy has been widely endorsed across the community, as has the investment through the budget in infrastructure. That applies especially to the investment of \$10.5 billion over 10 years in the transport and livability statement to meet the needs of a modern economy and to provide through that transport investment for building an inclusive society which has mobility and access for all to work, to have recreation and to take part in other community activities.

I contrast that with the commonwealth government's budget brought down by the federal Treasurer three weeks earlier, which failed to invest in education and training and failed to invest in essential infrastructure across the nation, even though all states were crying out for it. Instead the federal Treasurer and the Prime Minister accumulated huge surpluses. In the last year we have seen \$17 billion in surpluses, and they have used those surpluses to play Father Christmas with tax cuts, interestingly adding as a result to pressures on interest rates with the potential to have an adverse effect on the national economy if their budget triggers a rise in interest rates in the near future. It highlights the poor financial management at the national level.

Education and training remain at the top of the priority list for the Bracks government. Again, in this budget we see an additional \$1.22 billion investment in that area. That comes on top of significant increases in education and training every year for the past six budgets. Why are education and training the foundation stones of the priorities for activity in Victoria from the perspective of the Bracks government? It is because education and training are the pillars of activity. They provide for the future of all Victorians, especially young people. However, increasingly we are seeing the need for intervention and training support to assist mature-age Victorians to re-enter, retrain or stay in the work force. For those reasons education and training are major planks of our strategy for growing the Victorian economy.

One of the initiatives in the 2006–07 budget is an allocation of \$367 million to maintain Victoria's skills advantage. When we talk about maintaining the advantage it is because Victoria is doing well vis-a-vis other states. In 2005–06 Victoria continues to exhibit a strong economic performance among the non-resource states. Its economy has grown by an average of 3.6 per cent above the national average growth rate of 3.3 per cent of the last few years. Just yesterday in the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee hearing the Minister for Education and Training and the Minister for Education Services tabled a graph which gave an indication of the health of the Victorian economy in terms of work force participation in the area of increased apprenticeship and traineeship completion rates. We can see from that graph that between 1999 and 2005 Victoria had a rate of growth of completions higher than all of the larger states. In 2005, while there were 27 000 apprenticeship and traineeship completions in Queensland and 38 000 in New South Wales, there were 45 000 completions in Victoria. That is another indication of how well we are travelling in Victoria.

However, like all the states across the nation, Victoria is still grappling with a shortage of skills in the work force, hence the \$367 million budget investment to encourage more young Victorians to take up and complete a trade, to boost the skills of our work force and to help grow the economy into the future. An important component of this budget package and strategy is the \$500 trades bonus. We still have one out of three first-year apprentices dropping out before they even get to the end of their first year, and the trades bonus has been introduced as an incentive to encourage them to stay on and complete that first year, and hopefully it will encourage an even higher completion rate of apprenticeships in the future. In addition, as Ms Lovell mentioned, another important initiative is that \$6.2 million of that \$367 million has been allocated to boost the accommodation allowance for around 2700 apprentices and trainees in regional Victoria from \$7.40 per night to \$25 per night. That will be a significant means of support for people who are undertaking apprenticeships and traineeships in areas to which they need to travel.

I was recently at a consultation for youth at Leongatha in Gippsland. One of the points that was raised time and again was the barrier that a lack of transport is for youth who need to get to jobs, fulfil the terms of their apprenticeships or attend courses in rural and regional Victoria. The increased accommodation allowance should go some way to helping address that barrier they face. Another important initiative in maintaining Victoria's skill advantage is the \$7.2 million that has

been allocated to continue the successful Victorian certificate of applied learning (VCAL) program. Sixty per cent of education providers are now providing VCAL courses. That program has been very successful, so it is important to continue and expand it.

An amount of \$15.5 million is allocated in the budget for the provision of new training opportunities in skill areas of high regional demand. This is again the Bracks government trying, through the *Moving Forward — Provincial Victoria* statement that was released earlier this year, to provide training in areas of rural and regional Victoria where there are skill shortages — for example, engineering skills for wind farm and road and rail projects and electrotechnology skills for the power generation industry. These are all important areas that need further support and investment.

The \$367 million funding for maintaining the skills advantage also incorporates the \$241 million allocation that was announced earlier in the year to encourage more young people to enter the trades, to provide workers with a chance to update job skills and to help businesses match skills training to industry priorities. Those initiatives include the allocation of \$28 million to guarantee funding so that all Victorians up to the age of 20 can complete year 12 or an equivalent qualification, \$33 million to encourage pre-apprenticeships in areas of skill shortage, \$11 million for older existing workers who did not complete year 12 to go back to study and gain a qualification, \$2 million to employ skills advisers for business and \$42 million to help existing workers to upgrade their skills to keep pace with technology. As well there is \$3 million for information campaigns to encourage a take-up of careers in trade and manufacturing and \$10 million to help businesses plan for work force and industry skills needs. Those are just some of the many elements of the package that has been put forward to continue the work of maintaining the skills advantage that we have in this state, while knowing that we have to keep building on that and expanding further access to education, knowledge and training in our community.

Importantly, as you would have noted, Acting President, many of the initiatives are designed to attack the barriers that people face at different times in their lives and in different parts of Victoria in accessing opportunities for education and training. Some of them are small but obvious. One that we came across about three years ago when I was part of the school bus review team, along with the Minister for Energy Industries, was the problem that young people had accessing bus services into towns to complete their studies after they had left school. The Bracks government has made it possible for young people in

the country to access school bus services to make sure they can get to TAFE courses and other tertiary training.

The *Meeting Our Transport Challenges — Connecting Victorian Communities* statement that was released by the Minister for Transport in the other place, Peter Batchelor, just a few weeks ago contains a government commitment of \$510 million to improving public transport in regional Victoria. That commitment is embodied in the 2006-07 budget and future budget projections.

The \$510 million includes a commitment to new services to assist local students and youth to access tertiary education, jobs and community facilities in the country. There is also a commitment to improve transport service levels at night and on weekends in major regional centres, including Ballarat, the Latrobe Valley, Bendigo, Ararat, Colac and Leongatha. These services are critical for young people and adults living in rural and regional Victoria and make it possible for them to access work, recreation and other community facilities and activities as part of an active life in their own communities.

There are other ways in which students in provincial Victoria are big winners from the massive investment in education and training in this budget. An amount of \$170 million has been allocated over four years for new school and TAFE facilities, for regional schools, for a renewed focus on improving literacy and for the School Start bonus for prep and year 7. That \$170 million will go to people in rural and regional Victoria. Since 1999 the Bracks government has invested an extra \$440 million in 242 projects at 175 schools in rural and regional Victoria. That has been part of the tripling of investment in programs and capital assets across the state since 1999. In Gippsland there will be school modernisations for Leongatha, Moe, Traralgon Secondary College, Orbost Secondary College and Traralgon South Primary School.

Hon. D. K. DRUM (North Western) — It is interesting that we have this opportunity to discuss the budget that was handed down last week. It is a budget of high spending and high taxes and effectively goes to show that the government is starting to move in the wrong direction on the slope in relation to its responsibilities concerning taxpayers money. It is proving that Victoria is a great place to tax a family.

There is nothing in the budget for carers or people with disabilities. There is no push in the budget for a population-based benchmarking of funding arrangements. Effectively the government will let the

existing waiting lists stay the way they are and let the existing services struggle. There is very little in it for country Victoria. There is the proposal for the aged care facility at Warracknabeal, which will be gladly encouraged and warmly welcomed. The public transport initiatives for the major regional centres in rural Victoria will be welcomed but will miss the mark because the networks should be extended. The amount being spent is only a pittance compared with the money the government is spending in metropolitan Victoria.

Despite the stamp duty reductions even more money will flow into the coffers of the government via stamp duty — and according to budget forecasts the GST is also set to increase by 8 per cent. Spending programs have been inflated to include time frames of 10 years. The government has an increased revenue stream that is now pushing \$33 billion but will still be forced to borrow \$7 billion to carry out its infrastructure projects. It has not yet been in government for seven years but has been able to overrun each of its budgets and now must borrow \$7 billion.

The government is using sleight of hand with the Regional Infrastructure Development Fund announcements. It has told regional Victorians that it will spend \$450 million each and every year, but in May it said that \$60 million or \$70 million a year of the amount promised might remain unspent. However, inevitably the amount of \$70 million promised in May turns into \$34 million come 30 June. Since that program has been in place some \$450 million has been promised for spending on programs in regional Victoria, but what has actually been spent is as little as \$150 million. That shows the sleight of hand and the spin that is associated with this government.

There is nothing in the budget for the environment, renewable energy, solar power or technology to clean up brown coal. This government will be known as the master of hidden and secret taxes. Treasurer Brumby is very good at saying that he has reduced this and reduced that and made savings in respective areas, but what he will not tell the people of Victoria about, and what the government has introduced legislation to hide, are the taxes it has introduced.

Why the government would need to cash in \$2.9 billion of future dividends from Transurban for \$609 million is beyond the understanding of even the most astute financiers in this land. What are the hidden taxes that this government has forced on Victorians — taxes that have been forced on everybody without them realising it? The government takes \$1 billion from poker machines, which is effectively taking \$1 billion out of the pockets of Victoria's most vulnerable citizens.

Labor backbenchers talk about the damage the gaming industry does to vulnerable families, but the government takes \$1 billion in direct taxes out of the pockets of those families.

Not only does the government do that, it also has its grubby hands on the Community Support Fund money that is intended to be used for projects that should increase the livability of communities that have to struggle through the evils associated with gambling. The government now takes effectively \$130 million every year and allocates about 50 per cent to projects that were historically funded through line items in the budget. So \$65 million stays in the budget revenue area for the government to use in other areas. It uses the Community Support Fund money to fund budget line items such as rehabilitation of drug-affected prisoners in the jail system and the like.

TAFE colleges are one of my favourites. How did the government decide that students who want to better themselves in the TAFE system should be a target for extra taxation? Now 3 cents for every student contact hour will go straight to taxation — and it does not have to be tagged to be spent in education. The Bracks Labor government believes that anybody who has enough money to better themselves by studying at a TAFE college should contribute to the government, and 3 cents out of every \$1.25 payable for student contact hours will go directly into the government's coffers. What a great endorsement for a government that says that education is its no. 1 priority.

Another hidden tax is unpaid TAB dividends. Those of us who like to have a bit of a flutter at the TAB contribute \$9 million in unclaimed money. If we were contributing to the racing industry that would be one thing, but to think that the money snaffled by this government goes directly to state revenue is extraordinary. The government just thinks it has another \$9 million per year of unpaid dividends from the TAB. This government has given no thought to sharing that money with the racing industry or in fact to delivering at all to the racing industry.

Another hidden tax is being paid to the Victorian government. If you put a 10 per cent deposit down on the purchase of a \$400 000 house, that deposit of \$40 000 goes into a pool until the conveyancing on your house goes through. It could be left there for three months. At any one time there is \$750 million in that pool. You would like to think that \$750 million would be earning in the vicinity of \$40 million a year in interest. We find that the government is taking all but \$1 million of that fund every year, another little hidden treasure that the Treasurer has put his dirty hands on.

That effectively means that if you are buying a \$400 000 house, you are paying a \$1300 contribution to the Victorian government by way of a hidden tax. This is not about the residential tenancy bond fund. It is about another fund that has many hundreds of millions of dollars in it generating interest, and that interest is funding government organisations and government offices.

There is also the consumer price index (CPI). This government is very good at making sure that all its income, taxes, licences and fees are CPI indexed. Every year when 1 July ticks over, up goes all of its income in line with the CPI; and then on the way out all the allowances and expenditure also should be tagged. That is what would happen if this government had any ethics about it at all or any ability, desire or will to do the right thing. As Mr Hall said last night, you would think that an allowance that is paid to people who have to get their children to schools would be CPI indexed, but not on your life. Anything on the way into this government in the way of revenue will be CPI indexed; any expenditure will only be increased when and if it suits the Labor government.

The fire services levy and all our insurance premiums also offer another hidden and secret tax to the Bracks Labor government. We have the premium we pay for our house insurance or our business insurance — I will just keep it to residential house insurances — then we have the fire services levy thrown in on top of that and the goods and services tax thrown in as well. We all realise that the GST has to be paid, but what we do not realise is that stamp duty goes on the whole lot, so it encapsulates the GST as well. That is a tax on a tax, and that tax on a tax goes straight to the Labor government — not that it would ever want us to hear about this at all. That is not to mention the fact that the fire services levy being put onto household insurance is a totally ridiculous way in which to fund the Country Fire Authority in the first place.

I want to talk about another anomaly between the GST and stamp duty. If you purchase a building for your business and you pay, say, \$800 000, then you might pay GST of \$80 000 on that, except if it is a building to be used for your business, you are going to get that GST money back at the end of the quarter. But when you pay the stamp duty on the purchase of that building, you pay the stamp duty on the GST as well, even though you will get that GST back at a later time. You are paying a tax to the state government on a mythical tax in the first instance because you do not really pay that tax, you get it rebated back in full, but along the way you have just thrown another \$5000 into the coffers of the Bracks Labor government. It has

thought out many ways in which to increase its bottom line without actually letting the people of Victoria ever know that it is taking the money out of their pockets.

An extra \$600 million has been taken out of our third-party insurance. When we pay our registration — it might be in the vicinity of \$500 for each of us — about half goes to register the car and about half to third-party insurance. We now find that the government is making so much money out of this aspect of insurance that it can give itself a \$600 million dividend on an annual basis. That \$30 per head in Victoria when we pay our car registration is another secret, hidden tax that is going straight through to Treasurer Brumby so that he can make a big man of himself and waste it on self-congratulatory advertising programs.

Last year we saw the centralisation of the small hospitals funds around Victoria. Many of those hospitals, which generally have a tremendous army of volunteer workers raising additional funds for the hospitals, are now being told by this government that all those funds have to be centralised in Melbourne. The government will pay a nominal and minimal interest component on those funds and will reap off the top the additional interest, which will effectively go straight through to the government as well. It really is quite an extreme action to target some of those smaller hospitals which have extremely strong communities.

The parking tax was introduced by this government and then doubled. That now reaps in the vicinity of \$40 million a year. It turns out to be in the vicinity of an \$800 impost on every owner of a car parking facility in this city. Obviously it has not been introduced to fix the traffic congestion problem; it has nothing to do with fixing traffic congestion. If the government were serious about fixing the problem of congestion, it would do what was done in London and charge a levy on people driving into the city, but it does not want to do that. It just wants to charge enough so it will have no effect at all on the number of people driving their cars into Melbourne. The government wants to make sure that the financial impost on the owners of car parking spaces, which is passed on to the users, will be just enough not to deter people from driving into the city.

We also have the health tax, which is put onto gaming machines as well. That is a third way in which this government has its hands on the gaming industry: it gets its own area of tax, it takes the Community Support Fund and now it is doubling its income from Tattersalls and Tabcorp.

Acting President, I have a fair few of these hidden taxes still to mention. I wonder if I could have an extension of time. I have a couple of pages more.

The ACTING PRESIDENT

(Hon. R. H. Bowden) — Order! No, the member's time has expired.

Debate adjourned on motion of Hon. ANDREW BRIDESON (Waverley).

Debate adjourned until later this day.

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT 2006/2007) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance).

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS (Eumemmerring) — It is an unexpected opportunity this afternoon to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2006/2007) Bill which has come before the house this week. This bill is a bit of an anachronism. It is a historic attempt to demonstrate some separation between the legislature and the executive. The historic basis of having a separate appropriation bill for Parliament is to demonstrate that the Parliament is in control of the appropriation process and it appropriates a sum of money for the operation of the legislature, and then separately you have the Parliament appropriating a separate sum for the executive for the operations of government.

In 2006 I do not think anyone believes that this truly is an independent process where the Parliament makes its own appropriations separate to the executive. Of course the Appropriation (Parliament 2006/2007) Bill we are considering this afternoon is the work of the government, of the executive, admittedly in consultation with the Parliament, but it is very much dictated to the Parliament by the executive.

I recall conversations with former President Chamberlain about some of the discussions and negotiations that he and speakers Andrianopoulos and Plowman had had with successive governments on the issue of funding for Parliament. From those discussions with the late Bruce Chamberlain it was clear to me that, despite the will of the presiding officers, at the end of the day it was the Treasury that dictated exactly how much would be appropriated for this Parliament. It is a bit of anachronism that we are negotiating a separate appropriation bill for Parliament as though it were the

Parliament's will rather than the executive's will that is being implemented.

However, there are some differences between the mechanisms of the general appropriation bill and those of the parliamentary appropriation bill. That is reflected in the amounts that have been appropriated for the various parliamentary departments. They do not match what is shown in the budget papers because, apart from the sums appropriated under the parliamentary appropriation bill there are also special appropriations that flow through to the Parliament under various acts of Parliament, including the Parliamentary Committees Act. Funding for the parliamentary committees, which is in the order of about \$5 million per annum, is appropriated separately to the funds the Parliament is considering today in this bill.

The bill provides for separate appropriations for each of the parliamentary departments. It provides that from the consolidated fund the Treasurer can provide a total of \$87.989 million for Parliament. That sum is split up between the four parliamentary departments: the Legislative Council, \$2.651 million; the Legislative Assembly, \$4.114 million; parliamentary committees, \$5.71 million; Parliamentary Services, the bureaucracy, \$64.234 million; and the Auditor-General, \$11.28 million. It is interesting that the Auditor-General is included in this bill. While that figure does not reflect the Auditor-General's budget, it reflects the fact that the Auditor-General is an officer of this Parliament and is appropriated accordingly.

The budget papers give a more accurate reflection of the actual funding that is provided to the Parliament under the appropriation and also under the special appropriations. I turn to the relevant section of budget paper 3, which provides that funding for outputs for Parliament totals just short of \$116 million, which is quite different to the \$87 million appropriated by the parliamentary appropriation bill because of those special appropriations.

The budget papers outline the funding for outputs for the parliamentary departments, which are: for the Legislative Council, \$9 million; for the Legislative Assembly, \$16.8 million; for Parliamentary Services, \$57.6 million; for parliamentary committees, \$5.7 million; and for the Auditor-General, \$26.8 million. That more accurately reflects the actual funding that will be available for the operation of the respective departments.

In passing I note that criticisms are often made of the Legislative Council and the work it performs, but the budget papers clearly demonstrate that the cost to the

people of Victoria of providing for the Legislative Council is substantially less than the cost of providing for the Legislative Assembly.

Hon. H. E. Buckingham — They get value for money.

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — They do get value for money, Mrs Buckingham. Perhaps if a chamber is to be abolished or restructured the expensive one could be looked at first, rather than the Council.

Consideration of the Appropriation (Parliament 2006/2007) Bill is a good opportunity to look at the way in which this Parliament spends public money. While admittedly the \$115 million for the output groups for Parliament is a relatively small sum in the context of a \$32 billion budget, it is still a substantial amount of money, and it is appropriate that the Parliament be accountable to the people of Victoria for the way in which the funds are spent.

The mechanisms this Parliament has to attempt to keep the executive accountable to Parliament are via the Financial Management Act, via the ministerial directions issued by the Minister for Finance and also via the mechanism of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, which is charged with the oversight of the budget and government agencies. As honourable members know, every year the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee makes a number of recommendations through a series of reporting mechanisms on the operation of the individual departments, including the Parliament, and proposes ways in which the operation of those agencies can be made better to improve corporate governance and to improve accountability to this Parliament.

In its latest report on budget outcomes the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee made a number of recommendations with respect to the Parliament. The bipartisan committee was quite critical of the operation of the reporting and accountability mechanisms of some of the parliamentary departments. I will place on record at this time that it is important that the message the Parliament sends to the executive and to the wider bureaucracy is that the Parliament has its own house in order before it expects individual departments to report and adhere to accountability mechanisms in the same manner.

Although the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee recognises that aspects of the Financial Management Act and the directions of the Minister for Finance do not apply to the Parliament, it is still the

committee's belief that it is appropriate that all the parliamentary departments adhere to those requirements. If we as a Parliament expect the individual government departments to adhere to that accountability framework, it is appropriate that the Parliament adheres to that framework. It is the very strong recommendation of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that the Parliament of Victoria and its individual departments adhere to the requirements of the directions of the Minister for Finance and the Financial Management Act.

The committee's report on budget outcomes went into some detail about the shortcomings of the reporting framework of the Parliament in its annual reports. I place on record that in particular it found no fault with the reporting of the two chamber departments — the Department of the Legislative Council and the Department of the Legislative Assembly — but it was very critical of the reporting mechanism of the Department of Parliamentary Services, which is the overarching bureaucracy, if you like, for this Parliament.

The committee's criticism was that the Department of Parliamentary Services failed to provide in its annual report quantitative details of its performance outcomes. This matter was raised with the Department of Parliamentary Services. The way the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee works is that with issues that are identified from time to time there is an interactive dialogue on its concerns. It received back from the Department of Parliamentary Services a written response advising that in effect the performance measures and achievements against those measures are a matter for internal use and for discussion with internal staff and internal management, but external reporting to the Parliament and to the people of Victoria as key stakeholders is something that is done on a 'top level strategic overview'.

The Department of Parliamentary Services was saying that it would keep the reporting outcomes internal and provide only a quick overview for the Parliament and the people of Victoria. This is something that the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee regards as completely unacceptable. I add that the committee reached the view that it is contrary to the Parliamentary Administration Act 2005, which has as a primary objective the promotion of the highest standards of governance in the administration of the Parliament of Victoria. So it is a fairly significant issue that the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, this Parliament's lead committee on accountability and governance, found that the Parliament itself — through its agency, the Department of Parliamentary Services — is in

breach of that key objective of the Parliamentary Administration Act 2005 and is failing to provide adequate disclosure to the Parliament and the people of Victoria.

The committee went on to note that the Minister for Finance has issued ministerial directions that require government departments to provide in their annual reports a comparison of the output targets specified in the budget with actual performance against those targets. Again, while it notes that those ministerial directions do not apply to the Parliament, it is the strong expectation of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee that the Parliament would adhere to the same reporting requirements that the Minister for Finance requires of government departments.

As a consequence of that investigation, the committee recommended that the Department of Parliamentary Services improve its level of accountability to the community by including in its annual report quantitative measures of actual and targeted levels of performance. That recommendation was in the report published earlier this year. I have to say that it is a recommendation that the members of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee will be expecting the Parliament to adhere to in its reporting this year. I expect that it will be something that will be canvassed with the presiding officers when in the following weeks they appear before the committee for consideration of this year's budget.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — No doubt about that!

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — Mr Baxter says that there is no doubt about that. I think it would be a very good initiative on the part of the presiding officers to ensure that these recommendations are taken up and acted upon. As I stated earlier, if we as a Parliament expect the executive and the public service to adhere to these requirements, we should be adhering to them.

A number of output and asset initiatives with respect to the Parliament are picked up in budget paper 3. I will touch on just a couple of those because they go to how the Parliament will operate this year. One of the key output initiatives funded in the budget is \$3 million for 2006 election costs. On Tuesday, I think, of this week the shadow Treasurer and I were briefed by the Department of Parliamentary Services on the parliamentary appropriation. We were advised that the \$3 million allocated for election costs will be primarily for the expected relocation of electorate offices. While I must say that it seems like a fairly substantial sum of money for that purpose, it was made clear that due to the electoral activities there is no clear understanding

within the Department of Parliamentary Services as to how many electorate offices may need to be relocated as a result of the defeat or resignation of members or as to how offices will be allocated across the eight regions of five members each that will result from the restructuring of the Legislative Council.

Another output initiative that has appeared in the budget for the Parliament is an amount rounded to \$100 000 for the Legislative Council sitting in Colac last November. It is interesting that this has appeared in the budget this year because previously we were given the indication that the cost of both the Legislative Council sitting in Colac and the Legislative Assembly sitting in Geelong would be funded through existing resources. The advice from the Department of Parliamentary Services was that that was not possible and that substantial cost overruns were incurred in providing for the Legislative Council sitting in Colac.

I guess that has again raised for me the question of how appropriate the regional sittings are. The Parliament has now had, I think, three for the Legislative Council and two for the Legislative Assembly. Over my time in this Parliament, the Council has sat in Ballarat, in Benalla and in Colac last year. While it is an appropriate initiative to make the Parliament open to the people, given the level of visitation during the regional visits — the fact that, for most of the time, most of the audience is school groups — and the general level of interest in the visits basically every time we have sat outside this Parliament, it has occurred to me that it may be more appropriate if the funds used for the regional sittings were used to bring people from those towns to see Parliament sitting in its public place, here at Parliament House.

I do not know that for the funds expended the people of Victoria are necessarily getting a good return on their investment, given the level of interest shown in the regional sittings and the fact that they do not, for a whole lot of practical reasons, accurately replicate the sitting of the Parliament. Nothing compares to the actual operation of this institution in this chamber. Sitting in a town hall in Benalla, Colac or Ballarat does not convey to the people of Victoria a true sense of the operation of this chamber. In a sense, in spending the money to go out to the regional centres rather than taking the opportunity to bring people from those centres to Parliament, we are denying people a true insight into the operation of Parliament.

I am pleased that the Minister for Finance, who is also the Minister for Major Projects, is in the chamber, because yesterday in question time I, along with many members on this side of the house, was amused when

Mr Somyurek asked a dorothy dixer about one of his major projects. The major project that Mr Somyurek asked about was in fact a kitchen renovation. It occurred to members on this side of the house that when the Minister for Major Projects is reduced to having questions asked about a kitchen renovation because it is the only project that he apparently is willing to take questions on and talk about — —

Mr Lenders — Ask me about the Hallam bypass!

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — The minister asks me to ask him about the Hallam bypass. Members will recall that the Hallam bypass was a project planned by the previous government and funded in its last budget.

Mr Lenders — The Monash Freeway is a Kirner government initiative, is it?

Hon. G. K. RICH-PHILLIPS — Again, I reflect on the minister's comments — about the Monash Freeway. Members will recall that the traffic lights at Toorak Road and the other intersections on the Monash Freeway were an initiative of the Kirner government. So yes, I am happy for the previous Labor government to take credit for those traffic lights et cetera on the Monash Freeway.

Getting back to the kitchen renovation, members on this side of the house were amused that that was the one major project that the minister was happy to talk about yesterday. He got up and said that it was ahead of schedule and under budget. Without dobbing in anybody, I note that certain members of the parliamentary staff were rather surprised by the statement that it was under budget. Of course, that remains to be seen when the final costing on that project is revealed — if, indeed, it is revealed. It will be interesting for the Parliament to reactivate those facilities. Obviously, with their having been closed for a very long time — from late last year and for all this year — business has dropped off. Certainly among members of Parliament, people have gone elsewhere.

I accept that for a lot of practical reasons it is very difficult for those kitchen and dining room facilities to operate in a commercial sense. Notwithstanding the management's best efforts, the dining rooms are not a commercial proposition, and for members of Parliament who eat there, they frankly do not provide good value for money. There are a lot of reasons for that, such as the overhead of staff et cetera, but they do not provide an attractive option for members who are simply seeking meals. Given that they have been closed for the past seven months or thereabouts, I think management will have a significant challenge in

attracting business back once they are fully operational. Because we are located at the junction of Spring Street and Bourke Street, there are many options for members to dine elsewhere in the central business district and frankly get better food at better prices. Notwithstanding the camaraderie and fellowship associated with the parliamentary dining rooms, in my view they are not for members a commercial proposition, and a lot of work would need to be done to attract back the business that has diminished as result of their closure. I place on record that that was the one major project that the Minister for Major Projects was willing to talk about.

Among the other initiatives articulated in the budget is the \$1 million output initiative and \$2.5 million asset initiatives for relocation of Parliamentary Services. This came as quite a surprise during the briefing. I was a little concerned that the officers providing the briefing to the shadow Treasurer and myself were unclear as to how this would proceed. Only a few years ago a lot of effort went into the leasing and establishing of 157 Spring Street. At that time we were told that it would provide for the ongoing central business district accommodation needs of the parliamentary bureaucracy, so I was surprised at the proposal to move from 35 Spring Street to take up 55 St Andrews Place.

That is at odds with information that was provided to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee in the previous Parliament four or five years ago. The focus was to be on consolidating at 157, but this further expenditure to move to St Andrews Place for further accommodation for parliamentary staff seems to suggest that the leasing of 157 was not as well considered as it could have been. At the time there was some conjecture as to whether that property should be purchased or leased. The decision was taken to lease it, but given that it has been such a short period since that arrangement was reached, perhaps it was not an ideal location.

The Appropriation (Parliament 2006/07) bill is an important piece of legislation. It lays down in principle the framework for how Parliament will be funded.

Going back to something I said earlier, I make the point that the recommendations of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee suggest that the operation of this Parliament could be improved. If we as a Parliament are imposing requirements on the executive and public service for accountability and reporting to the Parliament and the people of Victoria and if we have high expectations of the public service, we should also have high expectations of ourselves. In supporting the passage of this bill this afternoon I re-emphasise the need for this Parliament to look at the recommendations

made by the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee to ensure that in future years the level of accountability to be imposed on the public service is also adhered to by this Parliament so that we truly can be accountable to the people of Victoria.

Hon. W. R. BAXTER (North Eastern) — I am pleased to make a contribution to the debate on the Appropriation (Parliament 2006/2007) Bill. In this year of the 150th anniversary of Parliament perhaps it has some added significance. I am very pleased indeed that the Parliament is taking the opportunity to mark this historic event with a number of activities both in the Parliament and throughout the state. A short while ago I attended the opening by the Speaker of the travelling exhibition at Shepparton. I commend the Speaker for the contribution she made that morning and her references to the members of Parliament who have represented the Goulburn Valley over the 150 years.

My disappointment was in the small attendance. I am not sure of the extent of the invitation list, but I was surprised that we were a relatively small gathering. I think that goes somewhat to the point Mr Rich-Phillips was making: in the community at large there is a disappointing — it might properly be described as abysmal — level of interest in the Parliament. I am not certain whose fault that is. Clearly it has something to do with those of us who are current members of Parliament. Perhaps we are not held in as high regard as we might be. It has got something to do with the history of Parliament over the last century and a half. It seems to have lost some of its attraction and respect. I hope that in this 150th year we can go some way towards re-energising the image of Parliament in the community and getting people to better understand that this is the pivot of our very valuable democracy.

Members of the Parliament and members of the public all have a responsibility, indeed a duty, to honour this place, uphold its traditions and make sure it operates as effectively as possible. None of us believes that it operates as effectively as it could. I think we all have a responsibility to improve that. I encourage members to think about that on occasions when they might be tempted to behave in a manner that is not particularly conducive to building the high regard of which I am speaking.

I wish the exhibition well as it travels to other places in the state. It has already moved from Castlemaine and is travelling to Wodonga and other regional centres after visiting Shepparton. I think it is being launched in Queen's Hall on the 19 June. It is a valuable aspect of celebrating 150 years of the Parliament of Victoria, as

is the open day, which this year will have an added significance because of the anniversary.

Speaking of the open day brings me to my usual complaint: it is a great tragedy that this building has never been completed. Every day we witness the disadvantage that is suffered by the Parliament and the democratic system of this state because the Parliament of Victoria is operating in an incomplete building. Many of the offices are entirely inadequate. Whilst it is true that improvements have been made in the last decade — we have fewer members having to share offices, and we have better occupational health and safety throughout the building in the form of heating and cooling facilities — we still have members who work in the temporary 1970s buildings in the gardens. Although I have a delightful office with a beautiful outlook, it is in fact an infill under a stairwell. I run the gauntlet whenever there is a function on in the Legislative Council committee room at night, and I am tempted to sample some of the fare as I make my way up the narrow passage to my office.

We all ought to commit ourselves to making sure that at some time in the future there will be genuine bipartisan support for the completion of this building. If it is not completed to its absolute original design because of the costs that might be incurred, then it should at least be completed to its full footprint so that members, staff and visitors who come here can move around easily and expeditiously without having to go up and down corridors, stairs and so on while wondering how on earth this place could possibly work efficiently. It simply cannot work efficiently in its current configuration.

In that vein, it is a tragedy that the Leader of the Opposition in the other place has had to vacate his offices and move across the road. It is a total denial of the concept of parliamentary democracy that the Leader of the Opposition is unable to work in the building and has to work from across a busy street. It does nothing for the institution. I understand that move was made because of the shortage of space and because of security reasons associated with the Premier's office facing directly onto a public area. I acknowledge all those issues, but that situation emphasises again why this building needs to be completed.

In respect of the kitchen renovations, it is true that the kitchens were built in 1927 and have had virtually nothing done to them since. We have read about restaurants in various suburban streets that find themselves in some trouble because of the state of their kitchens. Recently that was the case at a restaurant in Brunswick. I am not saying that our kitchens were

unclean. I am sure that they were kept as well as they could be, but the fact that they were decades old is clear evidence that it must have been very difficult for the staff to adhere to modern day expectations of food handling. I am glad the kitchens have been finally renovated. I commend the House Committee and the presiding officers for getting on with the job.

The renovation has given the usual suspects in the media the opportunity to make ill-informed comments. There was scuttlebutt that we had leather walls in the members dining room. That was news to me, so I presented myself to the renovated members dining room and looked about. I could detect no difference at all except that the airconditioners had been taken out of the windows, where they had been put years ago as a temporary measure. The room has been repainted and, I assume, recarpeted. However, I could not find any leather walls until it was drawn to my attention that there might be leather — it may be vinyl, I do not know — on one wall of the narrow passage leading out to the balcony.

I am surprised and somewhat frustrated that the architect or someone else took it upon themselves to use that wall covering in that place, as small as it is, because it gave a free kick to the people in the media who want to denigrate this place, who want to be populist and who want to portray members of Parliament as living in luxurious circumstances. Clearly we are not in luxurious circumstances. Anyone who looks at this place will see that for themselves. The wall coverings seem to be an ill-judged piece of interior decoration that should have been avoided. It is a minor matter but it gives a free kick to the media. It is still repeated in the newspapers that we have silver service dining in this place. That was a throwaway political line used by a former member, David White, more than a decade ago. He knew it was untrue at the time he said it, but it still gets reported in the newspapers as though it is gospel. That is one of the reasons Parliament is not held in the regard that it should be.

I also want to express my concern about the state of the computer systems in members' electorate offices. As I have said before, I cannot understand why we substituted a system which appeared to me to be perfectly adequate with one which is not adequate. My electorate officer, who is very competent at operating this sort of technology, although I am not, is absolutely frustrated that she can type words faster than they appear on the screen, that several times a day she has to shut the system down and restart it, and that it freezes. I think it is extraordinary that members have to put up with that sort of inconvenience in their electorate

offices, particularly those of us who only have one staff member.

Why is it that in this day and age, when the government is spending millions of dollars on IT, we who serve the public on a face-to-face basis have been lumbered with less than satisfactory equipment on the basis that it was the latest? Clearly we were sold a pup and we are paying the penalty for it now.

My two colleagues on the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee want to make a contribution to debate on the bill and, like me, cannot be in the chamber this afternoon, so I will leave my remarks at that.

Ms ROMANES (Melbourne) — I am very pleased to have an opportunity to make some comments on the Appropriation (Parliament 2006/2007) Bill. The bill provides appropriation authority for payments from the consolidated fund to the Parliament in respect of the 2006–07 financial year. It includes ongoing liabilities incurred by the Parliament such as employee entitlements that may be realised in the future. The amount of appropriation from consolidated revenue to the departments of the Parliament for this financial year is \$87.989 million.

Included also in the appropriations for the Parliament are the appropriations for the Auditor-General's office, as it is an output group within the Parliament. I think it is appropriate to acknowledge the important role of the Auditor-General in scrutinising the performance of government and providing that accountability. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Auditor-General, Wayne Cameron, for his thorough and diligent commitment to this task over the last seven years.

The President and the Speaker, as presiding officers for the Parliament, have in the past brought before us the appropriations and the outputs for the Parliament and have overseen various challenges facing this institution. One challenge has been putting in place the new corporate structure, One Parliament, and the continued development of that structure, which is reflected in changes in output initiatives under the provision of information and resources in the budget papers that we are dealing with currently.

As previous speakers have mentioned, the President and the Speaker have also overseen important renovations to this very important heritage building. It is certainly reassuring and pleasing to see that the major overhaul of the dining rooms and kitchens, which has been something that needed to be done for many

decades, is nearing completion. All members look forward to utilising in full the renovated and improved facilities. I am sure the dining room staff and the kitchen staff will appreciate the important changes that have taken place.

Another important change that has happened for occupational, health and safety reasons, overseen by the presiding officers, has been the raising of the balcony in this very chamber and the improvements associated with that. In future those who come into the gallery in this chamber will be able to watch proceedings safely. I would like to commend all those who have been involved in the project, because it has been beautifully executed within the constraints of Heritage Victoria requirements. While enhancing the safety of the chamber, it also enhances the beauty of the chamber. I agree with Mr Baxter in regard to the completion of Parliament House. It is something that I, too, would like to see considered in the future. People who visit this chamber, the Legislative Assembly and other parts of Parliament House gain a lot of enjoyment and pleasure from their tours of this building. I think a project to complete this building more or less in keeping with the vision of the original architects is something worth considering in future budgets.

I am a little surprised by the comments of Mr Rich-Phillips about the regional sittings and his questioning of whether they are appropriate. As I have just said, I know that a lot of people get a lot of enjoyment and pleasure from visiting the Parliament and that nothing will quite replace or replicate a sitting of Parliament in the place where it belongs — that is, this chamber and the Assembly chamber. However, the regional sittings were widely embraced by the people of the country towns and cities that we visited as a Legislative Council or a Legislative Assembly. In fact, I would go so far as to say that when we went to Colac last year to mark the beginning of the 150th anniversary celebrations the local MPs, Mr Koch and Mr Vogels, were the ones who made the most mileage out of the sitting we had in that town. I agree with Mr Rich-Phillips to the extent that I think we need to make a proper evaluation of the regional sittings and their worth and balance them against their costs, so that we make a clear decision in the future as to the value of regional settings and how we might best conduct them and benefit the most from them.

I have talked about past challenges the presiding officers have faced in their roles as President and Speaker and the things they have had to deal with. Set out on page 269 of budget paper 3 are the significant challenges facing the department in the medium term. One of those is the closing of the 55th Parliament and

the election of the 56th Parliament. Elections are coming up at the end of this year, and \$3 million is provided in the budget for the relocation of offices, depending on the outcome of those elections and where members in the new representative structure will be located in the future. There is the ongoing challenge of continuing to ensure that Parliament House remains a functional working location that is accessible to the public within security constraints. There is the challenge of delivering all the services of the Parliament within existing resources and recruiting and retaining good, skilled staff to do the jobs that we need for the smooth running of the Parliament.

Those are the challenges facing Parliament in the medium term. But as Mr Baxter said, they are within the context of the 150th anniversary of this institution that we are in the middle of in this 2005–06 year. I commend the President and Speaker for the program of events and exhibitions like Bills, Bells and Ballots, which is currently touring metropolitan and regional Victoria, and the exhibition entitled Naked Democracy, which was opened just last week at the state library and which outlines where we have come from in terms of democratic government in this state over the past 150 years. When I attended that launch I was very surprised to see that I was quoted in the exhibition. I urge others to go along and see what I have said in this Parliament that made it into that exhibition. On 25 November we will have an election, and that is close to the 150th anniversary of the beginning of bicameral legislature in this place. It is well timed to coincide with the 150th anniversary of the Parliament of Victoria.

I conclude by thanking the President and the Speaker for their leadership through this very busy period of activity for the Parliament over the last four years.

Mr SOMYUREK (Eumemmerring) — It is a pleasure to rise and speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2006/2007) Bill. The bill provides appropriation authority for payments from the consolidated fund to the Parliament in respect of the 2006–07 financial year, including ongoing liabilities incurred by the Parliament such as employee entitlements that may be realised in the future.

Before moving on I would like to say that I am surprised that a lot more parliamentarians do not speak on this bill; we normally only have a couple of speakers every year. You do not necessarily have to be a member of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee or be concerned about the intricacies of the finances of government and Parliament to have a view on the way this place functions. As Mr Baxter said, Parliament is pivotal in our Westminster system of

parliamentary democracy. Because of that it is very important that Parliament continues to get sufficient funds to perform its duties, but on the other side of the coin we also have to be careful that the funds being utilised by Parliament are not wasted.

Parliament is the institution that keeps a check on the executive and makes it accountable in every way. The executive should be accountable to government. We need to figure out other ways to make the Parliament more appealing and accessible to the public. That is not easy to do, because some people have other priorities. They should not really have other priorities, because this is a most important institution. But it is difficult, and we have to understand that it is difficult, to get people to concentrate on things concerning Parliament. I refer to page 269 of budget paper 3, which states:

The departments of the Parliament of Victoria include:

the Department of the Legislative Council;

the Department of the Legislative Assembly; and

the Department of Parliamentary Services.

According to budget paper 3 the revised output for the Legislative Council in 2005–06 was \$8.8 million while the figure for 2006–07 is \$9 million. For the Legislative Assembly the 2006–07 figure is \$16.8 million, for Parliamentary Services it is \$57.6 million and for the parliamentary investigative committees it is \$5.7 million. I know the chair of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee has often complained about the lack of resources going into that committee, and she has a valid point in that respect. The Auditor-General's office will receive \$26.8 million, making a grand total of \$115.9 million, which is an overall increase of \$7.9 million for the parliamentary departments.

Page 269 of budget paper 3 — which was also mentioned by Ms Romanes — goes through the significant challenges facing the departments in the medium term. It talks about the transition from the 55th Parliament to the 56th Parliament, and I will speak about that in a minute. It also talks about the delivery of the services demanded of the parliamentary departments within resources and the continuing task of ensuring that Parliament House remains a functional working location that is accessible to the public within security constraints. That is a big problem for us at the moment, because security really is a big issue. There is a fine line between protecting people's civil liberties and allowing open access to Parliament, which every Victorian is entitled to have. We need to get the balance right, and that is going to be difficult. We need to be vigilant to make sure we get the balance right between access and invasion of privacy.

I now move on to the output initiatives on page 341. There is the Legislative Council Colac regional sitting at \$0.1 million, 2006 election costs at \$3 million, the Parliamentary Services office relocation at \$0.1 million and recruitment of the Auditor-General at \$0.1 million. With regard to the 2006 election costs, I presume most of that money will be for office relocations. There will be savings as a result of upper house reform in terms of there being fewer upper house members in this place, but there will also be costs because members will have to shift their offices.

Hon. W. R. Baxter — Are you going to give charter allowances to those representing the rural regions — or they will never get around them?

Mr SOMYUREK — That really does need to happen. There are some offices that are well outside their current electorates. We cannot help that. People do need to move their offices, and I think we will use up the amount of money that has been appropriated in the budget.

In terms of the Legislative Council regional sittings, I am a little bit ambivalent. I do not necessarily like the drive, but I can understand what Mr Baxter was saying. He was very positive. I understand that it is very important for the people in country and regional areas to see democracy and the Parliament brought to their region. It is not always practical, as Mr Rich-Phillips has suggested, to induce these people to come to the city. I can see the positive aspects of Parliament going out into the regional areas. I enjoyed my stay in Colac too, so that helped!

In terms of the recruitment of the Auditor-General, notwithstanding what the opposition has been saying in this regard, the employment of the Auditor-General was bipartisan. The incumbent Auditor-General, Mr Wayne Cameron, has done a very good job. His seven-year term expires in September 2006 and he chose not to renew his contract. He was not pushed.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr SOMYUREK — Mr Cameron was not pushed. His term does expire in 2006. Mr Rich-Phillips, who interjects, took part in the process to appoint the new Auditor-General, who is a person of high standing with extensive experience in the public sector. I am sure he will do a very good job. It was an open and transparent process. Mr Rich-Phillips was involved from the start, so it is disingenuous for him to suggest otherwise. With that I conclude my contribution. I commend the bill to the house.

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

Debate adjourned until later this day.

Sitting suspended 1.03 p.m. until 2.13 p.m.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Greater Geelong: councillors

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Local Government, Ms Broad. I refer to the report on the investigation into Greater Geelong City Council by municipal inspector Merv Whelan tabled in the house this morning. It is a damning report that reveals an ALP electorate officer and councillor of the City of Greater Geelong, David Saunderson, handled financial campaign funds totalling \$84 028 for 15 candidates standing at the 2004 elections. I ask the minister: is this not another example of Labor Party culture corrupting local government elections, and what action will she take to ensure that Cr Saunderson is dealt with under the law?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) — In response to the member's question and the report I tabled — —

Hon. B. N. Atkinson interjected.

Ms BROAD — If opposition members do not want to hear the answer, then I will not continue, but if they do I will endeavour to answer the member's question. In response to the member's question and the report I tabled in the house this morning, the independent inspector for municipal administration made a recommendation, which I have accepted, and that recommendation is that my department, Local Government Victoria, with the assistance of the Victorian Government Solicitor's Office, work to bring action through the courts in relation to the failure of a councillor to declare, as councillors are required to do under the Local Government Act, a gift received.

I have accepted that recommendation, and my department will be taking the necessary steps, together with legal advice. It is important to note that under the Bracks government we believe elected representatives at every level of government should uphold high standards of integrity, whether they are federal, state or local representatives, and that includes making declarations of donations received. The Bracks government, unlike the previous government, has acted to lower the threshold in councillors' annual returns.

The government has also brought in a new requirement, which did not apply under the previous government, to ensure that all candidates, whether elected or not, are also required to make declarations of gifts received, whether they are for elections or any other purposes.

The government is taking all the steps that need to be taken in accordance with the inspector's recommendation, which is the right thing to do. The report, just to refer back to a question which the member asked me some time ago, is the report in its entirety, as I committed to provide. There has been nothing omitted, added or amended in any shape or form, nor would there ever be under this government. The recommendation is being implemented in full.

I also wish to add at this point, on omitting to make a declaration of a gift or a donation received, that this is not the first time this has ever happened. Under the Local Government Act there is a clear penalty, a fine, that applies to a councillor who fails to do that. If these matters are brought through the courts, then that is the penalty that applies. It has been applied in the past, and I am sure that in future all councillors and candidates will take more care. It is certainly the government's view that they should ensure that all gifts and donations received are declared in accordance with the provisions of the act.

Supplementary question

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — I thank the minister for her answer. I would say that she is sticking fairly close to the script which has been handed out to ALP members from her spin department on how to answer key lines and how to answer questions from the media on this issue — especially around Geelong I have no doubt. I do not think there has been any case before where someone has had \$84 000 to spend in a council election, and that was the bagman part of it. Cr Saunderson, according to the report, received gifts to the value of \$5649 for himself, which is 11 times what is allowed under the Local Government Act. Will the minister therefore demand that he resign now or at the very least step down while an investigation is being carried out?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) — I am not sure which part of that statement was a question. Can I add to my earlier remarks in making it very clear that the penalty that applies under the act to any person who fails now or in the future to declare gifts is 50 penalty units. That is the maximum penalty that can be applied under the Local Government Act.

I am certainly satisfied that the independent investigation by the municipal inspector has fully examined these matters. That is why I have been happy to accept his recommendation to take the necessary steps, and that is the end of the matter so far as I am concerned.

Aged care: government initiatives

Hon. J. H. EREN (Geelong) — My question is to the Minister for Aged Care, Mr Jennings. Last week the minister advised the house of further investment by the Bracks government in state-run residential aged care facilities included in this year's budget. Can the minister advise the house of other initiatives by the Bracks government directed towards older Victorians?

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS (Minister for Aged Care) — I thank Mr Eren for his question and also his concern for the wellbeing of older members in his community.

Honourable members interjecting.

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS — I am glad that opposition members know how to make themselves relevant within the Parliament; it is fantastic. They have been looking for every opportunity to be relevant because in many community debates they have got not a clue how to engage in the setting that they find themselves in, and have not for quite some time. I am pleased to say that Mr Eren is not one of those people because he knows that the wellbeing of his community is to ensure that older members, when they need residential aged care, receive it.

We are making significant investment through the McKellar centre, and we are continuing through with a new investment in the Grovedale facility, so 108 beds will be provided in the Grovedale facility to serve the needs of older members of the community in the Geelong region.

That is not the only investment. There was a significant investment of \$130 million allocated in this budget to ensure that communities right around Victoria have residential aged care, whether it be in Warracknabeal or Rochester or a new facility that is going to be built in the south-eastern suburb of Doveton. We are investing right across the state to ensure quality aged care when people are not as independent as they once were and they require some additional assistance. But we are particularly mindful of supporting older members of the community to stay as independent and active in their homes for as long as they possibly can.

A number of significant investments have been made in this budget to underpin a healthy and active lifestyle for older members of the community so that they can live at home. There has been a significant increase to the home and community care budget. An amount of \$44 million has been added to home and community care this year to try to provide that degree of support. We have increased the number of personal alerts that are available. An additional 1200 people will receive personal alerts through the initiative in this budget, bringing to over 20 000 the number of personal alerts that will have been made available free of charge to members of our community who may feel isolated and vulnerable, giving them that additional security of having a personal alert system.

We have also seen the value of trying to increase the availability of ambulance services to pensioners. A very timely \$1.8 million has been allocated to provide an additional 18 000 services to pensioners and people on low incomes across Victoria.

We recognise that people do feel vulnerable. In fact there is significant investment through an elder abuse strategy of \$5.9 million, which will be outlined in greater detail next week. It will provide for a network of service delivery to respond to the needs of older members of the community if they feel vulnerable or victimised, and we will be able to identify what recourse is available to them.

We recognise that pensioners have been doing it hard for many years. There is a significant but perhaps underreported item in the budget that relates to the protections the government has entered into with the energy sector to provide for all low-income people who may be vulnerable to disconnection because they are unable to afford to pay their energy bills. When the Minister for Finance and I were at a meeting of the Council on the Ageing this morning I made the meeting aware of this important initiative —

Hon. D. McL. Davis — The dynamic duo!

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS — Indeed we are the dynamic duo, Mr Davis; there is no doubt about us. There is not much dynamism on your benches, but there is a bit on our side. In fact the members of the Council on the Ageing were very impressed with this perhaps underreported initiative to ensure that vulnerable members of our community will not be disconnected through an inability to pay their energy costs.

We are trying to stretch the increase to supporting vulnerable people, so there has been a significant

package of \$29 million to support those who live in supported residential services to make sure that their care needs are addressed and that supported residential services remain viable. We are committed to ensuring the quality of life for older Victorians.

Greater Geelong: councillors

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Local Government. The inspector of municipal administration, under the terms of reference of his report into Greater Geelong City Council, stated:

During the investigation I received allegations about breaches by councillors of the conflict of interest provisions of the act. My terms of reference did not include examination of breaches of these provisions ...

Will the minister now widen the terms of reference to include conflict of interest provisions so that the people of Geelong can get to the bottom of this sorry tale?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) — In response to the member, the inspector of municipal administration did have included in his terms of reference the capacity to make recommendations about any further investigations that he felt were warranted, under either the Local Government Act or any other legislation. He has not so recommended, and I do not propose, in accepting his recommendation, which I have done in full, to institute any further investigations.

Supplementary question

Hon. J. A. VOGELS (Western) — In his report the inspector of municipal administration stated that Cr Saunderson objected to his request to provide him with a copy of his campaign support statement and supporting information on the basis that the documents ‘are not relevant to the terms of reference of your investigation’. As I read the report, the inspector, Merv Whelan, clearly stated that he passed on these concerns that the terms of reference were not wide enough. The report states:

... I have referred correspondence received by me on this issue to Local Government Victoria for attention.

He does not say at all that he does not expect any more action. He has supplied the minister with the information, so what action is the minister going to take to ensure that that part of his recommendation is abided by?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Local Government) — In response I reiterate that I have accepted the inspector’s

recommendation in full and the necessary steps are being taken to action that recommendation.

Employment: rural and regional

Mr VINEY (Chelsea) — I address my question to the Minister for Housing. Can the minister inform the house how the Bracks government is generating job opportunities for public housing tenants in regional Victoria?

Ms BROAD (Minister for Housing) — I thank the member for his question and for his keen interest in the strong investment the Bracks government is making in delivering jobs in regional Victoria. It is worthwhile pointing out that the Bracks government has delivered some 90 000 jobs in regional Victoria compared to only 40 000 generated by the previous Liberal-National government over the same period. This is a terrific record which we intend to continue building on.

Importantly, public housing tenants are also receiving the benefits of the growth in employment in regional Victoria. Last month, for example, I officially opened the Shepparton Starting Point — Work Shed Enterprise Incubator in Parkside estate in Shepparton. The development of the work shed involves the dismantling and then the reconstruction of a prefabricated steel shed that was donated to the neighbourhood renewal project, I am pleased to say, by the City of Greater Shepparton. The land at Wanganui Park Secondary College was donated by the Department of Education and Training, so this is a true partnership project. The work shed provides access under the one roof to job-hunting services. As well the on-site office can also refer jobseekers to expert employment advice services.

There are now two community enterprises that have made the shed their home, including Just Romans, which manufactures and installs energy efficient Roman blinds, and an enterprise called Kids N Cars, which provides an automotive detailing service. These community enterprises assist disadvantaged jobseekers, primarily within the Shepparton neighbourhood renewal area, by creating training opportunities for those who want to gain skills in the manufacturing and construction industries. I was very pleased to meet many of these young people who are working in these businesses, and I can say that they are very proud of the work they are doing.

The work shed is a real community partnership and a clear demonstration that cooperation between government departments, local schools, councils and residents can bring real practical benefits to disadvantaged communities.

Similar initiatives are under way across Victoria. There are some 22 community enterprises spread across Victoria's 19 neighbourhood renewal areas, generating an estimated 100 new jobs every year as well as providing many training and volunteer opportunities. These job opportunities are making a real difference in regional Victoria, particularly to areas that may have otherwise missed out on Victoria's prosperity. This includes places in Geelong, in Wendouree West at Ballarat, in Seymour as well as Shepparton, and it is a very important demonstration that the Bracks government is continuing to govern for all Victorians.

Cricket: ticket scalping

Hon. D. K. DRUM (North Western) — My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, the Honourable Justin Madden. Given the evidence of significant ticket scalping already taking place for the Boxing Day cricket test, will the minister declare that event under the Sports Event Ticketing Fair Access Act 2002, which will protect cricket-loving Victorians from ticket scalping?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I welcome Mr Drum's question, his interest in all things sport and his great love of cricket. I welcome that question because I actually discussed this matter the other day with some of his former colleagues on radio on the Sports Entertainment Network, which I know Mr Drum is a great fan of.

What is interesting about our legislation in respect of sports ticketing is that it is world first legislation — and it is a fantastic piece of legislation. Until this point we had nominated only a small number of events under that legislation. It is worth telling the house that those events were the Australian Football League grand finals over, I think, the last three or four years, the Commonwealth Games and the FINA World Swimming Championships. What is critical about the whole process — and I encourage Mr Drum to pass his eye over the legislation at some of the detail; I am also happy to have him briefed on the detail, because it is quite complex — is that you must allow sufficient time for notification of all parties to the event, and that gives them sufficient time to appeal within that time frame.

Hon. Bill Forwood — When were the Ashes scheduled?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — I take up Mr Forwood's interjection about when the Ashes were going to happen and how much time people had. It is worth appreciating that it was not really until the English

started to display some form that people got particularly interested in the Ashes test series here in Australia.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — I tell you what, it will not be until the Liberal Party shows a bit of form, too, that people will take a bit of interest in it in the same way. Getting back to the question Mr Drum asked, you have to have sufficient time not only to distribute the tickets — hence, six months before the event — but also for appeals against any notification. It is very much process driven. What we could not afford was to have those cricket matches — the test series in Melbourne only — nominated under that legislation and have that holding up the ticket sales until late into the year, when we would not have had that applying with the other test matches across the country.

I am pleased to inform Mr Drum that I have written to my colleague the federal sports minister in Canberra calling for a national approach to sports ticket legislation. That is particularly important. If we are going to talk about test series in the future, if we are going to talk about the Rugby World Cup or the soccer World Cup, it is important that it does not just happen in Victoria, even though we are the world leaders. It has to happen right across the country.

I welcome Mr Drum's question. I also welcome the fact that it reinforces why the investment in the Melbourne Cricket Ground that has been delivered by Labor governments has been so important. The ability to seat 100 000 people in that stadium means there are more tickets provided for the general public. We have seen that tickets for the other test matches that are to be held in other venues around the country have been taken up within the first hour or two and the telephone networks have been logjammed, making it very difficult for fans across Australia to access those tickets.

Again I say we are world leaders when it comes to this stuff. We have the best venues, the best people and the best events, and we will continue to uphold the work that we are doing in these areas.

Supplementary question

Hon. D. K. DRUM (North Western) — Everybody knows that the minister had 18 months to ready himself following the intense interest in the English test series last year. With 18 months he had all the time necessary available for appeals and so forth to make sure we were ready to proceed with legislation and a ticketing regime that would protect Victorians from any form of scalping. He has not done that. Tickets for the MCG Boxing Day test days one and two are all but sold out.

Those tickets will be worth an absolute mint to scalpers. What will this government do to protect Victorians from those tickets being sold at a higher price?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I welcome the member's question. He said it in his own words — the tickets for Victoria are all but sold out. We have the biggest stadium and the best controls. We do not control Sydney. If nobody has told Mr Drum, Sydney is in New South Wales and Brisbane is in Queensland — and this is the state Parliament of Victoria.

Hon. D. K. Drum — Melbourne is sold out.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — Mr Drum said 'all but sold out', so people will still be able to go to the event — and they can have a lot more confidence in this state than they can have in other states.

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — I encourage Mr Drum to read the legislation, go into the detail and read the clause notes, and he will work out that if we had done that in this state we would not have had tickets sold until about December this year.

Soccer: government support

Ms MIKAKOS (Jika Jika) — My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, the Honourable Justin Madden. With the FIFA World Cup kicking off tomorrow and given the evident growing support for the world game in Australia, and in particular here in our sports-loving state, I ask the minister to advise the house what action the Bracks government has taken to support the world game in Victoria.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I welcome Ms Mikakos's interest in sport and particularly the world game. As she would appreciate, what we formally knew as soccer for many years is now known very much as the world game. The start of the 2006 FIFA World Cup being held in Germany is tantalisingly close for soccer lovers. The opening match between Germany and Costa Rica will end a four-year waiting period for millions of football fans across the globe. As that excitement bears down upon us it will end the 32-year wait many Australian Socceroo fans have endured waiting for another Socceroos World Cup event.

We will see the best teams in the world playing each other. Of course sport is one of those great things: it is a metaphor for life and many other things. You can learn a lot — —

Hon. Bill Forwood — It is a metaphor for life! You are an idiot.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN — I suggest that Mr Forwood could do with a few more metaphors in his life, particularly derived from sport but not necessarily his golf game. It would be nice if opposition members spent a bit of time studying the World Cup, because they might learn a few things about teamwork for starters. More importantly they might instead learn about the offside rule — it is a bit tricky, I know, but they have been continually offside with the Victorian public — and how not to score an own goal! I would encourage them to take it on board.

No doubt the world game has seen a huge resurgence with the success of the Hyundai A-League and with our national team competing in the 2006 FIFA World Cup. The excitement and enthusiasm continues to grow. The Premier and the chairman of Football Federation Australia, Mr Frank Lowy, announced earlier this year through the Victoria Major Events Company that we have secured a package of world-class football events over the next four years. This includes the match that we have just seen between Australia and Greece in the redeveloped Melbourne Cricket Ground, which was attended by a record crowd. As well as that the four-year event package sees a major soccer event played in Melbourne each year. As well as deriving an economic return and significant opportunities to promote Australia and Victoria internationally and nationally, that will give us a great opportunity to promote grassroots football participation and development. That is part of the package.

The package is being negotiated now, so what we will see in the future — and I look forward to announcing the details — will be an initiative delivered through Football Federation Victoria. We expect Melbourne Victory to be involved in that in some shape or form. This will build on an initiative we have already been very successful with — that is, our three-year, \$400 000 per year commitment to promoting and developing women's involvement in football through Football Federation Victoria. All in all the package is a spectacular one. We wish the Socceroos well — and we also know that we will learn a lot from watching the Socceroos perform using the teamwork they are so good at.

Australian Football League: ground redevelopment

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — I wish to direct a question to the Minister for Sport and Recreation, the Honourable Justin Madden. I note that

yesterday the minister quoted from minutes of a Melbourne City Council meeting, in response to my question on the Australian Football League grounds redevelopment. I note also that David Pitchford, the chief executive officer of the Melbourne City Council, has reported to councillors that the entire arrangement of the AFL package has been managed by the state government on an ad hoc and disorganised basis. The council has been told by Sport and Recreation Victoria that a media release would be prepared which would include a statement of support from the council. When SRV was told that that must not occur without the approval of the council, no draft was forthcoming. Council received the media kit and details actually after the announcement.

The council's position has been an agreement to fund up to \$2 million for North Melbourne and provide support for the redevelopment of facilities at Carlton and North Melbourne, but no commitments have been made to funding for the other two clubs. I ask the minister to confirm that there is no financial commitment to this project by the Melbourne City Council beyond the North Melbourne project.

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — I welcome the member's question today in relation to this fantastic announcement by the state government that has been warmly received by all parties. It has been warmly received by the City of Melbourne. Members will recall from my answer yesterday that the City of Melbourne has agreed in principle to supporting all these upgrades. Of course, appreciating that there is a significant process required to deliver a number of these projects — not least a planning process, as Mr Atkinson would appreciate — the City of Melbourne will have to oversee a planning process for a number of these redevelopments. In many ways it would be premature for it to commit the funds without agreeing to a process for that, including a planning process.

Let me just say that it is wholeheartedly supportive of these redevelopments, because the assets of those venues — as Mr Atkinson would appreciate, having been at the event, and as members would appreciate if they had visited Moorabbin, as I did today — are in incredibly poor condition. This is not to accuse anybody of letting anything go into decline, but there are difficult arrangements between councils, football clubs and communities because of what were the traditional arrangements, in which football clubs invested heavily in those venues because the public used them. That is no longer the case. Very few people turn up at those venues, so there is no incentive to upgrade them. By providing funding as part of the

package, the government is bringing the parties together — councils, football clubs and the community. We are leading. We are facing the challenges that need to be faced to make sure that we get a better outcome for the community, for sport and for the economy. Overall, it is a fantastic package.

Whilst I know that the opposition might be discouraged because not only are we a fantastic team here in Parliament, not only are we a fantastic team in the party and in government but when it comes to teamwork, we do it better than anyone else. As I said to before, if opposition members could learn anything from sport, they would learn that it is about teamwork — but they do not seem able to do so.

To build the participation rate over and above the national average, we will continue to invest where we need to, and we will continue to make fantastic public announcements. We will continue to invest in sport and recreation in Victoria. I know that might hurt the opposition because they do not have policies in this area, so they might even announce a policy on sport and recreation at some stage. We are facing the challenges, we are delivering, we are increasing participation in sport in the state over and above the national average. We are making Victoria not only the sports heartland of the country but a better place to live and raise a family.

Supplementary question

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — On a supplementary, yesterday the minister actually said, in quoting from the minutes of a Melbourne City Council meeting, that the council resolved to:

... support the redevelopment of the recreational sporting facilities ...

He did not qualify an in-principle support; he said ‘support’ and tried to convey to this house that the Melbourne City Council fully supported that project. In fact at no stage has any party been given an indication, beyond in-principle support, by the Melbourne City Council — that was agreed by its committee on 6 December 2005 — except in the case of North Melbourne, which has \$2 million provided to it. In the case of the other two clubs, certainly the council has made it plain at all stages that the final project design and budget will have to be submitted to the council before any formal agreement is entered into.

Therefore, given that the minister misrepresented the Melbourne City Council’s position and misled the house, I ask if the government will pick up the shortfall in the event that the Melbourne City Council does not

meet the hypothetical budget set by the government in its press releases?

Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) — It is interesting, is it not, that it seems everybody is enthusiastic about these projects and is endorsing them? The council has endorsed them in its minutes, which I read out. What is even more interesting is that a councillor who supported them, Cr Clarke, who happens to be a Liberal councillor, is also the man who criticised them yesterday. It is the same old story. There are two things wrong with the Liberal Party and Liberal candidates and Liberal councillors, and we see that again in the chamber today — their faces, that’s it!

**Information and communications technology:
government initiatives**

Mr SOMYUREK (Eumemmerring) — My question is to the Minister for Information and Communication Technology. As we are all aware, the Howard government’s lack of vision has created a skills shortage across Australia. The minister has often referred to the Bracks government’s commitment to growing the Victorian information and communications technology industry. Can the minister provide the house with details of recent actions that she has taken to assist the ICT industry in ensuring that it has access to the skilled work force it requires to continue its growth?

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Information and Communication Technology) — I thank the honourable member for his question. It is important that we understand that when we are selling the information and communications technology (ICT) industry internationally one of the major factors in being able to sell that industry is the actual skilled ICT work force that we have in Victoria. In fact I can say that when I speak to companies about investing in Victoria it is the skills sets of our young graduates and the work force which is a major factor in them deciding to set up their operations here in Victoria.

Unfortunately, over the past three years we have seen a drop in students choosing IT courses as first preference choices. There is fear that this will lead to a skills shortage. In fact, there are already some worrying signs that supply is not keeping up with the pace of demand. This is a national phenomenon. The government has initiated a number of skills and career programs since 2000. Through these programs, two things are clear. One is that the biggest impediment to young people choosing an IT career is the perception that it is a nerdy career, that only nerds go into it. The second is that this is a problem that needs to be addressed not just by

universities or industry or government alone but by all three working together to resolve it. As I said, this is a national issue and it is crying out for leadership. Unfortunately, the Howard government fails to show any leadership when it comes to the ICT industry.

But the Bracks government is in fact showing leadership. A fortnight ago I held a round table with the deans of the IT faculties of all nine of Victoria's universities, Box Hill TAFE, six key IT companies and six industry associations from both the IT area and general industry. I made it very clear at the beginning of the meeting that this was not to be a talkfest but a meeting that would have outcomes at the end of it. That afternoon we achieved an unprecedented agreement to work collaboratively to address IT skills issues. It has started with a short-term strategy to promote IT careers for 2006 year 12 students and a medium and long-term strategy to be developed to deal with relationships between industry and universities, course structures and the image of IT careers.

All the organisations that participated in the meeting met again the following week to put this commitment into action. I am pleased to say that two working groups have been formed: one, headed by the Australian Information Industry Association, will be responsible for marketing activities, and the other, to be headed by the Australian Industry Group, will coordinate road shows and information events to promote IT careers in the lead-up to university course preferences later this year.

I want to thank and congratulate those who participated. This is another example of the Bracks government standing up for and showing leadership on behalf of the information technology and communications industry.

Hazardous waste: Nowingi

Ms HADDEN (Ballarat) — I direct my question without notice to the Minister for Major Projects, Mr Lenders. In a letter to me, signed by him and dated 21 January 2006, he advised me that all local councils along the potential industrial toxic waste transport routes to Hattah-Nowingi sought and received briefings from Major Projects Victoria. Can the minister guarantee to the house that the local councils of Bendigo, Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mildura, and Mount Alexander received full briefings from major projects in an open and transparent manner?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Major Projects) — I can reiterate to Ms Hadden that this government, being a courteous government, went to all the councils on the Calder corridor and offered them full briefings. I cannot

say to her or the house whether they all took up the offer, but I do know that they were all offered it — as a courteous government would ensure. Many of them certainly took it up.

I will reiterate to Ms Hadden that, as far as the environment effects statement (EES) process goes, from day one this government, in an open, transparent and accountable fashion, has had an EES process that invites the Sunraysia community to participate. We have had 24 detailed reports that have gone to the EES, most of them sought by the local community, which Major Projects Victoria then commissioned. We have had six supplementary reports. We have released whatever information has been sought. We have twice extended the time lines for the hearings. I am waiting for Mr Bishop to write to the independent panel seeking a third one, because he was saying yesterday there was no natural justice.

Hon. D. McL. Davis interjected.

Mr LENDERS — I take up the canary-like calls from Mr David Davis, who again is complaining about the process. I remind him that unlike 1700 members of the local community who actually responded to the invitation for an EES, he did not. He sat on his hands. Not one single Liberal member of Parliament bothered.

Hon. D. McL. Davis — I wasn't the shadow minister at the time.

Mr LENDERS — Now Mr Davis is giving the coward's defence and saying he was not the shadow minister. I wonder what the member of Warrandyte in another place, Mr Honeywood, thinks of that. Either Mr Honeywood was lazy, Mr Davis was lazy or perhaps the whole parliamentary Liberal Party was lazy.

To return to Ms Hadden's question: did the councils respond? I do not know. Were they written to? Yes, they were written to by me. There has been a standing offer for the officers of Major Projects Victoria to go out and brief the community. I know the officials of major projects on dozens of occasions have been in Sunraysia, along the corridor whenever — —

Hon. Andrea Coote interjected.

Mr LENDERS — I advise Mrs Coote that whenever people have wanted information, the officials have gone forth. I have gone forth to Mildura, and most of my ministerial colleagues have gone forth. So, the answer is yes, we have offered that advice. Have the councils taken it up? I do not know the answer.

Supplementary question

Ms HADDEN (Ballarat) — That is far from a satisfactory answer from the minister, but it is what I am used to in this house. I will give him a hint. Macedon Ranges shire moved a motion on 25 May 2005 opposing the transport of toxic waste through the shire along the Calder Freeway and on 9 June 2005 advised the state government of its opposition and of its concerns for the health and safety of residents and freeway users by letter directed to the minister's department of major projects, and sought a response as to what measures and safeguards were being implemented to address the concerns. To date no response has been received. Is this the minister's interpretation of an open and accountable government meting out its terms of natural justice to rural shires?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Major Projects) — Far it be it from me to advise Ms Hadden on the word 'courtesy' and what it means, but I can say to her that the government offered to municipalities in the state of Victoria that if they wished to, they would be briefed — and that is what she asked — and have officers Major Projects Victoria go and speak to them about a very long and complex process. This government has responded.

We have twice extended the time line of the process. We have hearings being held in Mildura, Bendigo and Melbourne, so Ms Hadden might not like the answer. She might be thinking this is a government that, like the Kennett government, does not believe in environment effects statements and is not open, transparent and accountable, but we have made the offer. Officials have sallied forth, ministers have gone forth and day after day in this Parliament we have happily faced questions. That is the answer. Ms Hadden might not like it, but the invitation has been there, and any council can ask major projects for a briefing.

VicUrban: projects

Ms CARBINES (Geelong) — My question is to the Minister for Major Projects. We have often heard the Minister for Housing speaking of the Bracks government's admirable record on affordable housing. Can the Minister for Major Projects inform the house of the role of VicUrban in assisting Victorians to gain affordable housing and making Victoria an ideal place to live, work and raise a family?

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Major Projects) — I thank Ms Carbinés for her question and her ongoing interest in issues of affordable housing and policy generally. I note her comment that my colleague the

Minister for Housing, Ms Broad, has led the way in dealing with these very important issues and has worked very hard. In fact she is a national leader in this area, in unbelievably stark contrast to the government that preceded us.

Hon. D. McL. Davis interjected.

Mr LENDERS — I take up Mr David Davis's interjection. If Mr Davis wants to learn about what hard work is, what intellectual rigour is, what commitment is, what passion is, what consistency is and what delivering results is, I suggest that he watch my colleague Ms Broad very closely and that he listen and learn.

Ms Carbinés has asked a question about what VicUrban is doing. Victoria's sustainable urban development authority has a number of challenges in front of it. Clearly we have a number of projects. The Minister for Housing and I have spoken about some of those projects and how we can deal with them. We have had issues regarding shared equity home loans, where we try to provide some access to families in an the up to \$60 000 category who do not qualify for social housing but really struggle. We all know of families who really struggle to get a foothold in the housing market.

We have also been experimenting with the One in Ten affordable housing pilot project. VicUrban has put a lot of its resources into trying to design homes that are more affordable, and to finding things that Victorian families look for in homes and putting them in place. We have been working very closely with VicUrban in a number of areas. I have asked Pru Sanderson, the new chief executive officer of VicUrban, to make it a high priority of an overall strategy. It is not just about places— —

Hon. Richard Dalla-Riva — How do you spell 'Pru'? I might make a freedom of information request.

Mr LENDERS — Mr Dalla-Riva mocks. He is not interested in affordable housing or solutions for constituents of his who are trying to get into their first home. All he is interested in is political point-scoring. He does not listen. All he is interested in is finding some gloom in the state of Victoria.

In a number of areas VicUrban has gone forward to find more affordable housing, whether it be in Docklands, whether it be through work it is doing with a number of new developers, whether it be at Waterfront City, where modelling is being done for 49 units for key worker housing, whether it be Parkside estate, which is in Ms Lovell and Mr Baxter's electorate, where VicUrban is working with the Office

of Housing and local communities to put more affordable housing in place, or whether it be in Dandenong transit city.

In Dandenong we have Metro Village 3175. We are talking about 1000 new homes, 1 in 10 of which are a part of the affordable homes program, so people can have access to them. There are market cycles and prices often go up and down, but VicUrban intervenes in the market and does what it can to make housing more affordable in some outer suburban and inner urban areas.

One of the biggest challenges we face as a community is giving people the capacity to get into their first home. I am pleased with the work that VicUrban has been doing, but there is more to be done. I am delighted to be working with my colleague the Minister for Housing to find solutions to assist Victorian families to get into their own homes. This is what hard work is about. We need to be working in this area. We need to be working cooperatively with the community and with the commonwealth. We need to be working in any way we can. It is by hard work that we will start addressing these issues, not by nitpicking and not by rhetoric — and not by the naysaying of those like Mr Dalla-Riva, who get no greater delight than they get from talking down the state of Victoria, talking down good initiatives and looking for gloom.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers

Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance) — I have answers to the following questions on notice, and I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition will be delighted to know that his question is one of them: 1550, 5020, 5313, 5428, 5500, 5721, 5723, 6435, 7468, 7508, 7509, 7516, 7808, 7847, 7879, 7895, 7897, 7898, 7921, 7963, 7979, 7981, 7982, 8019.

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT 2006/2007) BILL

Second reading

Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance)

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — I am pleased to speak on the Appropriation (Parliament 2006/2007) Bill. The opportunity to make a contribution in this debate affords members the ability to make observations about how the Parliament works. Before I

go forward, I must say that the Parliament is well served by the many staff who work in it. They probably have more interest in this bill than any other bill that comes before the Parliament of Victoria, because this bill will not just enable Parliament to continue to operate but will ensure that employees of the Parliament, who make such a wonderful contribution to the good governance of Victoria, receive their just reward.

Having said that, I will say this: there are some issues in relation to the Parliament which this appropriation bill enables, and I have three particular matters which I will briefly touch on. Firstly, there have been recent major renovations to the Parliament, which the Minister for Major Projects boasted about in question time yesterday. I refer specifically to the refurbishment of the kitchens, which apparently, in the scale of things in this state, is a major project. I have to make this point: if this is the best that the government of Victoria can do when declaiming the opportunities for major projects in this state, it reflects badly on the collective vision of the current government and shows how bereft we are.

In my view — let me be quite clear about this — the project in itself is not a good use of taxpayers funds. The cost of the project has been significant and the benefits to the community as a result of it will be very limited. However, notwithstanding that, the issue here is not about whether or not there will be beneficiaries of this project — they will be the staff and members who work in this place over time — but about the Minister for Major Projects claiming this is a matter which he and the government should be proud as part of a major infrastructure scheme in this state. It is just pathetic.

Secondly, I wish to talk briefly about a matter of great concern to me and which I have raised in this place from time to time. When the President is less distracted by the interjections around her she might take note of what I say now. I have said it before, but I will add and embellish on it. The security arrangements here at Parliament House are nothing but a veneer at the present time. Large sums of money are paid to contractors to provide what is essentially a smokescreen of security. At 8 o'clock in the morning contractors start work and at 6 o'clock at night they leave. During that time, the public is given the impression by their attendance at Parliament House and a review of their access and entry to the building that it is a secure place. The reality is quite different, because at 6.00 p.m., in the event that there is a function occurring in the Parliament somewhere — in Queen's Hall or another room — there is no security in respect of people's access to and egress from Parliament House.

I have had the experience where people who, after 6 o'clock, have apparently come for a function — or maybe not, I do not know — have waited upon me in my office. I have been decidedly discomfited by that interest in what I might be doing working in my office in the evening. I have invited those people to leave my office and, if they did not have anything better to do, to leave Parliament House.

It is my view that this farce should not continue. Either security is provided or it is not provided, but it is a sham, and the President needs to take on board the fact that if the security arrangements as they are now are not rectified, there will inevitably be a consequence to that. Secondly with regard to security, I believe that the locking down of the building has occurred in such a way as to be an absolute inconvenience for the people who primarily work here. I am referring to members of Parliament whose principal office in Melbourne is Parliament House. Clearly ministers seldom use the Parliament outside sitting hours, but opposition and government members whose electorates are located in the regions spend a good deal of time working from Parliament House.

Now that access is denied to the front of the building via the lower south and north front doors and there is a restriction of access to members, it makes it extremely difficult for people who have appointments that overlap the formal opening time of the main foyer area. This means that the access to the building and to offices is limited. Significantly, I am concerned that while this is supposedly a security measure, it has been brought to my attention recently that there are some members of Parliament who do in fact have a security pass that gives them access to those doors. I am not going to make a pointed comment about who has been seen accessing those particular doors and on what basis they have done it, but if special arrangements have been made for certain members of Parliament who happen to be ministers, then those arrangements should be made as well for other members of Parliament who use the parliamentary precinct as a principal office when they need to be working from an office in Melbourne. I think the double standard is appalling.

In conclusion, I make the final point that in the next 24 weeks and 3 days we are about to transform the upper house from one scheme of operation, which has been the conventional arrangement since the early 1880s of local electorate representation, to a different scheme where we are moving to an electoral system that effectively is a party list system. It is dressed up in all sorts of other language, but that is what it is. The consequence is that the structure of the electorates which the government has introduced means that

members, instead of the representing 4 lower house seats, will be representing 11 lower house seats.

The government has not proposed, so far as I am aware at this point, any recognition of the additional burden that will be imposed on members and their staff. It seems difficult enough for most members to cope with one member of staff, which is, pointedly, one-eighth of the total number of staff allocated to lower house members. After the 25 November election members will be representing constituencies which are recognised to be large, not just in geography but in population, with a lot of demands being imposed on them, and it is ridiculous to expect members to be familiar with issues across the breadth of their region. This is a capacity which needs to be enhanced by the support from staff and the representations on behalf of individual constituents, which is an obligation for upper house members just as it is for Assembly members.

It is ridiculous that the government is making no provision in the appropriations for additional resources to be provided to upper house members in the new regions. The capacity for us as members to operate and to make an intelligent and informed contribution to the legislative process, simply because of the design of the new electoral system, will mean that upper house members will have an increased burden of obligation in dealing with what I suspect will be detailed negotiations about the legislative process. By virtue of the fact that there will be an inevitable change to the dynamic in this place, members will be under an incredible burden. It would be negligent of the government not to recognise that.

To think that a member of the upper house, representing a region with 11 lower house seats — —

Hon. D. McL. Davis — Half a million voters.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — Typically 445 000 voters — nearly half a million voters, as Mr Davis interjects — will be under an incredible burden. We need to make the point at every opportunity that the government needs to listen to this. I know in conversations I have had with representatives of the government on this subject that to date there has been no light behind the eyes, as I would describe it. It is as if the government has no regard for the consequences of its actions in reforming the upper house.

Hon. D. McL. Davis — Reforming?

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — Changing is a better word. The government would like to think it is reform and I think that is the conventional word. What it has done is change the electoral system to deprive local

communities of local representation. It is inserting its own factional system into the upper house. That is reflected in the endorsement by the Australian Labor Party of members of the ALP who live in Melbourne or represent Melbourne-based electorates, and dropping them into country regions where they have no connection whatsoever. I note that of the six candidates who have been endorsed to contest the two most likely winnable spots for the ALP in each of the three country regions, only one is presently enrolled in the proposed region they will contest. I note it is the Honourable Matt Viney — although I am not so sure if he is honourable. Are you honourable, Mr Viney?

Mr Viney — I declined the title.

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — Mr Viney says he is not honourable so I will refer to him as Mr Viney. I make the point that he has attempted to satisfy the first principle of representation, which is at least to have some relationship with his electorate — or the electorate he proposes to represent. I remind members that Mr Viney is in fact a member for Chelsea Province and has not had much experience in representing a rural constituency such as the one he is about to represent. That is presuming he succeeds and maintains his endorsement by the ALP, which will depend on the factional arrangements as they develop.

My point in conclusion is this: the Labor Party has so changed the arrangements in the upper house that it has created an almost impossible burden of responsibility on members of the Legislative Council, and they will be unable to undertake their serious obligations to represent their constituencies without additional support. The government fails to make any effort to provide that support. Between now and when the next parliamentary appropriation bill comes before the house, I urge the government to address the issue to ensure that members of the community are not disenfranchised by a lack of resources to support the hard work of members of this place.

Mr VINEY (Chelsea) — I am pleased to rise in support of the Appropriation (Parliament 2006/2007) Bill. I appreciate the disingenuous comments of the Leader of the Opposition in questioning my 'honourability', but I am quite proud to say I was happy to decline the title of 'Honourable' in coming into this place. I did not assume such status just because I happen to represent people in the Parliament of Victoria, unlike members on the other side who like all the titles and all the little perks and lurks that go with office in this place. They grab them all. They then mock those of us who have a different view; those of us

who have a view that we were elected to represent the people of our community.

In making his comments about my residence, I point out to the Leader of the Opposition that the restructure of the upper house is a fairly complex process. I have moved to the family farm in Gippsland, and I recognise that in wanting to represent this community it is important that I be a part of it. But I point out that until July — or it may have been August — last year, the seat of Frankston where I previously lived was in the Eastern Victoria Region. Frankston was in the draft maps. I also point out to him that the Eastern Victoria Region comprises more than just Gippsland, and I know he has a strong Gippsland focus. I am happy to represent Gippsland, but it also includes the Mornington Peninsula, where I lived for 16 years, so I understand the electorate reasonably well.

I agree it is a very big electorate, and I do not think any member would be able to say they know the entire electorate. But I know it reasonably well and have a strong commitment to the area in Gippsland where I currently live and with which I have had a lifelong association, as well as to the Mornington Peninsula. Ironically, while I live in Gippsland, it could probably be described as being at the foothills of the Dandenongs. This new region can be best summarised as taking in Gippsland, the Dandenongs and the Mornington Peninsula. I feel I am fairly well placed to serve that community, and I look forward to doing so in the next Parliament.

The Appropriation (Parliament 2006/2007) Bill can best be described as the cost of democracy in this state. At \$87.89 million I suppose some would argue it is too high a cost, and others will argue it is pretty cheap. But it is important that the parliamentary appropriation is dealt with separately from the rest of the budget. It is important for the community to be able to see the cost of running this place and the cost of its representation.

The budget is broken down and includes, of course, the cost of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly, but also the important work done by the parliamentary investigatory committees. This year the budget for those committees is up a little on last year from \$5.49 million to \$5.71 million. I think the joint parliamentary investigatory committees have served the Victorian community extremely well over many parliaments, and I expect they will continue to do so. Probably the greatest example is the parliamentary investigatory work that has been done over perhaps 30 years or more in road safety. That would probably be one of the greatest examples of where a joint parliamentary committee, with people working in a

pretty bipartisan way over a long time, have been able to bring down the road toll.

The government is very proud to continue in that way. I am a little disappointed that the opposition has not maintained the complete spirit of that bipartisanship in relation to some of its policies on speed, and I think that would be disturbing to a lot of former members who have served on that committee in a bipartisan way and who put a high priority on saving lives and reducing injuries as well as on trauma and cost.

But there are many other examples of joint parliamentary committees that have worked well, certainly in the economic and social policy areas. I think the continuation of those joint parliamentary committees through the increased funding in this budget should be welcomed by all members.

Out of the \$87.9 million, or nearly \$88 million, we have a very large appropriation to Parliamentary Services of \$64.234 million. That of course provides all the support to us as members of Parliament to enable us to do our jobs. Whatever words might be said in this chamber from time to time about the work that members of Parliament do, I think we should acknowledge in debate on a bill such as this that our work would not be anywhere near as effective if it were not for the support we have through Parliamentary Services, through the staff who work here at Parliament and also the staff we get in our electorate offices through that funding. I am sure most members would agree that on many, many occasions the staff we get in our electorate offices make us look a little better than we have been. They do a lot of the behind-the-scenes work and a lot of the research that needs to be done — from constituent inquiries to speeches to policy papers, our electorate officers do a whole raft of things. I think debate on this bill is an appropriate opportunity to acknowledge the great support members get from their staff.

Of course that continues through to some of the work done, as Mr David Davis acknowledged by interjection, by the clerks and the staff in and around the Parliament. Having worked on the Legislation Committee that we trialled and the Standing Orders Committee, I know that a considerable amount of support and work is done to assist members in their deliberations, and I commend that work. I think the behind-the-scenes work is important. Members of the community see the television grabs of politics and the clippings from the print media, but I do not think they necessarily get to appreciate the depth and range of things that we as members of Parliament are required to cover. I think the support we get through this appropriation in Parliamentary Services is of great benefit not just to us

as members of Parliament but to the community as a whole. The legislation, the policies and the practices of the Parliament are the better for that support, which enables us to provide genuine assistance to our constituents.

I also note the inclusion in the parliamentary appropriation of the allocation to the Auditor-General, which has increased from \$10.8 million to \$11.28 million.

Hon. D. McL. Davis — You got rid of him.

Mr VINEY — I will take up Mr David Davis's interjection. It is just completely untrue that the government has in any way attempted to get rid of the Auditor-General — absolutely untrue.

Hon. D. McL. Davis — In the last few years you've sliced his budget.

Mr VINEY — As Mr Davis knows, it was the Bracks government that made the position of Auditor-General a genuinely independent position, reporting directly to the Parliament, not through the executive. And not only that, we enshrined the position of the Auditor-General in the constitution. As Mr David Davis well knows, it was a decision of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee to advertise the position. Mr Cameron, who I think has served the state very well as Auditor-General — I have met him on several occasions, and I think many of the reports he has presented to this Parliament have been extremely useful — decided that he was not going to reapply for his position, which was a matter for him. As I understand it the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee on a bipartisan basis decided to advertise that position and on a bipartisan basis has selected a successor to Mr Cameron. I welcome that decision, and I look forward to the contribution the new Auditor-General will make to the proper governance of this state and to accountability.

This government has an absolute commitment to that accountability and to transparency. We have demonstrated that in terms of the position of the Auditor-General, the funding of the Auditor-General in this budget and by making the position of Auditor-General an independent office. That stands in stark contrast to what the Kennett government did; it attempted to nobble the Auditor-General and to diminish the Auditor-General's authority and capacity to independently look after the interests of the taxpayers of Victoria in the way that it is essential for auditors-general to do. I appreciated Mr Davis's interjection because it gave me an opportunity to

expand on how the important principle of the office of Auditor-General in this state has been enhanced and developed by this government.

I think the great work of the Parliament in dealing with quite considerable amounts of complex legislation and the range of things members of Parliament are required to do — as I said, they go from constituent inquiries to policy analysis to dealing with legislation — is an important plank in our civil society. If we are going to do this properly, we need to fund it properly. If we are going to celebrate our democracy and talk up the importance of our democratic processes and principles, then we simply have to fund the Parliament properly. Without that basic position, without that basic capacity of having open, democratic discussion in the Parliament, it is not possible to put in place the raft of laws and regulations and services that deliver to our community. It would not be possible to put those things in place anywhere nearly as effectively as we do if we did not have that proper funding.

On occasions school groups come through here and you have a chance to talk to them. They ask you things like, 'Do you slag off at the other side?' and express some of those sorts of interests that they have in this work. I point out to them that in this society we deal with our differences by words; unfortunately in other societies they use different means. Whilst at times the public sees members of this place and the other house using those words in a fairly vigorous manner, I say it is far better that we do it that way than by other processes that are used in other countries. It is only by having an appropriate appropriation to the Parliament that we can ensure that that democratic process continues and that that spirit of resolving our differences continues.

Motion agreed to.

Read second time.

Third reading

Hon. M. R. THOMSON (Minister for Consumer Affairs) — By leave, I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

In so doing I thank honourable members for their contributions to the debate.

Motion agreed to.

Read third time.

Remaining stages

Passed remaining stages.

BUDGET PAPERS 2006-07

Debate resumed from earlier this day; motion of Mr LENDERS (Minister for Finance):

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

Hon. ANDREW BRIDESON (Waverley) — Before making comments in relation to the budget for 2006-07 I endorse the comments of the previous speaker, Mr Viney, on the Appropriation (Parliament 2006/07) Bill when he said that the Road Safety Committee had served Victoria extremely well and that it was a hardworking and bipartisan committee. I endorse that, and having been chairman of that illustrious committee I know exactly what he was talking about. I put that on the record and thank him for his comments.

A week is a long time in politics. They say a day is a long time, but a week is certainly a long time in politics, particularly in relation to this budget. The only people who are excited about the budget are members of the government, who slavishly stand before the chambers of both houses reading from copious notes that have been supplied to them by ministers where they list ad infinitum, and rather boringly in many instances, the amounts of money the budget has allocated to the various departments and how in turn that will affect their re-election.

As a matter of interest, today I had my electorate officer ask the first half dozen people who made contact with my office what their reactions to last week's budget were. They are interesting indeed. A small businessman said that the budget lacked vision, revealed no future for Victoria and put Victoria into a holding pattern. A visually impaired person said that he was extremely disappointed with health and that in his view the budget did not address waiting lists. A retired elderly lady said that the budget had not made any impression on her, that it was shallow and that there was nothing in it for her. A real estate agent said the transport area of the budget was a real letdown, there was no planning for the future and whatever is done our roads are still going to be congested.

The comment that I thought took the cake was from a first-time mother at home with a young one who said that the budget made absolutely no impression on her. She said that she can tell us more about Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's baby. A young professional businesswoman asked the question, 'Has the budget actually been delivered?'. Another professional woman said that the budget had absolutely no impact on her and did nothing for her. Here we are seven or eight days after the budget, and its impact is poor indeed.

What of the budget? It is a high-taxing budget, and it is a budget that puts Victoria on a precarious road to the future if it is not carefully managed. I enjoyed listening to the Honourable Damian Drum's comment when he was advising the house on all the taxation measures that have been implemented. I shall not repeat all those, but there was one tax he did miss, and that is the hidden tax that has been levelled on all householders through their water charge. Mr Drum informed me that there was a hidden 2 per cent levy on all rural water bills and a 5 per cent levy on all urban water bills. It is not shown on the actual accounts that this is a tax — it is another one of those hidden taxes. It is estimated by the shadow Treasurer that since the Bracks government come to power the average increase in taxes per household is now around \$2500 per annum. Each and every household in this state is now paying in excess of some \$50 a week more in taxation than it was when the Kennett government was in office.

I want to spend some time on poker machines, because this tax is one of the biggest areas of revenue for the government. Pages 131 to about 140 in budget paper 4 clearly set out state revenue. Gambling revenue in this state will increase markedly over the next 12 months. In fact gambling taxes are expected to grow by 3.9 per cent in 2006-07 compared with the revised estimate for the previous financial year. The main contributor to growth will be an increase in revenue from electronic gaming machines, which in fact will be 4.7 per cent on the basis of estimated growth.

We all know electronic gaming machines (EGMs) create serious social problems. I have hunted through every budget paper, from the thin budget speech to budget papers 2, 3 and 4. I have even read the relatively simple document 'Victorian budget overview', and not once in any of the documentation have the words 'problem gambling services' been mentioned. Neither I nor the public know how much money has been allocated to problem gambling services. It seems highly immoral to me that on the one hand the government is collecting enormous amounts of money from poker machines that create a social problem but on the other hand the government does not tell us about the flip side and how the money will be spent to assist those with an addiction to gambling.

In my own area gaming problems are massive, and I will provide statistics in relation to the cities of Monash and Greater Dandenong. According to the *Monash Bulletin*, which the City of Monash prints on a quarterly basis:

Electronic gaming machine losses in Monash are forecast to hit \$125.6 million for the 2005-06 financial year, the second highest on record.

The mayor of Monash is alarmed. She said:

We have the depressing distinction of being the epicentre of the almost \$2 billion a year gaming machine tragedy that has gripped Melbourne and the state.

The forecast loss in Monash is a 5.2 per cent increase on last year, which is higher than the metropolitan average increase of 3.5 per cent. We hold the title of the biggest gaming machine losers in Victoria, and we seem to be pulling away from the pack.

The publication goes on to say:

The Victorian Commission for Gambling Regulation has provided the forecast figures.

Monash has 1185 gaming machines located in 16 venues across the city.

The metropolitan area average density of gaming machines per 1000 adults is 7.09, while in Monash's areas of least advantage the density of machines is much higher.

Mulgrave has 21.01 machines per 1000; Chadstone 19.03 machines per 1000; Oakleigh 16.39 machines per 1000; and Clayton 14.42 machines per 1000.

The government has made some changes to electronic gaming machine regulations, but it has not gone far enough. The social problems that exist in my area are massive, and I call upon the government to publicly release figures and invest more in programs that will assist problem gamblers.

In my local newspapers in recent times there have been massive headlines. The *Monash Journal* of 15 May has the headline 'Pokie shame'. The *Waverley Leader* on the following day carries the headline 'Biggest losers again?'. The *Monash Journal* a week later has some information from people involved in problem gambling in the area. Dr Arthur Veno, a Monash researcher, says that:

Problem gambling is like any other addictive behaviour ... it can't be cured until you hit rock bottom.

In my area many residents are hitting rock bottom, and the services the government is supposedly providing are not there. Dr Veno has come up with suggestions and solutions for problem gambling. He suggests smartcards, capping electronic gaming machine (EGM) numbers and having problem gamblers exclude themselves from venues. I support those comments. In fact, the new Leader of the Liberal Party in the other place, the honourable member for Hawthorn, is on record as saying that the Liberal Party will reduce by

5000 the number of electronic gaming machines in operation at any one time.

I would like to put some further statistics on the record which I gleaned from the gaming regulation web site this morning. In the cities of Greater Dandenong and Monash combined there are 2263 gaming machines. In excess of \$225 million per annum is taken from those gaming machines. It is just an appalling statistic. When you have a look at the money that is spent on gaming machines per household per annum in Greater Dandenong and Monash, it is staggering. Over \$2000 per annum is spent per adult. When you take out all of the adults who do not gamble on EGMs, there would be some households putting in more than \$5000 per annum and some putting in maybe \$10 000 per annum.

The problems that are created are massive and, as I said, there is no information in any of the budget papers on how problem gamblers are going to be helped, or about what amounts of money have been given to people who help problem gamblers. Nor is there one piece of evidence on the Community Support Fund. It is just abysmal that this government has not addressed those issues through the budget papers, and I hope it does so in the future.

I want to make some comments about a couple of other issues which affect Waverley Province. One is in relation to the Monash Freeway. We all know that the government has put on a bells-and-whistles act to say how great the improvements are going to be to the Monash Freeway. Whilst I encourage them, I hope that the planners put a lot of thought into it because I am not quite sure how you funnel four lanes of traffic into three lanes of traffic into two lanes of traffic. I think what is going to occur is that there will be increased numbers of cars, trucks and other forms of transport on the Monash Freeway, and all they are doing by attracting more transport onto the freeway is funnelling it into two lanes at Glenferrie Road.

The increased volume of traffic is going to mean increased pollution. It is going to mean increased noise pollution. There have been several occasions in this Parliament when I have called for the government to put more sound barriers along that freeway. I hope that in the planning stages, and certainly in the construction stages, sound barriers will be built to assist residents in my electorate to overcome that noise pollution. I particularly request that sound barriers be put over the bridges along that freeway. It seems to me that you cannot stop the noise when you come to a bridge. The barriers stop at a bridge, then there is a space, and the noise certainly affects people living there.

I am surprised that the government is going ahead with the grade separation at Middleborough Road. My constituents are very concerned that this is going to lead to more traffic coming down Middleborough Road. It would have made more sense to have built a grade separation at Springvale junction. For years I have been calling for this at the Springvale junction of Centre Road, Police Road and the Princes Highway. It is the worst black spot in Melbourne. I cannot remember the statistics off the top of my head, but it is one major black spot that the government has neglected, and I call on the government to get to work on that pretty quickly.

Another issue which needs addressing in my area relates to drugs. Drugs are still a massive problem in the Clayton and Springvale regions. I do not see that there is any major attempt through the budget to address that issue. For about five or six years in a row I have also called for the Clayton police station to be refurbished and/or replaced. Again, that does not crack a mention.

In relation to public transport, my constituents require more regular train services. In order to get people to use public transport more often, we need added parking facilities at our railway stations. You cannot get a park after 9.00 a.m. at Glen Waverley, Mount Waverley, Syndal or Jordanville railway stations. It is absolutely paramount that we have more car parks to enable more people to use our rail service.

Hon. H. E. BUCKINGHAM (Koonung) — I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the budget today. Perhaps a budget debate is fairly predictable, as the Honourable Andrew Brideson said. It is a bit like a tennis match, I suppose. The government gets up and says how good it is — and mark my words, this is a stellar budget — and then the opposition benches, as oppositions do, get up and criticise the budget, some more eloquently than others. May I repeat — —

Hon. E. G. Stoney — Acting President, I draw your attention to the state of the house.

Quorum formed.

Hon. H. E. BUCKINGHAM — As I was saying before I was interrupted, this is a stellar budget. We rightfully retain our AAA rating along with a \$317 million surplus. I heard on the radio yesterday that the federal government is about to lose its AAA rating because of its enormous foreign debt. Victoria retains its, though. That is because there is sound economic management in this state.

The highlights of the state budget include \$4.9 billion for capital works, the government having already invested over \$13 billion over the last six years. In fact,

with the \$4.9 billion in this budget and with a \$3.2 billion average over the next four years, this government is spending almost as much in one budget as the previous government delivered in six years on capital works. The 2006 budget has also delivered \$2.6 billion for transport infrastructure, which is the first instalment of \$10.5 billion for a 10-year plan, aptly named Meeting our Transport Challenges.

Another highlight is the \$1.3 billion allocated to the health and aged care and community services infrastructure area, including, I am proud to say, \$847 million to rebuild the children's hospital. There is a \$2.5 billion boost to the health and community services budget. We deliver more hospital beds, reduce waiting lists and improve services. I am particularly proud that the \$230 million package to strengthen our medical research facilities is also in this budget, and we are world leaders in medical research in many areas.

The 2006 budget also delivers \$1.4 billion in tax cuts over the next four years. These have been adequately covered by others, but include cuts to payroll tax, land tax and WorkCover premiums. Specifically, the payroll tax rate is reduced by 5 per cent over three years. This represents a 13 per cent reduction in payroll tax since 2001 and reinforces Victoria as having the second-lowest payroll tax rate in Australia.

The Bracks government has announced tax cuts of over \$4 billion in its term in office. As mentioned, we have cut payroll and land taxes, but we have abolished duty on non-residential leases, financial institutions duty, duty on quoted marketable securities, duty on unquoted marketable securities, duty on mortgages, and bank account debits tax. The Bracks government has taken Victoria from being the state with the highest number of business taxes to being one of those with the lowest number. It has abolished more taxes under the GST agreement than any other state.

I would like to mention some areas of funding in the budget that are of interest to me and have not already been spoken about in this debate. The budget has provided \$4 million in grants for conserving, managing and interpreting heritage places and objects in Victoria. As a past history teacher, I am pleased to see this. It has also provided \$7.3 million in grants to promote communities understanding and managing their heritage. Whilst a councillor in the City of Whitehorse I was on the heritage committee and I know how hard it is for communities to protect heritage areas — to understand what heritage areas are, how to classify them and how to protect them. I note that the government is giving \$2.1 million for capacity building to train tradespeople, heritage specialists and

volunteers. It is providing another \$1.7 million for Heritage Care, a new community initiative delivered in partnership with Conservation Volunteers Australia and other community organisations, and finally it is providing \$1.6 million for heritage leadership and advice, which will go to local councils and to heritage owners and managers.

Victoria is about to become the first state in Australia to introduce a charter of human rights and responsibilities. I am enormously proud of that. It will simplify and bring together our laws on human rights in one piece of landmark legislation. The budget will support this with an allocation of funding of \$6.5 million over four years. This will provide for, amongst other things, a community education project to be undertaken by the Equal Opportunity Commission and support for the Human Rights Law Resource Centre, which does a terrific job, to assist in its advocacy work for disadvantaged Victorians. I salute that.

The budget also provides funding of \$8.78 million over four years for the office of the workplace advocate. I particularly want to mention this, because I am very proud of the legislation that put in place the workplace advocate. Mr Atkinson commented on this and questioned its worth. I do not understand that. I believe it is money well spent to protect the rights of Victorian workers whose entitlements have been eroded by the federal WorkChoices legislation. Employees — and employers — will be able to obtain free information from the workplace rights advocate phone information line and web site, and that is what this money will pay for. The workplace advocate will bring harsh and unfair practices to the attention of the Minister for Industrial Relations, Rob Hulls, the Parliament and the Victorian community.

Finally, I would like to be more parochial and talk about my electorate — as Mr Brideson said, some of us do when we talk about the budget — and how it has benefited from this; not because I think it will get me re-elected, as Mr Brideson said Labor members do, but because the budget has brought good, positive things to my community and I would like to list some of them.

In the City of Whitehorse, as I have already mentioned in this house, Antonio Park Primary School will receive \$2.63 million for a stage 2 rebuild. It is a fabulous school and deserves this. There will be \$38.2 million for stage 1 of the rebuilding of Box Hill Hospital. I served on the board of Box Hill Hospital from 1995 until 1997 — or it might have been 1998. It is a fabulous hospital, but it is an ageing hospital and it needs to be rebuilt. This money is great for our community. The government is allocating \$54.3 million

for the Middleborough Road level crossing. Unlike Mr Brideson, the community welcomes this; it will be great, as will be the way the project will be undertaken, with the least amount of disruption to the community.

There will be \$1 million for the refurbishment of the Box Hill town hall. I have already spoken about this in the chamber; it will become a great community hub. There will be \$330 000 for pedestrian lights in Mitcham, and there will be an upgrade of traffic lights at Canterbury Road and Middleborough Road. As I sit there quite a lot, I am pleased to hear about that.

One of the things I am most pleased about is the increased recurrent funding for Whitehorse's neighbourhood houses. Whitehorse has nine neighbourhood houses, and I have visited every one of them. I will list them: Bennettswood neighbourhood house, Box Hill South neighbourhood house, Burwood neighbourhood house, Clota Cottage neighbourhood house, Kerrimuir neighbourhood house, Koonung Cottage community house, Mitcham community house, The Avenue neighbourhood house and Vermont South community house. I fought long and hard for the neighbourhood houses when I was a councillor, and I continue to do so as a local member of Parliament. I am very pleased to see the funding they will receive. There will also be \$30 000 for floodlighting at Heatherdale Recreation Reserve.

Of course there are the things that will happen further afield than just in my electorate. There are the new orbital bus routes that will go from Nunawading to Ringwood and the extended V/Line travel concessions for seniors. Up at the other end of the electorate, in Knox, Karoo Primary School will get a facilities upgrade of \$3.1 million, and there will be \$10 million for a new centre for sustainability, environmental design and land management at the Swinburne University Wantirna campus. The Kelletts Road duplication will happen, at a cost of \$13.6 million, and the wonderful Country Fire Authority brigade at Bayswater will get a station upgrade worth \$200 000. There will also be \$2.69 million for improvements to the Ringwood transit city project. There will be a new span of hours for buses, and improvements to the 737 bus that goes from Monash University to Croydon, the 738 bus from Knox City to Mitcham and the 664 bus from Chirnside Park to Knox City.

All of these services will improve the lot of the people who live in Koonung Province. This budget is a good budget. I commend it to the house.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — I am pleased to make a contribution to this budget debate. The broad

parameters of the budget have been laid out very clearly — tax is up, spending is up, and the government is getting less value for money. Whether you look at — —

An honourable member interjected.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — Services are modestly up, but not commensurate with the increased taxes and the increased spending.

Mr Pullen mentioned health. The reality is that in health the figures for last year's budget were that we had a 71 per cent increase in acute health spending and a 20 per cent increase in throughput. That figure is largely replicated in this budget. That is indicative of the problems with this budget.

I also want to zero in on some areas that have not received the attention that in my view they deserve. They relate to the state's future, and in particular greenhouse issues and the problems faced by Victoria, Australia and the international community. Of course the greenhouse problem is one that we all face together, and there is every reason why action by governments — federal, state and local — as well as action at the community level should be taken as swiftly as possible. I agree with the points made in the Victorian greenhouse strategy released in 2005. It is an important strategy, but I want to point to some deficiencies in the strategy and some inconsistencies with what appears in this budget. It is all very well to write glossy documents that are said to lay out a strategy, but when it comes to measuring achievement of the strategies and the government being held accountable to those achievements, this government is deficient. As I work through my contribution I will make that point very clear indeed.

As an example, I will start with some figures from the budget, as they are the most recent figures. I refer to budget paper 3 at pages 371 and 372. At page 371 it states:

In Victoria, total ... emissions —

this is greenhouse emissions, carbon dioxide emissions —

rose from 119 megatonnes of CO₂ equivalent (a measure that enables comparisons of emissions of various greenhouse gases by their global warming potential) in 1999 to 123 megatonnes of CO₂ equivalent in 2004.

My point is that greenhouse emissions continue to grow in Victoria at a significant rate. The government argues with the budget that the amount of emissions relating to the value of gross state product has declined

marginally. That may well be true, but that in no way deals with the urgency of this issue and the urgent need to take the necessary steps. As I go through other aspects of the budget it will become quite clear that the government has failed to hold itself accountable and to tackle these problems as it should.

I quote from the government's greenhouse strategy:

Victoria has an important role and responsibility.

I agree with that. The strategy states:

In 2002 the state's greenhouse gas emissions were 117.0 million tonnes.

I make the point that the increase continues. It further states:

This is more than the total emissions of many nations, including industrialised nations with ... higher populations ...

That is true. It states further:

... Victoria's per capita greenhouse gas emissions were 24 tonnes and Australia's per capita emissions were 28 tonnes. This is higher than any other developed country. Even the USA has lower per capita emissions.

This is the government's own document. Why the delay and the failure to tackle some of the things that I will point out in a moment, when the government is beginning to recognise these things? It is the actions that are lacking in the government's response. The document states also:

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions must remain a priority for all governments ...

I agree with that. The impacts of climate change are many and varied. They will be very significant for small Pacific nations. They will be very significant as the costs of energy eventually start to rise — that is, they will be significant in their economic impact.

Victoria has, of course, had the historic advantage of being a very low-cost energy site, with our brown coal reserves. We do have to grapple with the fact that brown coal is one of the dirtiest fuels on the planet and many of our power stations are amongst the dirtiest on the planet. In that context it is interesting that the government on one hand is talking about greenhouse abatement in the longer term but in the very recent period signing for the availability of an additional coal seam for the Hazelwood power station, which is one of the oldest and, indeed, one of the dirtiest power stations on the planet. Whilst speaking the rhetoric about greenhouse abatement, the government has signed with Hazelwood.

I hasten to add that any Victorian government would have had to come to an accommodation with Hazelwood to provide it with some security into the future. That power plant provides more than 20 per cent of Victoria's electricity needs and for that reason government could not take any precipitate step. But that is not to say that the government could not have made substantial arrangements with Hazelwood that would have seen really significant greenhouse abatement into the future. The agreement that the government achieved with Hazelwood will not stand scrutiny in the longer haul. That agreement was not optimum; it was not an agreement that Victorians can be proud of in the longer term. Greater efforts will have to be made elsewhere in our greenhouse abatement strategy because of the lack of achievement of a proper agreement with Hazelwood that would have delivered an outcome of which all Victorians could have been proud in the circumstances.

In its own paper the government says that Victoria's economy needs to be:

... positioned to achieve the emissions reductions in a manner that protects Victoria's economic interests, minimises costs to industry, and facilitates the exploitation of domestic and export market opportunities in 'greenhouse-friendly' processes, products and technologies.

No-one disagrees with that — we all agree with it. We also agree with steps that the government is taking, like the:

... introduction of requirements for large emitters to report and disclose their greenhouse gas emissions ...

Over time this will assist. But again, this is a government that is almost seven years into its term and I think that seven years is long enough to have achieved a great deal. Why is it that only recently — on 1 May — the government began to tackle the commercial building sector and the difficulties of getting good greenhouse results there? This has been known for a long time. Bringing together the planning requirements for new buildings and for retrofitting old buildings is one of the central tasks of making a greenhouse-efficient building sector that will reduce greenhouse emissions in those buildings into the longer term. This is an area where government leadership is necessary and needs to be right at the forefront. In Victoria that leadership has not been there, so for seven years this government has largely dithered on this important matter.

I welcome the announcement on 1 May of the Building Code of Australia 2006, under national leadership. The government's media release states:

The energy efficiency measures, introduced through the Building Code of Australia (BCA) 2006, apply to all new commercial and public buildings, as well as any buildings being refurbished, altered or extended.

There is good sense in having a national standard, because it is an important signal. There is a huge amount of work to be done.

Earlier I mentioned in this chamber some of the green buildings in Victoria. I was very impressed with the quality of and the thought and ingenuity that has gone into the building at 40 Albert Road, which is an exemplar in Victoria, and indeed the southern hemisphere, for building design and retrofitting a building that can reduce greenhouse emissions and be sustainable in other ways as well.

A central point of what I want to put on the record are my concerns about the government's budget paper 3. I draw the attention of the house to the output group of the Department of Sustainability and Environment in the section beginning on page 229 and flowing through to page 232 and headed 'Less Waste, Less Pollution; and Clean Air, Livable Climate'. This seeks to be the government's accountability point for greenhouse strategies and steps in this state. I think that when they have heard these output measures members of the house will agree that a central failing of the government has been on greenhouse. It has been big on rhetoric but small on detail and sharp measurement. I know that the Deputy Leader of the Government has his office in a green building, 60 L, and I congratulate him on that. He is in that sense a leader.

Mr Gavin Jennings — Thank you.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — I am pleased to put that on the record. It is another green building. There are only about three of them in the state that get the tick. That is one of them, 40 Albert Road is another and there is one, of course, that the Melbourne City Council is working very hard on at the moment. I congratulate the council on its foresight in that matter.

I ask members of the house to bear with me and not to break up laughing. These are the measures that members of the government want to be measured by for the most important environmental issue that the country is being confronted with.

Ms Hadden — What page?

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — Page 229. Under 'Sustainability and Greenhouse Policy', the following measure appears:

Coordination of the implementation of programs and measures under the sustainability action statement ...

The target is 95. The next measure is:

Major policy papers, strategy reviews or research papers ...

The next is:

Number of councils participating ...

The next measure is:

Number of departments implementing the strategic directions of *Our Environment Our Future* ...

et cetera. Under the overall topic of 'Quality', the measures are:

Greenhouse response actions managed and administered

Ministerial endorsement and support for the ongoing implementation and review ...

Under the next topic, 'Timeliness', the first measure is:

Ad hoc policy advice delivered as required with initial advice ...

Ms Hadden — Ninety-five per cent!

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — Oh, great! The next is:

Advice to government on climate change policy issues to facilitate ...

I hope members of the house are not laughing at these listed output measures, results and change in the community. This is about paper shuffling. It is nonsense. It is about bureaucrats pushing one piece of paper here or there. This is not a serious attempt to measure this government's performance. Let me keep reading. The next measures are:

Analysis of issues to inform the development of the government's sustainability outcomes delivered within the agreed time frame.

Delivery of an implementation plan and reporting model for *Our Environment Our Future*.

It is a joke, is it not? Next is:

Framework for metropolitan waste and resources strategic plan completed.

Completion of a plan is fixing greenhouse.

Finally:

Responses to ministerial correspondence delivered within agreed time lines.

The government is spending \$33.2 million on paper shuffling. This is not a serious attempt. I see the

Minister for Finance, who is responsible for these budget measures in the aggregate, has come in.

Mr Lenders interjected.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — No, but you are responsible for coordinating with the output groups and you do not disagree with me; you know what I am saying is right. This is a joke. We have the most serious environmental issues facing our state, our nation and the community internationally, and the government has put forward this set of bogus, paper-shuffling measures. I am disappointed.

The central point I wish to make in this contribution is that the opposition is very concerned about these matters. We are irritated that the government has not tackled things properly —

Honourable members interjecting.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — Let us talk about Nowingi and the budget! Let us have a look at it. I have 1 minute and 36 seconds remaining. This is an arrogant minister and an arrogant government. At page 143 budget paper 3 states:

Hazardous waste siting:

statutory approval given for long-term containment facility.

The target date is September 2006. Then:

commence process for appointment of an operator for long-term containment facility.

The target date is December 2006. That is an arrogant government pre-judging the panel and final processes. It might be that the panel will come back and tell the government to nick off. If that is the case, how will this part of the budget be applied? The government intends to push forward with the proposal. What it has done is arrogant.

Mr Lenders — Nick off!

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — The minister does not endear himself to the house with his comments. He has missed the point and has not understood that the communities in north-western Victoria and along the Calder corridor are very concerned about his government's attempt to foist a toxic waste dump on them and to have trucks carrying toxic waste trundling up and down the Calder corridor past schools, hospitals, kindergartens and crèches. The minister's response to people who are worried about the spillage was to say to them, 'Just go scoop it up'. What a joke! What an arrogant minister and what a nasty thing to say. It is no

wonder the communities along that corridor are determined to throw him and his government out.

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA (Melbourne West) — I am delighted to make a contribution to this debate and talk about the recent budget that has been brought down by our very fine Treasurer in another place, John Brumby. There is no doubt that the 2006-07 budget is building on the work that has already been done over the past six years. It is about meeting the challenges ahead. We recognise where good work has been done and progress has been made, but we also recognise that there are more challenges ahead and more work for us to be doing. We are absolutely committed to meeting the challenges and investing here in Victoria for Victorian families.

The budget has put Victoria on track with a strong operating surplus of \$317 million for 2006-07, making Victoria absolutely the best place in Australia to do business. We are continuing to drive jobs and investment. No matter where you live in Victoria — in metropolitan Melbourne, on the fringes of the city or in rural and regional Victoria — you will have access to the highest quality services. Many of those services are already in place. This budget builds on those services and invests in a whole range of new infrastructure and new services. The government is taking the benefits that we are experiencing from a strong economy and making sure that families across the state — in cities, in regional towns and rural areas — are able to share in that growth and our prosperity.

In the 2006-07 budget we see the biggest infrastructure investment program that has ever been undertaken by any state government in Victoria. We heard the Honourable David Davis going through budget papers and quite inaccurately at times reflecting some of the content of those budget papers, but there is no getting away from it: there has never been such infrastructure investment made by any previous state government — and that includes the previous Liberal-National party coalition, which never put investment into infrastructure. We hear opposition members waxing lyrical about how there is a need for major projects and a need for an increase in spending on infrastructure — roads, transport, schools, hospitals and police stations — but they never made the sort of contribution that this budget makes. We do not hear them congratulating our Treasurer, our Premier and the Bracks Labor government for putting this huge infrastructure investment program in place for Victoria.

We are going to see new and upgraded roads, schools, hospitals, police stations and public transport that will make a very real difference to people's lives — to the

way they are able to access services and move around not only their local communities but also the rest of the state. A highlight of this infrastructure spending is a \$4.9 billion record total estimated investment in capital works, with \$12.6 billion to be spent over the next four years. That is an enormous sum.

There will be \$1.4 billion of savings to Victorian businesses over the next four years through the cuts to payroll tax, land tax and WorkCover premiums. I have not heard any opposition members talk in any detail about these enormous cuts in taxes, which are going to make a real difference, particularly to small businesses. You only have to have read some of the comments that have been made not only by industry groups but also by individual businesspeople to see how these cuts to taxes have been welcomed across the state.

The budget includes \$1.2 billion for schools and skills development within the state. There is \$2.5 billion for health, community services, aged care and medical research, which are areas very close and dear to me. Before I became involved in politics, I worked for many years as a nurse. I know the health system well from the hospital floor upwards. It is great to see this kind of investment being made in these important community services. Health is such a big area and to be able to stay abreast of the changes in technology, the way that treatments are being delivered and the services we need to be able to provide, we need this sort of interjection of funds. We also need this sort of injection of funds to improve the input, the number of patients we are able to care for, and the support we provide to patients and clients in the community after they have been through an episode which has been perhaps acute.

There is \$3.3 billion to meet our transport challenges in roads and public transport. We often hear members of the opposition complaining about things that need to be done in transport, particularly public transport. But I have not heard any member of the opposition in any of their budget speeches welcome this significant investment to meet our transport challenges.

The budget allocates \$818 million for A Fairer Victoria. That program is all about improving opportunities and supporting families who are under different sorts of pressures. A Fairer Victoria addresses the needs of the most disadvantaged and aims to ensure that those people are able to participate as fully as they possibly can so they get the support they need for their families in their day-to-day lives.

There is \$766 million to maintain Victoria's livability and to improve our natural environment. The amount of \$444 million has been allocated to crack down on

crimes, to boost emergency services, to improve access to justice and to help keep Victorians safe.

I have not heard any opposition members talking about the \$1.1 billion that has been earmarked in this budget for projects across provincial Victoria, including rural and regional cities in Victoria. We have some significant and magnificent rural cities and rural towns here in Victoria. The \$1.1 billion for provincial Victoria includes major new investments, which again include our schools, our roads, health and community services. Because of my role as Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs to the Premier, I spend a lot of time in regional Victoria, particularly around Goulburn Valley — where I grew up and where my family lives — Mildura, Robinvale, Swan Hill, Wangaratta and those sorts of areas which are particularly culturally diverse. The communities talk to me about what they want, which is schools, educational opportunities and to be able to access good health services when they need them. They want improvements to roads and transport. They are the sorts of things that we have been listening to, have taken on board and are delivering as part of this budget.

The budget allocates \$502 million for the *Moving Forward — Provincial Victoria* statement. Those members who represent provincial areas will be well aware of that statement. Students in rural and regional Victoria are big winners with a massive investment of more than \$170 million over four years for new schools and TAFE facilities. This is a terrific investment in our schools and TAFE facilities. More people are living in rural and regional areas. We want them to be able to get world class treatment close to home. There is an extra \$116 million for upgrades to hospitals, aged care and ambulance facilities right across Victoria.

I am pleased to be heading to Shepparton tomorrow to make an announcement about the Ambermere mental health facility there. I am very pleased to see that this is a part of the budget. Ambermere was where I actually started my nursing training many years ago and where I was a prospective nurse or a student nurse. In fact, my younger brother was born in Ambermere hospital. The former Ambermere hospital is a very beautiful old building and is set on some lovely gardens and grounds. I am pleased to see that Ambermere hospital is going to have a big injection of funds and it is going to be up and running again as a mental health facility. It is going to have some terrific facilities; \$6.5 million will be allocated to the redevelopment of the former Ambermere psychiatric hospital for mental health services.

Those funds are going to provide a range of opportunities for both the recovery and the rehabilitation of 20 patients with appropriate recreational as well as residential facilities. The redevelopment will establish a 10-place prevention and recovery care unit for people who need short-term subacute care, and a 10-place community care unit to enable people to be able live more independently. It will also include new purpose-constructed facilities for the Centre for Older Persons Health that operates from the Ambermere site currently. It is a terrific investment and one I am looking forward to launching tomorrow in Shepparton.

As part of the Aboriginal affairs package, funding has been allocated to the Koori Youth Alcohol and Drug Healing Service, which is something I was very pleased to see in the budget. It is a \$3.7 million investment. It will provide a residential facility for young Koori people who have substance abuse problems. This is about providing a safe and secure environment that is culturally sensitive to their particular needs. I am sure it will go a long way towards helping young Aboriginal people who suffer from substance abuse problems to acknowledge those problems, to be treated for them and to live much more productive lives.

I have to mention the Royal Children's Hospital, because I think the \$847.4 million investment in it is just a fantastic announcement. If you speak to anybody in Victoria you will find they all have good things to say about this hospital. As parents, particularly of small children, we have all been really glad that we have a Royal Children's Hospital that focuses on the needs of children and the speciality of diseases and the way illness affects children. It has always been great to have it there. It is great to see that our Treasurer, our Premier and our minister have determined that this is where we should have some huge infrastructure spending. This is about rebuilding the Royal Children's Hospital. This hospital is used by all Victorians. People come from all over the state to use the very specialised services that are offered at that hospital.

Mr Lenders — And around the world!

Hon. KAYE DARVENIZA — They come from all around the world, as the Leader of the Government says. He is absolutely correct. Its reputation is world renowned. The existing building is going to be demolished and there will be a number of new buildings on the site. The site that is to be demolished is going to be returned to parkland, so it is still going to be — —

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

Debate adjourned on motion of Ms HADDEN (Ballarat).

Debate adjourned until next day.

APPROPRIATION (2006/2007) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

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

TRANSFER OF LAND (ALPINE RESORTS) BILL

Introduction and first reading

Received from Assembly.

Read first time for Hon. J. M. MADDEN (Minister for Sport and Recreation) on motion of Mr Lenders.

Business interrupted pursuant to sessional orders.

ADJOURNMENT

The PRESIDENT — Order! The question is:

That the house do now adjourn.

Minister for Community Services: adviser

Hon. BILL FORWOOD (Templestowe) — I want to raise with the Minister for Community Services in the other place, Ms Garbutt, a matter regarding the treatment of Margaret Ryan by her adviser, Mr Ian Parsons. Ms Ryan is a disability advocate who is well known to many of us. She is an advocate because she has practical hour-to-hour, day-to-day, week-to-week, year-to-year experience, as her nephew Ben is seriously disabled. For only one day in my 14 years as a parliamentarian, the last day of the Legislative Council's committee on the Disability Bill, I employed Ms Ryan. She sat behind me and assisted with the discussion on the bill. She did so because she knows a lot about the bill, and I valued her assistance.

On 23 May she emailed the minister and sent a copy to Mr Scheffer as follows:

Last year I asked our local member, the Honourable Johan Scheffer, for help to rectify the mistakes and service cuts in the support and choice assistance provided to my sister, Annie Bannenberg, and her family members, through DHS Southern Region ... I am now coming directly to you to ask that the mistakes and service cuts in the support to the Bannenberg family be rectified.

There is now some urgency to resolve the problems, and I would appreciate an urgent response.

This is part of the response from Mr Parsons after he could not find the fax — there no fax; there was an email. He said there were privacy issues, because that is one way of prevaricating. He then said it would be difficult to work out when he could have time. Then he said:

Thirdly ... it needs to be said that Bill Forwood has unfortunately complicated this even further by having publicly introduced you as his casual staffer, because this now creates some confusion about when you are acting in a private capacity and when in a political capacity. If you are no longer his staffer, it may be helpful for either you or Bill to formally advise us of this.

In my view it is outrageous that Mr Parsons should seek to use me as an excuse for his not dealing with a particular family that is well known to the department over the issues they have with Ben. The action I seek from the minister is, firstly, to counsel Mr Parsons and advise him that his behaviour towards Ms Ryan is completely unacceptable. Secondly, will she arrange for a member of her department to meet with members of the Bannenberg family, including Ms Ryan, to investigate the cuts to Ben's support and choice package?

Knox: rates

Hon. C. D. HIRSH (Silvan) — I want to raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Local Government. I want the minister to investigate a very devious strategy being undertaken by a majority of Knox councillors to shift the rate burden for Knox residents from those living in the higher value properties to those living in the lower valued properties — that is, according to Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for the higher income areas of Knox to the lower income areas.

Rate levels are usually arrived at by calculating the amount of revenue needed to provide essential council services after all the other funding sources are taken into account. Of course, roughly speaking, the rate level is calculated on the value of the property, which ensures a reasonably progressive system of rates in which rates

on properties in low-income areas tend to be less than the rates on more expensive properties, which Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show belong to the high-income earners. However, it appears to me that what this majority of councillors, including Cr Jim Penna, who represents one of the lower income parts of Knox but lives in Wantirna, which is one of the higher income parts of Knox, has done in order to satisfy the residents in the areas where they live is remove the cost of a basic council service from the list of services it needs to provide. The council has removed the important service of waste collection and management, costed it up separately, and introduced a waste service charge to be levied at an equal dollar amount to all residents to cover the collection of waste in Knox.

The council argues that while the system does not create additional revenue for council, because the rates have been kept lower with the waste service charge taken out, it varies the amount paid on individual rate assessments, resulting in a proposed rate increase of 3.03 per cent. Last week the local paper included an article headed 'Retirees rate rage'. The change means that people in retirement villages and in the lower income areas of Knox will be paying a much higher proportion than people in Lysterfield and Rowville.

As I said at the beginning, I want this issue investigated by the minister. I want her to have a look at what is going on with the inequitable rate burden that has been created for Knox residents by these five councillors who have taken down the people of Boronia.

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

Western Port Highway, Lyndhurst: upgrade

Hon. R. H. BOWDEN (South Eastern) — I seek the assistance of the Minister for Transport in the other place in relation to several aspects of the Western Port Highway that are causing increasing concern and great consternation to many of my constituents. Honourable members will recall that on several occasions in the past I have raised specific issues about the Western Port Highway concerning a decrease in efficiency and safety.

A items I have mentioned over a considerable number of years now have related to the Lyndhurst area and the disgraceful installation of an unsafe set of traffic lights and other traffic changes at the Moreton Bay Boulevard intersection. We have massive congestion now along the section immediately to the north of the intersection of Thompsons Road and the Western Port Highway. Any visit there in the morning or afternoon peaks will

show how disastrous and unsafe that area is. To the south of Thompsons Road, at the major intersection with Hall Road, there is a new service station under construction, which will further decrease the efficiency and add to congestion. The story goes on and on.

There is no question that in the design of the Western Port Highway system there has been a conflict of interest between developers, VicRoads and the Casey and Frankston councils. They all have different perspectives on the issue, but it is quite clear that VicRoads is not exercising its responsibilities as it should. Over time it has agreed to these incursions onto the Western Port Highway. I suggest to honourable members that there is no alternative to the Western Port Highway for a future major port road with appropriate carrying capacity and its efficiency and design integrity has to be respected. It is not being respected at present. I have called repeatedly for VicRoads to take a strong stance against allowing councils and developers to dump unnecessary traffic straight onto these roads. We need a separated carriageway at Thompsons Road and at Hall Road or the present congestion will continue.

My request of the minister is to ask whether he will direct VicRoads to do an urgent and professionally guided full design plan for the Western Port Highway from the Lyndhurst section through to the Frankston-Cranbourne Road, because the deterioration in efficiency and safety is alarming.

Occupational health and safety: WorkChoices

Mr PULLEN (Higinbotham) — My adjournment matter this afternoon is for the Minister for WorkCover and the TAC and relates to occupational health and safety. On 29 May the Prime Minister, John Howard, told federal Parliament that it was his understanding that agreements had been entered into under the new law — that is, the WorkChoices law — which allowed for the safety training of people, including their attending courses provided by unions who are accredited trainers.

At the Senate estimates hearing on 30 May, Victorian Labor Senator Gavin Marshall asked the head of the Office of the Employment Advocate, Peter McIllwain: is occupational health and safety training that is organised by a trade union prohibited content under the WorkChoices legislation? Mr McIllwain answered:

Clearly, regulation 2.8.5(1)(c) identifies as prohibited content training or leave to attend training, however described, provided by a trade union.

Mr McIllwain added that leave to attend training provided by a trade union, however described, is

prohibited content. The Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation, Liberal Senator Eric Abetz, representing the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, Kevin Andrews, told the estimates hearing:

No matter how it is described, it is ...

...

... it is prohibited content. Therefore we could call it 'doing the work of angels' or all sorts of wonderful things but, at the end of the day, the regulation is very clear.

I do not think the federal government's left hand knows what its right hand is doing. I know from first-hand experience how workers have benefited from trade union occupational health and safety courses, particularly those run by the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union. The action I seek from the minister is for him to look into ways that training by unions can be recognised in Victoria if the WorkChoices regulations prohibit them from providing such training.

Hon. D. McL. Davis — Training in violence!

Mr PULLEN — On a point of order, President, I take exception to the statement just made by the Honourable David Davis, when he referred to trade unions training in violence. I think that statement should be withdrawn.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The withdrawal of remarks made to individuals in this house is a matter I take seriously. Comments and interjections from the Honourable David Davis are unruly and should be ignored. There is no point of order.

Melbourne River Cruises: berth allocation

Hon. B. N. ATKINSON (Koonung) — I wish to raise a matter with the Minister for Environment in another place concerning the allocation of berths on the Yarra River to tour operators. I have been approached by Mr Gantidis of Melbourne River Cruises, which has served Melbourne very well for more than 25 years — the company was established in 1978. It has operated river cruises serving people from Melbourne and around Australia and international visitors by providing them with an opportunity to cruise up and down the Yarra River.

Over that period of time through that company Mr Gantidis has built a very successful business. He has invested heavily, as people do when they need to build a successful business. He has bought out a number of companies that have not been as successful

in providing cruise services on the Yarra — indeed this is a fairly difficult business to operate. Clearly in summer it is fairly easy to generate the customers you need to run a successful tour company, but in the winter months there are fewer people and sometimes you are operating cruises for the sake of the tourism offer of Melbourne that might involve only three or four people at a time. There is a significant cost associated with running the services.

Mr Gantidis has recently been caught in a situation where Parks Victoria has moved to a new method of allocation of berths following a study that was undertaken in 2003 and has reallocated berths. It seems to be very much a fundraising exercise, but the problem is that I am not sure it is in the best interests of the tourism industry. I hasten to say that Melbourne River Cruises is an award winner in the tourism industry as well.

The reallocation of berths has placed a considerable strain on the ability of Melbourne River Cruises to continue to operate. At the moment the company operates 10 vessels which serve the tourism industry in Victoria, but is only able to get two berths for those boats at this time — one at Southgate and one at the Federation Dock; neither of them is as well located as they were previously because of an expression-of-interest process that was conducted by the minister.

The action I seek from the minister tonight therefore, based on the success and performance of this company, is that he conduct a review of the berth allocations and examine whether or not the process entered into by Parks Victoria matched the competitive neutrality obligations of the government.

Schools: teachers guide

Hon. D. K. DRUM (North Western) — My adjournment question is to the Minister for Education Services in the other house, Jacinta Allan. My issue with the minister comes from reports over the weekend that a new teachers guide promoting the abolition of the words ‘mother’ and ‘father’ from the school vocabulary is being supplied to Victorian schools at taxpayers expense. This manual tells our teachers that they should promote gay celebrities, put up posters of gay celebrities around classrooms, promote prominent gays and in fact promote the cause of same-sex couples to kids in prep to year 3. We are now being told we should be getting rid of any gender-specific toys. By allowing this type of literature within schools this government is just demonstrating that it is totally out of touch with

reality and needs to take stock of its social engineering and the direction it is taking.

According to an article in the *Herald Sun* the author and editor of the manual has been invited to attend a taxpayer-funded conference of principals and teachers next month in Melbourne. I understand the Minister for Education Services will be sharing the billing and will also address this conference. Surely the Victorian government cannot be supporting and promoting such extreme views in our education system. The government cannot have it both ways. It cannot invest taxpayers money on literature which calls for no more he-man toys in the classroom, no more fairy dolls and no more action men — Superman, Batman and Spiderman are all out the door — because somehow or other gender-specific toys will offend the kids who do not have a mother or a father.

I call on the minister to show some leadership on this issue and remove Vicki Harding from the taxpayer-funded conference — or she can remove herself — but she cannot have it both ways. I also call on her to rid our education system of a manual which promotes the abolition of the terms ‘mother’ and ‘father’ and effectively seeks to ban any children’s toys which may be gender-specific. Once again this is an example of political correctness gone mad, and I call on the minister to take the appropriate action I have outlined.

Australian Labor Party: Western Metropolitan Region candidate

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS (East Yarra) — My adjournment matter is for the attention of the Premier in his capacity as Minister for Multicultural Affairs. It relates directly to the appointment of Khalil Eideh as an ALP candidate for an upper house region. That individual, if elected, would be a member of this Parliament. The Premier was asked a question on this matter in the lower house today, and said in response to the member for Caulfield, Helen Shardey:

I can say on this side of the house every member of Parliament supports multiculturalism, that’s our very strong aim. And Speaker, the member referred to comments, but the only comments I am aware of from the candidate ...

The comments quoted by the Premier were:

If elected I will continue to work towards a tolerant and diverse society that embraces and celebrates cultural differences.

I find it extraordinary that the Premier would believe they were his only comments, given there has been widespread public discussion of this matter, including

in the *Australian Jewish News* of 9 June. I draw his attention to the headline on page 1 'Jews to grill Bracks over candidate's ties with terror'. Some of the comments made by this prospective Labor candidate include, 'I would never assist a regime that supports or promotes terrorism', and, 'If elected I will continue to work towards a tolerant and diverse society'. That is what the Premier said. But the prospective candidate also made comments about Arab heroes and martyrs and pledged loyalty to Syria's president, Mr Assad.

Mr Anton Block, president of the Jewish Community Council of Victoria, is reported in the *Australian Jewish News* as saying:

It can't be good for Victoria to have someone with such extreme views as a part of the government.

I have to say that I am very concerned about the potential racial and religious disharmony that could be created in our community by such a person being a preselected candidate for a major party and later elected to this Parliament. The Premier in his capacity as Minister for Multicultural Affairs needs to keep a very close watch on these issues. I call on him to intervene in this matter to ensure that no member is elected to this Parliament who will contribute to racial or religious disharmony in our community.

The PRESIDENT — Order! With respect to the honourable member's request to the Premier, it does not fall within the Premier's portfolio responsibilities to intervene in a preselection matter. It does not meet the criteria for adjournment matters, so I rule it out of order.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — Further to the point of order — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! It was not a point of order, it was a ruling.

Hon. D. McL. DAVIS — On a point of order, President, I always respect your rulings, and I am sure they are designed to assist the chamber, but it would concern me if a ruling was made that meant that in a matter of multicultural affairs, the Premier, or the relevant minister in that capacity in the future, did not have a responsibility across the whole gamut of Victorian society to ensure that there was fairness, tolerance and harmony in our community. If the Premier or relevant minister is not prepared to — —

The PRESIDENT — Order! I have given the member enough latitude on the point of order. The member's comments then were just that — comments — and not a point of order. The request for action by the Premier does not fall within his role as

Premier. It relates to the preselection of candidates and is not a matter to be raised with the Premier on the adjournment, so it is out of order.

Gippsland Southern Health Service: Leongatha campus

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS (Gippsland) — I raise a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health in the other place. It relates to the subject of the Leongatha hospital, a hospital which I have visited on many occasions over the 14 years I have been a representative of that area.

Mr Pullen — As a healthy man, Phil?

Hon. PHILIP DAVIS — Never as a patient. I have to say that notwithstanding the wonderful commitment of the staff at that hospital, the physical facilities are, frankly, a disgrace. The hospital is 50 years old. It has had inadequate commitment in recent years from government in terms of maintenance, and it is sorely in need of a rebuild. In May 2004 I raised the issue in this place and subsequently also wrote to the Minister for Health and received a reply from her some three months later. What I suggested was that it was important that proper budgetary considerations be made for the important needs of the hospital. Even the hot-water system and pipes are at the point of collapse. It is an entirely unsatisfactory circumstance in every aspect, from the building infrastructure to the services infrastructure

However, in the budget last week there was no allocation of funds for the redevelopment of the Leongatha campus. The expectation of the Gippsland Southern Health Service and the community of South Gippsland, especially at Leongatha, was that there would be capital funding of around \$9 million to start the rebuilding of Koorooman House to be completed by mid-2008 with further funding in later years to complete the rebuilding of all the facilities on site.

Currently consultants have been engaged by the Department of Human Services through to the completion of the project. All the work to date supports the urgent need for the replacement of existing infrastructure and buildings. The lack of funding for stage 1 of the project is entirely unexpected. The matter is urgent and must be addressed, and the infrastructure deficiencies will have to be pursued by the government, otherwise we will have a health crisis in South Gippsland.

I ask that the minister advise Gippsland Southern Health Service and me urgently as to what the plans are for the redevelopment of that hospital.

Responses

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS (Minister for Aged Care) — I thank members for raising these matters, and I will pass on the appropriate adjournment matters to the relevant ministers.

Mr Forwood raised what is obviously a very sensitive issue in relation to the care plan, provision and package that has been available to Ben, the nephew of Margaret Ryan. I can attest he was a casual employee for at least one day, according to Mr Forwood. Mr Forwood sought assurances from the Minister for Community Services in the other place about the ongoing provision of that care and is seeking a number of remedies, which include the meeting of the family with the appropriate people responsible for the service to provide that care to Ben, and I will pass that matter on to the minister.

Ms Hirsh raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Local Government. She is vitally concerned about the new rating regime that applies within the city of Knox. She has some concern that it applies in a very crude and blanket way, similar to what she remembers as the Kennett poll tax, which adversely impacted on citizens of the state. She fears that the current rate regime in Knox has been rejigged in a way that is not mindful of the income of people within the Knox region and will adversely impact on their income security. She calls on the minister to review these provisions to see whether there can be any remedies in terms of rejigging the rate base in the city of Knox.

Mr Bowden raised a matter with the Minister for Transport in the other place. I was very surprised that he raised a matter that relates to a road within his electorate. I note that he is back on the Western Port Highway and stuck somewhere between Lyndhurst, Frankston and Cranbourne. He is worried about adverse traffic impacts on that road, and asks the Minister for Transport to intervene to support a road plan for that area.

Mr Pullen raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for WorkCover and the TAC. He was very gracious in saying that the commonwealth may have some degree of confusion about what the intention of its WorkChoices legislation is in relation to training opportunities for workers in this nation. I think they are pretty clear about it, and I think Mr Pullen and my friend and colleague Senator Marshall, a senator for

Victoria in the federal Parliament, are pretty clear about that matter — —

An honourable member interjected.

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS — He has asked me to pass it on, and I am providing some additional material that will make the reference even more relevant. In asking the Minister for WorkCover and the TAC I will be very supportive of the ways in which we can ensure that occupational health and safety training is provided adequately to workers in the state of Victoria so that we have safe workplaces. That might be despite the intentions of the WorkChoices legislation.

Mr Atkinson raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Environment in the other place about a berthing allocation along the Yarra River and in particular the adverse impact he says it has had on a company called Melbourne River Cruises and asked the minister to review those berth allocations.

Mr Drum raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Education Services in the other place seeking to correct what might be an overcorrection in the name of political correctness. Mr Drum was very specific, whilst he might not like gender-specific terms, he was very specific in his remedy. It is the first sacking I have actually heard called for on the adjournment — and hopefully it will be the last. I hope more appropriate remedies are available to the minister to ensure that political correctness does not get in the way of our being respectful and responsive to all the aspirations of members of our community.

Hon. D. McL. Davis interjected.

Mr GAVIN JENNINGS — No, he did not. The people will decide, Mr Davis, have no doubt about that.

Mr Philip Davis raised a matter for the attention of the Minister for Health in the other place seeking her support to describe the plans for the redevelopment of the Leongatha hospital, which he says has poor fabric and may undermine the integrity of the services in Leongatha.

The PRESIDENT — Order! The house stands adjourned.

House adjourned 5.01 p.m.

